

Balancing Work and Family at the Start of the 21st Century: Evidence from Wave 1 of the HILDA Survey

Mark Wooden

Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research
University of Melbourne

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Introduction

For much of the last century the issue of adequately balancing working life with family life was one that was rarely thought about, let alone considered of any importance. Prior to the 1970s, the average Australian workplace was largely a male domain and while most of these men were parents, they were simply not expected to assume significant responsibilities for child care – this was women’s work. Women thus generally assumed most of the burden for rearing and caring for children. As a result, many women were effectively forced to leave the workforce once they became mothers, with little or no expectation of ever having to return.¹

Dramatic changes in both the labour market and in wider society, however, mean that the situation today is far different. Most mothers with dependent children are now either in paid employment or are looking for employment (63 per cent in the August 2002 Labour Force Survey). It is also no longer true that child care is automatically assumed to be the responsibility of women. Increasingly it is being recognised that beyond the first year of a child’s life, mothers have no special advantages over fathers when it comes to caring for their children.² Moreover, fathers today expect, and are expected, to be far more involved with their children than fathers in previous generations.

Demand for employment conditions and work practices that recognise the dual responsibilities workers have as employees and as parents (and partners) can thus be expected to have intensified over time. But how have employers responded to such demands? The union movement would argue that, despite some notable exceptions, employers have collectively shirked their responsibility in this area, and that changes in the way work is organised have only made things worse (see ACTU 2003). Certainly it is true that the proportion of the employed that regularly works very long hours each week is much higher today than it was two decades ago (Healy 2000, Wooden 2001, 2003, Watson et al. 2003). Further, there is a growing case-study literature in Australia highlighting the difficulty many workers have in juggling work and family responsibilities, and how the demands of the workplace can impact adversely on workers, their families and even the communities in which they live (e.g., Probert and Macdonald 1996, Probert, Whiting and Ewer 2000, Pocock et al. 2001, Pocock 2003).³

Case-study research, however, is by definition, selective. While case studies are well suited for identifying the sorts of difficulties individual workers and their families may be facing, they cannot reveal anything about how typical such experiences are. To get at this, we need data from a large number of workers and families, usually achieved through the use of sample surveys. Moreover, we must be confident that the

¹ While published data on the labour force activity of mothers is not available prior to the mid-1970s, we do know that in 1966 less than 30 per cent of married women participated in the labour force. We also know that labour force participation rates for wives with dependent children, and especially young dependent children, are lower than rates for wives without dependent children.

² According to Lamb and Oppenheim (1989), numerous studies of parents of newborn children have demonstrated that there are no inherent differences in the caregiving competence of mothers and fathers. However, measured differences in the parenting abilities of mothers and fathers do become apparent over time. This, they argue, is a direct result of differences in the amount of time mothers and fathers subsequently spend interacting with their children, rather than due to any innate advantages possessed by mothers.

³ Also see the summary of results from qualitative research reported in Appendix 2 of Charlesworth, Campbell and Probert (2003).

samples for such surveys are selected in a way that ensures specific groups of workers are not excluded and that the probability of selection can be determined. In this paper, data from a recent survey that meets these criteria – the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia, or HILDA, Survey – are used to examine how well Australian workers with parenting responsibilities are coping with their dual roles.⁴ More specifically, this paper uses the HILDA Survey data to describe the diversity of working arrangements across Australian families, and to identify associations between working hours, and especially long regular hours, and measures of work-family balance and well-being.

At the outset, it is important to realise that these data are far from ideal for analysing these issues. While the HILDA Survey is a panel, this study only makes use of the first wave. The analysis is thus entirely cross-sectional and hence unable to identify any long-term effects from working long hours. Further, causality is much more difficult to disentangle. The analysis assumes causality runs from long hours of work to increased tension in the home, but the reverse causality is just as plausible.

Data and Methods

Sample

The data used in this analysis come from the first wave of the HILDA Survey, a nation-wide household panel survey with a focus on issues relating to employment, income and the family. Described in more detail in Watson and Wooden (2002), the HILDA Survey involved the selection of a large nationally representative sample of households and then seeking interviews with members of those households. Specifically, a household interview was sought with at least one adult member. Individual interviews were then sought with all household members over the age of 15 years on the 30 June preceding interview. In addition to the collection of data through personal interview, all persons completing a personal interview were given a self-completion questionnaire that they were asked to return after completion either by mail or by handing it to the interviewer at a subsequent visit to the household. Almost all of the interviews were conducted during the period between 24 August 2001 and 21 December 2001.

Households were selected into the sample by a multi-stage process. First, a random sample of 488 Census Collection Districts (CDs), based on 1996 Census boundaries, was selected from across Australia (each of which consists of approximately 200 to 250 households). Second, within each of these CDs all dwellings were fully enumerated and a sample of 22 to 34 dwellings randomly selected. In general, all households within each selected dwelling were asked to participate. However, where there were four or more households occupying one dwelling, all households had to be enumerated and a random sample of three households obtained (based on a predetermined pattern).

After adjusting for out-of-scope dwellings (e.g., unoccupied, non-residential) and households (e.g., all occupants were overseas visitors) and for multiple households within dwellings, the total number of households identified as in-scope was 11,693.

⁴ The Australian Institute of Family Studies conducted a number of large surveys in the early 1990s that focused on work-family issues (see VandenHeuvel 1993, Wolcott and Glezer 1995). Somewhat surprisingly given the growth in long-hours working during the 1980s, none of the analyses of these data had a focus on long hours of work.

Interviews were completed with all eligible members at 6872 of these households and with at least one eligible member at a further 810 households. The total household response rate was, therefore, 66 per cent.

Within the 7682 households at which interviews were conducted, there were 19,917 people. Of this group, 4790 were under 15 years of age on the preceding 30 June and hence were ineligible for an interview in Wave 1. This left 15,127 persons eligible for a personal interview, 13,969 of whom completed the Person Questionnaire.

As discussed in Wooden, Freidin and Watson (2002), these response rates compare favourably with the rates achieved in the first waves of similar major household panel surveys. More importantly, comparison with population benchmark data from official Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) sources suggests that the sample has characteristics that are broadly in line with what would have been expected if the sample were truly random. There is, however, at least one major disparity, with residents from Sydney under-represented, a result that Wooden et al. (2002) attribute to both greater difficulties making contact with some Sydney residents (e.g., those in living in high-rise apartments) and a greater reluctance to participate because of time commitments.

Methods

The approach adopted in this paper is based in large part on the analysis of the impact of long-hours working on employed fathers and their families reported in Weston et al. (2003), which also used the HILDA data set. In that analysis, associations between a range of outcome measures, expected to be influenced by the degree of balance between working life and family life, and variations in the number of usual hours worked each week were reported. The analysis thus presupposed that tensions between work and non-work activity will be correlated with the number of hours spent in paid employment. A similar assumption is made here. The analysis here, however, is different in at least two important respects. First, the focus is broadened to include mothers in employment. Second, more explicit attention is paid to how associations with working hours might vary with working arrangements within households. In particular, separate analyses are reported for workers from four major household types:

- (i) lone parents;
- (ii) traditional families, defined here, as heterosexual couple households with dependent children and where the male is in full-time employment and the female does not have paid employment;
- (iii) neo-traditional families, defined here as heterosexual couple households with dependent children and where the male is in full-time employment and the female is in a part-time job; and
- (iv) modern families, or heterosexual couple households with dependent children where both the male and the female are in paid employment.⁵

Note the definition of dependent children employed in this analysis is not the same as used by the ABS. The standard ABS definition includes full-time students aged 15-24

⁵ This classification system for couple households is broadly in line with that used by Clarkberg and Moen (2001), with the notable difference that their 'modern families' are described as 'dual career couples' and include couples where roles are reversed and where neither adult is in employment.

years of age. In contrast, for this analysis only children under 15 years of age are treated as dependent children.

A summary breakdown of the individual sample by household type is provided in Table 1. Since our interest here is in the impact of paid employment on family life, all persons who are 65 years or older have been excluded from this table and, indeed, from all of the analyses reported in this paper.

Table 1 reveals that just over 30 per cent of the responding sample members aged between 15 and 64 years are married or partnered with at least one child under 15 years of age (though this falls to just under 27 per cent once the sample is weighted to conform to population benchmarks). Neo-traditional families account for the largest proportion of this group (11 per cent of the entire sample). Next come traditional families (9 per cent) and then modern families (6.4 per cent). This leaves a small proportion of households with children that do not fit into any of these categories, including same-sex couples, couples where the traditional gender roles appear to be reversed, and jobless households (included under 'other').

Couples without children under 15 years are more numerous, with around one-third of all adults falling in this category. Not surprisingly, within this group so-called modern employment arrangements are relatively more common. There is also a much larger fraction of jobless households.

Finally, the sample includes over 500 lone parents, just under half of whom are in paid employment.

Variables

Three major clusters of outcome variables are examined. These relate to: (i) hours of work; (ii) work-family balance and the quality of intra-family relationships; and (iii) subjective well-being.

Hours of work. The HILDA Survey collected data on both usual hours of work per week and preferred hours of work per week (conditioned on the consequences for income if hours are varied). In addition, a question on satisfaction with hours worked, scored on a 0 to 10 scale, was also asked.

Compared with the ABS Labour Force Survey, the HILDA Survey does appear to overstate mean hours of work, and mainly because it over-enumerates persons working very long hours. According to unpublished data from the August 2001 Labour Force Survey, almost 19 per cent of all employed persons, and just under 27 per cent of all persons usually working 35 hours or more, regularly worked 49 hours or more per week, the threshold frequently used to define long-hours working in Western countries (Wooden and Loundes 2002, p. 2). In contrast, in the first wave of the HILDA Survey the comparable percentages are 23 and 32, respectively. The reasons for these quite large differences are not entirely clear, though it is true that the relevant question in the two surveys are different. The HILDA Survey, for example, specifically prompted respondents to include both paid and unpaid overtime. Nevertheless, whatever the reason, it is suspected that for some respondents in the HILDA Survey data, usual hours of work was measured with considerable error. This is particularly likely for employees who are on-call (who may or may not include time spent on-call as part of their working time) and employees who work compressed schedules (e.g., two weeks on followed by two weeks off) and thus may report usual hours worked in a week when they do work.

**Table 1: Distribution of HILDA Sample by Household Type:
Persons Aged < 65 Years**

<i>Household type</i>	<i>Responding sample</i>		<i>Population weighted</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Couples with children <15 years of age</i>			
Traditional	1071	9.0	8.0
Neo-traditional	1306	11.0	9.2
Modern 1	693	5.8	5.1
Modern 2	76	0.6	0.5
Reversed roles	104	0.9	0.8
Same sex couples	20	0.2	0.1
Other	388	3.3	2.9
Sub-total	3658	30.7	26.6
<i>Couples without children <15 years of age</i>			
Traditional	494	4.1	4.6
Neo-traditional	755	6.3	6.5
Modern 1	1339	11.2	12.2
Modern 2	125	1.0	1.0
Reversed roles	257	2.2	2.4
Same sex couples	50	0.4	0.5
Other	855	7.2	7.3
Sub-total	3875	32.5	34.5
<i>Lone parents (of children <15 years of age)</i>			
Employed	256	2.1	1.9
Not employed	280	2.3	2.2
Sub-total	536	4.5	4.1
<i>Other persons (children and other lone persons)</i>	3851	32.3	34.9
TOTAL	11920	100.0	100.0

Key:

Traditional	Male employed full-time and female not employed.
Neo-traditional	Male employed full-time and female employed part-time.
Modern 1	Both employed full-time.
Modern 2	Both employed part-time.
Reversed roles	Female employed full-time and male either employed part-time or not employed at all.
Other (couple)	Both not employed or one has a part-time job and the other is not employed.

Work-family balance and family relationships. Our key measures of work-family balances are four scales derived from 13 items taken from the work-family strains and gains scale developed by Marshall and Barnett (1993). Scored on a 7-point agree-disagree scale, these scales measure:

- (i) the positive impact of having both work and family responsibilities (e.g., ‘having both work and family responsibilities makes me a more well-rounded person’— 3 items; alpha reliability = 0.84);
- (ii) the negative impact of having both work and family responsibilities (e.g., ‘because of my family responsibilities, the time I spend working is less enjoyable and more pressured’ —4 items; alpha reliability = 0.71);
- (iii) the positive impact of their work on their parenting role (e.g., ‘my work has a positive effect on my children’ – 3 items; alpha reliability = 0.62); and
- (iv) the negative impact of their work on their parenting role (e.g., ‘working leaves me with too little time or energy to be the kind of parent I want to be’– 3 items; alpha reliability = 0.72).

We also examine self-reported data on: satisfaction with the flexibility available from their employer to balance work and non-work commitments (single item scored on a 0 to 10 scale); the extent of working-time flexibility, as proxied by responses to a statement about the freedom individuals had to determine when they did their work; satisfaction with relationship with partner, both self-reports and reports by the partner (single item scored on a 0 to 10 scale); satisfaction with relationship with children and satisfaction with partner’s relationship with children (two separate items scored a 0 to 10 scale); a measure of parenting stress, which consists of four items taken from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics 1997 Child Development Supplement (e.g., ‘I often feel tired, worn out, or exhausted from meeting the needs of my children’ – alpha reliability = 0.74); usual weekly hours spent interacting with and caring for children (defined as time spent ‘playing with your children, helping them with personal care, teaching, coaching or actively supervising them, or getting them to child care, school and other activities’; and usual weekly hours spent in household production (defined as: household errands, such as shopping, banking, paying bills, etc.; housework, such as preparing meals, washing dishes, cleaning house, washing clothes, ironing and sewing; and outdoor tasks, including home maintenance, car maintenance or repairs and gardening).

Subjective well-being. Five measures of different aspects of well-being are examined in this study. First, we have a single-item measure of overall job satisfaction scored on a 0-10 scale. Second, we have an analogous measure of life satisfaction. The remaining three measures are multi-item measures of health and psychological well-being derived from the SF-36 Health Survey (Ware et al. 2000). The SF36 actually provides measures of nine distinct components of health. Following Weston et al. (2003), the three sub-scales considered here measure general health, where higher scores indicate better subjective health (5 items; alpha reliability = 0.82), vitality, where low scores indicate feeling tired and worn out (4 items; alpha reliability = 0.83), and mental health, where low scores reflect greater feelings of anxiety and depression (5 items; alpha reliability = 0.82). All scales in the SF36 are transformed into standardised 0-100 indices.

Findings

Working Time

Looking first at the question of working time, Table 2 presents summary data on usual weekly hours of work, preferred weekly hours of work and satisfaction with hours of work for each of the four main family types identified as being of interest to this study. Most importantly, this table highlights differences according to differences in the number of hours worked by the father (in the case of traditional and neo-traditional families) or by the parents (in the case of modern families and lone-parent families).

The key findings from this table are both very obvious and very striking. First, it is clear that for those parents who are working quite long hours (more than 48 per week), the gap between usual hours worked and preferred hours of work – what many US researchers refer to as the time squeeze (e.g., Clarkberg and Moen 2001) – is quite large. Indeed, if we consider the total population of parents of children aged 14 years or less who are also working 49 hours or more, then around 55 per cent would prefer to work fewer hours. Second, average levels of satisfaction with hours worked generally fall with the number of hours worked, and the differences are both large and statistically significant. Consider for example the case of a father in a neo-traditional family. Those working long hours have a satisfaction with hours score that is more than two points below that of fathers working a more ‘standard’ arrangement; that is, 35 to 40 hours per week. This is an extremely large difference given the scale is bounded at 0 and 10. Further, the numbers expressing dissatisfaction are quite high, with 27 per cent of the long-hours workers who are parents choosing a score below the mid-point of the scale and a further 28 per cent selecting 5 or 6 on the 0-10 scale. If we take a score of at least 7 as reflecting satisfaction, then only 45 per cent of these long hours are happy with their hours, which compares with 76 per cent of parents working 35 to 40 hours and 76 per cent of parents working part-time.

There are, however, a couple of exceptions to these general trends. First, males in modern families where both partners are working part-time are equally as unhappy with their part-time work weeks as the long-hours workers are with their 50 hours plus weeks. In other words, underemployment can be just as dissatisfying as overemployment, though among the population of parents at least, this problem is restricted mainly to men. Second, among lone parents in full-time jobs, the gap between actual and desired hours of work does not grow significantly with the number of hours actually worked. Indeed, 41 per cent of lone parents who work 35 to 40 hours would prefer to work fewer hours compared with 36 per cent of lone parents working 49 hours or more each week. It is still, however, the case that dissatisfaction with hours of work is a much more significant problem for those reporting very long hours of work.

Overall, these data are consistent with the widely held view that many Australians work very long hours and, more importantly, that these long hours arrangements are often inconsistent with worker preferences and appear to contribute negatively to overall worker well-being. Moreover, while the data from Wave 1 HILDA Survey can say very little directly about trends, a comparison with data from the employee component of the 1995 Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS), reported in Table 3, suggests that the gap between actual hours and desired hours has intensified since the mid-1990s.

Table 2: Usual Hours, Preferred Hours and Satisfaction with Hours of Work by Family Type^a

	<i>Hours worked^b</i>			
	<35	35-40	41-48	49+
<i>Traditional families (fathers)</i>				
Mean usual weekly hours worked		38.8	44.9**	59.1**
Mean preferred weekly hours of work		40.0	44.1**	49.7**
Mean satisfaction with hours worked (% of weighted N)		7.7 (35.2)	7.0** (22.6)	6.0** (42.1)
<i>Neo-traditional families</i>				
Mean usual weekly hours worked				
Fathers		38.8	44.8**	58.3**
Mothers		20.3	19.6	18.0**
Mean preferred weekly hours of work				
Fathers		39.1	42.0**	48.4**
Mothers		22.3	20.3**	19.6**
Mean satisfaction with hours worked (% of weighted N)		7.8 (31.4)	6.9** (21.3)	5.7** (47.3)
<i>Modern families</i>				
Mean usual weekly hours worked				
Fathers	24.2**	38.7	44.8**	60.3**
Mothers	18.7**	38.1	44.7**	57.8**
Mean preferred weekly hours of work				
Fathers	32.4**	38.4	43.1**	50.1**
Mothers	23.7**	31.9	37.8*	42.0**
Mean satisfaction with hours worked (% of weighted N)	6.5** (9.9)	7.8 (43.0)	7.1** (18.2)	6.3** (28.9)
<i>Lone-parent families</i>				
Mean usual weekly hours worked	19.2**	38.1	44.3**	55.9**
Mean preferred weekly hours of work	25.7**	33.6	41.2**	49.3**
Mean satisfaction with hours worked (% of weighted N)	7.2 (55.1)	7.2 (25.4)	7.0 (9.0)	5.5** (10.5)

Notes: a All data are weighted by the person sample weight.

b For traditional and neo-traditional families the hours worked relate to those worked by the father.

** , * and # indicate a statistically difference, at the 1, 5 and 10 per cent levels, respectively, from the reference group – persons working 35-40 hours per week.

Comparisons between different surveys utilising different sampling frames and methods and different survey instruments are often fraught with danger; nevertheless, the differences between the AWIRS and HILDA data are too large to ignore. The figures in this table indicate a marked increase in the proportion of full-time employees with preferences for working fewer hours – from less than 20 per cent to almost 37 per cent – and are thus consistent with the hypothesis that the mismatch between actual and desired working hours has been growing.⁶ Note, however, that this increased mismatch need not mean that the incidence of long hours of work has also been growing. Indeed, as I have documented elsewhere (Wooden 2003), official data on hours actually worked collected every month by the ABS suggest that the trend in the incidence of long-hours working since the mid-1990s has been relatively flat but trending downwards.

Table 3: Changes in Working Time Preferences: AWIRS 1995 and HILDA 2001 Compared (% of employees)

<i>Hours usually worked per week</i>	<i>AWIRS 1995</i>		<i>HILDA 2001</i>	
	<i>Prefer fewer hours</i>	<i>Prefer more hours</i>	<i>Prefer fewer hours</i>	<i>Prefer more hours</i>
35-40	11.0	7.1	23.8	14.3
41-44	15.8	4.8	34.1	9.4
45-48	26.5	4.8	43.1	5.3
49+	38.1	3.3	59.2	2.5
All full-time employees	19.5	5.6	36.8	9.4

Notes: To ensure comparability with the AWIRS data, the data from the HILDA Survey have been restricted to the sub-sample of employees (excluding owner managers) in non-agriculture workplaces with 20 or more employees. The results were then weighted to the population.

The AWIRS data are taken from Wooden and Loundes (2002, Table 4, p. 9).

Work-Family Balance

It thus seems very clear that many Australian workers are dissatisfied with the hours they work and that many of those working relatively long hours would prefer to work fewer hours. But how disruptive is long hours of work on family life? To assess this, for each of our four main family types a diverse range of indicators of work-family balance were cross classified by an hours of work measure. The results are reported in Tables 4a to 4d.

⁶ Data collected by the ABS as part of its Forms of Employment Survey in November 2001 (see ABS cat. no. 6359.0) suggest that the HILDA Survey has overstated the mismatch between desired and actual hours of work. The ABS, which uses the same sample as for its Labour Force Survey, found that only 29.9 per cent of full-time employees (excluding owner managers) aged 15 to 69 years indicated a preference for fewer hours. In the HILDA Survey the comparable percentage is 35.8. Nevertheless, it still seems very clear that the mismatch between hours worked and hours desired increased substantially between 1995 and 2001.

Table 4a: Indicators of Work-Family Balance in ‘Traditional Families’ by Hours Worked by the Father^a

	<i>Hours worked by father</i>		
	<i>35-40</i>	<i>41-48</i>	<i>49+</i>
Satisfaction with flexibility for balancing work and non-work commitments	7.4	6.9**	6.5**
Work time flexibility (1-7 index)	3.6	3.6	3.8
Work-family gains (1-7)	5.1	5.1	5.2
Work-family strains (1-7)	3.2	3.4	3.8**
Work-parenting gains (1-7)	4.5	4.2*	4.5
Work-parenting strains (1-7)	4.0	4.3**	4.6**
Parenting stress (1-7)			
Fathers	3.5	3.4	3.5
Mothers	3.9	3.9	3.8
Satisfaction with relationship with partner (0-10)			
Fathers	8.6	8.6	8.8 [#]
Mothers	8.6	8.1**	8.5
Satisfaction with relationship with children (0-10)			
Fathers			
Self-reported	8.9	8.9	8.8
Partner reported	8.8	8.7	8.8
Mothers			
Self-reported	9.2	9.1	9.3
Partner reported	9.0	9.1	9.1
Usual weekly hours interacting with children			
Fathers	16.2	12.4**	12.4**
Mothers	31.4	31.8	34.8
Usual weekly hours of home production (excl. child care)			
Fathers	16.9	14.0**	13.7**
Mothers	29.3	27.3	27.8

Notes: a All data are weighted by the person sample weight.

** , * and # indicate a statistically difference, at the 1, 5 and 10 per cent levels, respectively, from the reference group – families where the father works 35 to 40 hours per week.

Table 4b: Indicators of Work-Family Balance in ‘Neo-traditional Families’ by Hours Worked by the Father^a

	<i>Hours worked by father</i>		
	<i>35-40</i>	<i>41-48</i>	<i>49+</i>
Satisfaction with flexibility for balancing work and non-work commitments (0-10)			
Fathers	7.4	7.2	6.3**
Mothers	8.3	8.2	8.5
Work time flexibility (1-7)			
Fathers	3.4	3.7 [#]	4.3**
Mothers	3.4	3.4	4.2**
Work-family gains (1-7)			
Fathers	5.2	5.4*	5.3
Mothers	5.3	5.3	5.3
Work-family strains (1-7)			
Fathers	3.3	3.4	3.7
Mothers	3.2	3.1	2.9*
Work-parenting gains (1-7)			
Fathers	4.6	4.4	4.5
Mothers	4.5	4.4	4.3 [#]
Work-parenting strains (1-7)			
Fathers	4.2	4.3	4.3 [#]
Mothers	3.5	3.6	3.3
Parenting stress (1-7)			
Fathers	3.6	3.5	3.4**
Mothers	4.0	4.0	4.0
Satisfaction with relationship with partner (0-10)			
Fathers	8.4	8.3	8.5
Mothers	8.1	8.4 [#]	8.4 [#]
Satisfaction with relationship with children (0-10)			
Fathers			
Self-reported	8.6	8.7	8.7
Partner reported	8.5	8.7	8.5
Mothers			
Self-reported	8.6	9.0**	8.9**
Partner reported	8.5	8.7	8.5
Usual weekly hours interacting with children			
Fathers	13.2	13.5	9.9**
Mothers	26.0	28.7	25.6
Usual weekly hours of home production (excl. child care)			
Fathers	14.5	14.4	12.2**
Mothers	23.7	23.1	24.8

Notes: a All data are weighted by the person sample weight.

** , * and # indicate a statistically difference, at the 1, 5 and 10 per cent levels, respectively, from the reference group – families where the father works 35 to 40 hours per week.

Table 4c: Indicators of Work-Family Balance in ‘Modern Families’ by Hours Worked^a

	<i>Hours worked by parent</i>			
	<i><35</i>	<i>35-40</i>	<i>41-48</i>	<i>49+</i>
Satisfaction with flexibility for balancing work and non-work commitments (0-10)				
Fathers	8.0 [#]	7.5	7.2	6.4 ^{**}
Mothers	7.9 ^{**}	6.9	7.5 ^{**}	6.0 ^{**}
Work time flexibility (1-7)				
Fathers	3.9	3.8	3.5	4.2
Mothers	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.9
Work-family gains (1-7)				
Fathers	5.3	5.3	5.6 [*]	5.3
Mothers	5.1	5.2	5.2	5.5 [*]
Work-family strains (1-7)				
Fathers	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.6
Mothers	3.5	3.6	3.8 [#]	3.6
Work-parenting gains (1-7)				
Fathers	4.8 [*]	4.3	4.5	4.5
Mothers	4.4	4.5	4.4	4.6
Work-parenting strains (1-7)				
Fathers	4.2	3.9	3.9	4.3 [*]
Mothers	3.9 [#]	4.3	4.4	4.2
Parenting stress (1-7)				
Fathers	4.0 ^{**}	3.4	3.4	3.3
Mothers	4.1	3.9	3.5 ^{**}	3.5 ^{**}
Satisfaction with relationship with partner (0-10)				
Fathers	8.4	8.3	8.2	8.5
Mothers	7.4 [*]	8.1	7.8	7.8
Satisfaction with relationship with children (0-10)				
Fathers				
Self-reported	8.6	8.7	8.6	8.7
Partner reported	7.6	8.0	8.1	8.2
Mothers				
Self-reported	8.4	8.5	8.8	9.0 [*]
Partner reported	8.7	8.8	9.0 [#]	8.9
Usual weekly hours interacting with children				
Fathers	14.5	11.8	10.4	11.0
Mothers	18.3	18.7	15.6 [#]	19.9
Usual weekly hours of home production (excl. child care)				
Fathers	16.2	17.3	14.9 [*]	15.2 [*]
Mothers	27.4 [#]	22.3	22.9	21.0

Notes: a All data are weighted by the person sample weight.

** , * and # indicate a statistically difference, at the 1, 5 and 10 per cent levels, respectively, from the reference group – persons working 35 to 40 hours per week.

Table 4d: Indicators of Work-Family Balance in Lone-parent Families by Hours Worked by the Parent

	<i>Hours worked by parent</i>			
	<i><35</i>	<i>35-40</i>	<i>41-48</i>	<i>49+</i>
Satisfaction with flexibility for balancing work and non-work commitments (0-10)	7.7 [#]	7.1	7.7	6.4
Work time flexibility (1-7)	3.5	3.6	2.9	4.1
Work-family gains (1-7)	5.4	5.4	5.7	5.3
Work-family strains (1-7)	2.5	2.6	2.7	3.0
Work-parenting gains (1-7)	4.7	4.6	5.1	5.0
Work-parenting strains (1-7)	3.6 ^{**}	4.8	4.2	4.1
Parenting stress (1-7)	4.0	3.9	3.3	3.9
Satisfaction with relationship with children (0-10)	8.5	8.5	8.1	7.9
Usual weekly hours interacting with children	23.0 [*]	16.3	18.4	13.5
Usual weekly hours of home production (excl. child care)	29.0 ^{**}	22.4	22.0	20.9

Notes: **, * and # indicate a statistically difference, at the 1, 5 and 10 per cent levels, respectively, from the reference group – families where the parent works 35-40 hours per week.

All data are weighted by the person sample weight.

Looking first at satisfaction with the flexibility available to balance work and non-work commitments, there is a very clear and obvious relationship with hours of work – the more hours worked, the less the flexibility available. This is an entirely unsurprising result and one that was emphasised in the treatment of these same data by Watson et al. (2003, pp. 89-90). Nevertheless, dissatisfaction does not mean that those workers do not have relatively flexible working time arrangements. Indeed, as Golden (2001) has observed with respect to US data, the jobs that provide the greatest flexibility in work schedules may also be those involving the longest hours of work. The HILDA Survey data are broadly consistent with this hypothesis. Indeed, when averaged across all working parents, the long-hours workers score half a point higher on this flexibility scale than those working 35 to 40 hours.

Also as expected, these tables show that the hours spent by the father interacting with their children (and on housework) tend to be lower when the number of hours worked is relatively large. Nevertheless, this does not appear to be true of parents in ‘modern families’. It should also be noted that for fathers in traditional and neo-traditional families, the displacement of time with children (and time spent on housework) appears to be far from a one to one relationship. The average male working 49 hours or more per week in a traditional family reports working 20 hours more on average than the comparable male working 35 to 40 hours. They, however, report spending only four fewer hours each week with their children (and three fewer hours on housework). Further, the results of a simple regression equation which control for a

small number of other characteristics such as age and the age of the youngest child see these differences decline even further – to about 2.5 hours in both cases.⁷

Neither flexibility available to balance work and non-work commitments nor the amount of time spent with children, however, are direct indicators of work-family balance. Simply spending more time with one's children is not an indication that the work-family balance has necessarily improved. Indeed, if it reduces income-earning opportunities or is associated with greater stress at work, the balance might worsen. Similarly, while greater flexibility to take time off and reschedule working hours can assist achievement of a better work-family life balance, it does not guarantee it.

Arguably more revealing, therefore, are Marshall and Barnett's (1993) measures of the gains and strains associated with dual work and family roles, which attempt to more directly assess the difficulties and advantages associated with combining work with a family. These indicators suggest that the detrimental impacts of long hours working are not so obvious. The two 'gains' measures, for example, exhibit very little in the way of a systematic association with hours worked. The 'strains' measures, on the other hand, generally do exhibit a positive association with hours worked, though the differences are only pronounced for men in traditional families. With respect to the measure of parenting stress, the findings are even less equivocal – there is absolutely no evidence in these tables that the stress levels associated with being a parent are higher for persons working long hours or, for that matter, for their partners. Of course it is entirely possible that there may be other variables that are obscuring a positive relationship. For example, parenting stress might be expected to be higher for relatively new parents with young families, and it is entirely possible that workers from such families would be less likely to work extended hours.⁸ In fact the reverse appears to be true. After controlling for both worker age and age of the youngest child (and a small number of other variables), the coefficients on the variable representing long hours of work in linear regression models explaining parenting stress were negative and statistically significant for both men and women. The magnitudes of these effects, however, were still relatively small.

Poor work-family balance might also be reflected in dysfunctional family relationships. Measures of the level of satisfaction with both partners and children were thus also included among the list of indicators of work-family balance. Again, however, Tables 4a to 4d reveal almost no evidence of an inverse association between hours worked and levels of satisfaction with either partners or children. The only hint that hours of work have an adverse impact concerns lone parents and the relationship with their children, and even here the difference is not particularly large, and certainly not large enough to be statistically significant.

Subjective Well-being

The third stage of this analysis involves considering the issue of whether or not long hours of work is related to lower levels of subjective well-being (assessed here by measures of job satisfaction, life satisfaction, general health, vitality and mental

⁷ Separate equations estimating the amount of time per week male parents spent with children and on housework were estimated. The equations included controls for the number of hours worked by the male, household type (which effectively provides a crude control for partner's hours), age, the number of children, and the age of the youngest child. The adjusted R-squared values were 0.14 and 0.04, respectively.

⁸ Indeed, this is exactly what be might expected when hours of work are the result of worker choices rather than exogenously imposed by employers.

health), both of the individual working the long hours and their partner. The summary statistics, disaggregated again by family type, are reported in Table 5.

Again, the key finding is how little these outcome measures vary with hours of work. Persons working long hours only score noticeably lower than other workers on one of the four measures – vitality – and even then, the difference is only significant for men. Life satisfaction, on the other hand, appears to be largely unrelated to working time. Only among lone parents do long-hours workers score lower than those working 35 to 40 hours (though again, the relatively small number of lone parents in employment means that this difference is still not large enough to achieve statistical significance). Differences in self-reported health are also very small, and if there is a group where problems are most acute it is among parents in part-time jobs in dual income families where both income-earners are in part-time jobs.

Of course, critics would argue that the analysis presented here is too simplistic, and it is important to control for other influences on these outcomes. As Barnett (1998) has observed, jobs with long hours often tend to be the better jobs. For example, they provide better pay and working conditions and may involve more fulfilling work, which, in turn, will impact positively on worker health and well-being. These covariates thus need to be taken into account. This is no simple exercise, and would provide the basis for a number of lengthy and detailed empirical studies. Fortunately, the basis for this type of work has already been provided by separate studies undertaken at the Melbourne Institute into both job satisfaction (Wooden and Warren 2003) and life satisfaction (Shields and Wooden 2003) and using the HILDA Survey data.

Wooden and Warren (2003), for example, were interested in the question of whether or not non-standard employment arrangements help explain inter-personal differences in job satisfaction. A key feature of their analysis is that the effects of employment arrangements are allowed to vary with both hours of work and gender. After inclusion a large number of controls for both personal and job characteristics, they found no evidence for men employed on an ongoing or permanent basis that long hours of work is associated with lower levels of job satisfaction. For men employed on fixed-term contracts or on a casual basis, however, self-reported levels of job satisfaction are lowest for those working the longest hours, though the effect is only significant for the fixed-term contract workers. For female employees, on the other hand, the results suggested almost the reverse conclusions. Among those in permanent jobs, levels of job satisfaction fall markedly with hours of work, whereas for casual employees the difference between those working 35-hour work weeks and those working 50-hour work weeks is extremely small. Overall, these results do provide some evidence that job satisfaction declines with hours of work, but the effect is far from uniform or widespread.

Turning to life satisfaction, the question of whether or not long hours of paid employment might impact adversely on life satisfaction was not something considered in the analysis reported in Shields and Wooden (2003). Indeed, their results highlight the negative association between life satisfaction and unemployment, a result found in many previous studies of this kind. The specification developed by Shields and Wooden (2003), however, can be amended to provide a test of the impact of long hours of work on subjective well-being. We thus estimated a variant of their model,

Table 5: Indicators of Subjective Well-being by Hours of Work and Family Type^a

	<i>Hours worked^b</i>			
	<i><35</i>	<i>35-40</i>	<i>41-48</i>	<i>49+</i>
<i>Traditional families (fathers)</i>				
Overall job satisfaction (0-10)		7.7	7.2 [*]	7.7
Overall life satisfaction (0-10)				
Fathers		8.1	7.8 [#]	8.0
Mothers		8.0	8.0	8.4 ^{**}
General health (0-100)				
Fathers		74.0	73.9	73.1
Mothers		71.9	74.5	74.9 [#]
Vitality (0-100)				
Fathers		66.4	64.8	61.3 ^{**}
Mothers		58.2	57.6	57.1
Mental health (0-100)				
Fathers		78.1	77.0	76.6
Mothers		72.7	72.6	72.8
<i>Neo-traditional families</i>				
Overall job satisfaction (0-10)				
Fathers		7.6	7.4	7.4
Mothers		8.0	8.1	8.1
Overall life satisfaction (0-10)				
Fathers		7.9	8.1 [#]	7.9
Mothers		8.1	8.1	8.2 [#]
General health (0-100)				
Fathers		75.2	77.7 [#]	73.8
Mothers		75.5	78.0	77.9 [*]
Vitality (0-100)				
Fathers		65.6	65.6	63.7
Mothers		60.9	61.0	61.2
Mental health (0-100)				
Fathers		76.7	79.7 [*]	77.5
Mothers		74.1	74.9	75.9 [#]
<i>Modern families</i>				
Overall job satisfaction (0-10)				
Fathers	6.6 [*]	7.5	7.3	7.5
Mothers	7.7	7.7	7.9	7.7
Overall life satisfaction (0-10)				
Fathers	7.5	7.7	7.8	7.8
Mothers	7.9	7.7	7.6	7.9
General health (0-100)				
Fathers	67.7	69.8	73.3 [#]	73.7 [*]
Mothers	66.9 ^{**}	75.3	71.7 [#]	78.4

Table 5 (cont'd)

	<i>Hours worked^b</i>			
	<35	35-40	41-48	49+
Vitality (0-100)				
Fathers	62.5	66.4	62.1 [*]	60.5 ^{**}
Mothers	54.5 [#]	59.1	55.6 [#]	62.1
Mental health (0-100)				
Fathers	72.0 [#]	76.7	74.2	75.2
Mothers	68.6 [*]	73.7	71.5	76.8 [#]
<i>Lone-parent families</i>				
Overall job satisfaction (0-10)	7.9	7.6	7.5	8.0
Overall life satisfaction (0-10)	7.1	7.5	7.3	7.1
General health (0-100)	73.9	71.1	69.7	62.0 [#]
Vitality (0-100)	57.6	57.4	58.4	50.1
Mental health (0-100)	71.4	70.8	71.2	63.8

Notes: a All data are weighted by the person sample weight.

b For traditional and neo-traditional families the hours worked relate to those worked by the father.

**, * and # indicate a statistically difference, at the 1, 5 and 10 per cent levels, respectively, from the reference group – persons working 35-40 hours per week.

but restricted to the sub-sample of employed parents. Further, we used this specification for the estimation of models of not just life satisfaction, but also the three other well-being measures developed from the SF36. To keep the interpretation of the results straightforward, all models were estimated with ordinary least squares.⁹ In all specifications we test for the effects of working hours by including three dummy variables for the following hours bands: less than 35 hours, 41-48 hours and 49 hours or more. The omitted category, 35 to 40 hours, is the reference category. In addition, a variable that holds constant the working hours of the partner is included.¹⁰ A summary of the results on these hours variables is provided in Table 6.

These multivariate results suggest a slightly less optimistic picture than the simpler bivariate results presented in Table 5. Nevertheless, it remains true that any negative effects from long hours of work are very small. The largest associations are again with vitality. Most other coefficients are either statistically insignificant or very small in magnitude (bearing in mind that the variables are all scored on a 0 to 100 scale). It is also found that the effects of the working time of one's partner is even smaller, and restricted to men. Thus whereas the reported health and vitality of men appears to react negatively to their partners working very long hours, there is no such effect for women. Indeed, female life satisfaction is actually higher when their partner works longer than standard, though the size of this effect is again very small.

⁹ Since all of the dependent variables are ordinal variables, the technically appropriate estimator would be ordered probit. The ordered probit results, however, are qualitatively very similar to the least squares results.

¹⁰ Separate dummy variables thus had to be included identifying whether the respondent was partnered and whether the partner worked at all.

Table 6: Long Working Hours and the Subjective Well-being of Employed Parents: Regression Coefficients (t-ratios in parentheses)

<i>Outcome measure</i>	<i>Own hours</i>			<i>Partner's hours</i>		
	<i><35</i>	<i>41-48</i>	<i>49+</i>	<i><35</i>	<i>41-48</i>	<i>49+</i>
<i>Males</i>						
Life satisfaction	-3.739 (2.53)	-.583 (.59)	-1.300 (1.43)	.397 (.39)	0.200 (0.11)	.733 (.41)
General health	-1.790 (.98)	.328 (.27)	-.407 (0.36)	-.056 (.04)	1.057 (0.46)	-4.481 (2.03)
Vitality	2.535 (1.36)	-2.054 (1.65)	-4.135 (3.61)	.775 (.60)	-2.296 (.98)	-3.742 (1.65)
Mental health	-3.694 (2.34)	-0.542 (.51)	-1.768 (1.82)	.992 (.90)	-1.178 (.59)	-2.690 (1.39)
<i>Females</i>						
Life satisfaction	2.484 (2.54)	-0.607 (.38)	.786 (.49)	1.474 (.83)	2.370 (1.96)	1.714 (1.71)
General health	-.353 (.29)	-3.680 (1.86)	0.724 (.36)	-1.415 (.61)	.362 (.22)	1.374 (1.13)
Vitality	-0.001 (.00)	-5.666 (2.72)	-3.122 (1.50)	-.889 (.38)	1.020 (.66)	.019 (.02)
Mental health	-.278 (.25)	-4.067 (2.20)	-2.405 (1.30)	-.346 (.17)	1.294 (.94)	-.409 (.36)

Note: For purposes of ensuring comparability, all outcome measures have been scored on a 0-100 index. Thus meant rescaling the life satisfaction measure.

Conclusions

It is easy to get worried about working hours and the possible adverse consequences that working very long hours can have on workers and their families. There is certainly no difficulty finding examples of workers whose work schedules not only reduce the amount of time available for family and leisure pursuits, but also are dangerous, not only to themselves, but to their co-workers and to others who may be affected by their working behaviour (long-haul truck drivers being an obvious example). Furthermore, survey data which highlight both the relatively large number of persons regularly reporting working long hours and the gap between actual and desired hours, such as the HILDA Survey data reported on here, can be expected to be used to reinforce such concerns (see, for example, Watson et al. 2003). Nevertheless, these very same data also suggest that, for the most part, there are no sizeable negative relationships between working long hours (that is, more than 48 hours per week) and family life or between working hours and general well-being. This may seem surprising given an increase in working time must, by definition, mean a reduction in the amount of time available for non-work activities. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter once observed: ‘The amount of time demanded by occupations [is] ... among the most obvious and important ways that occupational life affects family life’ (Kanter 1977, p. 31). Nevertheless, despite claims to the contrary (e.g., Pocock 2003, p. 132), the findings reported here are in line with the international research. For

example, in her review of the literature, Barnett (1998), a prominent work-family researcher in the US, concluded that there is very little evidence that long hours of work are associated with lower levels of health and personal well-being or that it gives rise to increased levels of work-family conflict. To quote: 'the assumption that long work hours inevitably give rise to work/family conflict and negative personal outcomes is strongly challenged by these findings'.

It is important to realise that neither Barnett nor I are saying that long working hours cannot have negative effects. For example, Barnett points to the much more uniformly negative findings that emerge from the empirical research on shift work. Long hours of work combined with shift working may thus be a particularly dangerous combination. More generally, the mechanisms by which long hours of work might impact on individual and family outcomes are likely to be both complicated and highly variable with individual situations. Barnett (1998) highlights the possibility that the relationship between long hours of work and work/family indicators might vary with job characteristics such as the levels of job complexity and skills discretion. That is, long hours of work may only lead to significant problems where jobs are highly routine and monotonous. Similarly, the analysis of job satisfaction data reported in Wooden and Warren (2003) suggests that hours of work might interact with job security.

The take-home message from this analysis is very clear, and again, is one that has already been made with respect to previous research reported on in the US.

Overall, it safe to say that there is no simple relationship between time on the job and different indicators of individual-level outcomes. Moreover, there is no a priori reason to believe that work hours will have similar effects on diverse outcomes or will have similar effects for all employees ... In this light, long work hours can be construed as a risk factor: long work hours in conjunction with other factors lead to negative factors. Barnett (1998, p. 135)

The task for future research is thus to identify what these other factors are.

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