

# Parents' Jobs in Australia: Work Hours Polarisation and the Consequences for Job Quality and Gender Equality

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## Abstract

*This paper documents the gendered polarisation of work hours between mothers and fathers in Australia. Drawing on a large Australian sample of employee parents, we investigate the links between job quality and employment contract. Our focus is on mothers and fathers of young children – families facing high care demands – and investigate whether shorter and longer hour jobs carry the same contract and quality costs. Using a truncated measure of job quality, we find for both mothers and fathers that moderate full time hour jobs were the jobs with optimal quality and stable employment contracts. Poor job quality and casual contracts were common in very short hour jobs, usually worked by mothers. At the other end of the work hour spectrum, the very long hour jobs predominantly worked by fathers also showed a dip in job quality. Our study suggests that the gendered polarisation of hours in the Australian labour market, supported by a one-and-a-half earner family strategy, undermines parents', particularly mothers', access to good quality jobs. It also reinforces gender inequality by making it harder for fathers to fully engage in parenting and mothers to fully participate in employment and earn a decent income, with consequent hardship in later life.*

JEL Classification: J490; J290; J810; J160

## 1. Introduction

Debates about work, family and gender equality have centred on time and how to manage it – for work, for caring and for leisure (Edwards and Wajcman, 2005, p. 44).

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However, the ways in which work time generates gender inequality may be multi-dimensional and profound, because of the possible coalescence between work hours, job quality and the nature of the employment contract (Boulin *et al.*, 2006; Faganini and Letablier, 2004). Job quality refers to ‘the set of work features which foster the wellbeing of the worker’ (Green, 2006, p. 9) including the level of wages, work intensity, control over tasks, input into workplace decision making, job security, and career progression. Employment contracts formalise who bears financial risk within the labour market: permanent jobs minimise the risk for employees, whereas contingent jobs lack a legal agreement for the continuity and predictability of employment (and therefore income). Thus, if job quality and contract type vary systematically with the gender division of work time, they could have the potential to widen gender gaps in opportunity, income and wellbeing, a possibility this paper explores.

Work hours have a direct impact on the time available for caring and domestic responsibilities, so the regulation of work time is one way policy can make a difference. In the past, time for work and care was managed within the context of the male breadwinner/female homemaker division, but this excluded women from the financial security and decision-making power that flowed from employment (Crompton, 1999; Warren, 2007). The rise in dual-earner families, where mothers as well as fathers are employed, transfers time available for caring and household work to the workplace. This shift has the potential to reduce gender inequality between mothers and fathers. However, mothers’ participation in the labour force does not guarantee equality in the time allocated to work or to care because in most OECD countries the distribution of working hours is gendered and mothers, in particular, continue to take primary responsibility for the care of young children (European Foundation, 2007; Craig and Bittman, 2008).

As we explore below, recent Australian and international studies suggest that another way work hours polarisation might generate gender inequality is via the alignment of work hours with access to good quality employment and to long term income security. However, little research attention has been paid to the relationship between the quality of work and the quantum of hours parents spend on the job. What are the job quality consequences of working shorter or longer hours? Is there an optimal working time, contract and quality mix?

Drawing on data from a large nationally representative sample of parents with children aged six to seven years, this paper documents the gendered polarisation of working hours and explores the links between this hours polarisation, the employment contract and the quality of jobs within the context of families with children. Data from the second wave of the Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children [LSAC] study provides a unique opportunity to focus on mothers and fathers of young children – families facing high care demands. We note from the outset that this paper does not focus on preferences for working hours nor the much contested and rich terrain of choice and constraint in the location of men and women in particular jobs, including shorter and longer hours jobs. Whatever choices or constraints that influence the hours of paid employment engaged in by mothers and fathers, those working time decisions leave mothers and fathers at different ends of the working hours spectrum. It is the job quality consequences of this gendered polarisation of work hours that we explore in this paper, as well as briefly their implications for policy and a more gender equal sharing of work and care.

To place our analysis in context we briefly sketch out some of the relevant literature on working hours and job quality. A consideration of gender and gender (in) equality is central to both themes and in this paper we draw broadly on the concept of a gender institutional framework and the location of the working time regime within this framework, referencing research and theory elaborated by those such as Lewis and Fagan and, in Australia, by scholars such as Pocock.

## 2. Working Time, Job Quality and Gender

Each nation's gender institutional frameworks can be assessed in terms of the extent to which particular countries have moved away from the male breadwinner/female homemaker model (Lewis, 1997). The interaction of work and care occurs within the context of a specific and dynamic 'work/care regime' that incorporates not only institutional arrangements that shape labour relations and the welfare state, but also the gender order or gender culture with its assumptions about 'normal' gender relations, including the division of labour between men and women (Pocock, 2005). Thus at 'any point in time or place, work/care outcomes are the consequences of the gender order and its specific embodiment in a work/care regime' (Pocock, 2005, p. 38).

A crucial part of each country's work/care regime is working time. Working time regimes embody expectations about the length of the work day and gendered expectations for the allocation of time to paid work versus care. This in turn shapes employers' working time policies, the work hour options workers have, the working time arrangements they secure and their preferred working hours (Fagan, 2001, 2004). We argue however that working time regimes could extend beyond hours to contour other aspects of work, thereby aligning gendered distributions of working hours (a reflection of work/care regimes) to the contractual basis on which they are worked and the quality of women's and men's jobs.

### ***Distribution of Working Time by Gender and Employment Contract***

In most OECD countries the distribution of working hours is gendered and women are more likely to work shorter hours than men. In Australia in 2008, 44.6 per cent of employed women worked part-time and 85.5 per cent of employed men worked full-time (ABS, 2008). However, the pattern of working hours in Australia is far more polarised than many countries (Usalca, 2008) with a relatively high incidence of very short weekly hours (15 or less) among female part-time workers and very long weekly hours (50 or more) among male full-time workers (Lee *et al.*, 2007).

For couple households, long work hours of one partner (usually fathers) further reduces time potentially available for caring, which mothers then accommodate by shortening their hours. Furthermore, the gender disparity in work time is also overlaid with a shift to casual or contingent contracts in the Australian labour market. In 2008, a quarter of all Australian employees (24.1 per cent) were employed on a casual basis; that is, they had no access to leave entitlements such as paid annual and sick leave or paid maternity leave (ABS, 2009a) nor do they have a formal guarantee of continuity of employment. Many of these casual jobs are part-time, suggesting that gender inequality in work time is now combined with gender inequality in the security of employment (Campbell, 2008; Lee *et al.*, 2007; Vosko *et al.*, 2009). Over 28 per cent

of female employees are casual compared to 20 per cent of men. Further, while less than 10 per cent of full-time employees are casual, 58 per cent of part-time employees are casual (ABS, 2009a).

While permanent part-time employees have traditionally had more protection than casual employees around working time, recent evidence from the retail and hospitality industries points to substantial working-time insecurity for many part-time employees on a permanent contract (Campbell and Chalmers, 2008; Knox, 2006). At the other end of the hours spectrum many in professional and managerial jobs have to meet the demands of results-based time systems, they may have permanent contracts but are required to work however long is necessary to process the volume of work coming in (Rubery *et al.*, 2005, 2007). This raises two points. First, contract and work time represent connected but separate job dimensions. Second, jobs (including permanent jobs) may vary according to a range of conditions and provisions, pointing to the presence of a third dimension – job quality. What is not known is whether gender inequality in work time and contract type is also accompanied by a similar divergence in job quality.

### ***Job Quality and Employment Contract***

There is a burgeoning international literature on the quality of work (Green, 2006; Lowe, 2007; Rubery and Grimshaw, 2008; European Foundation, 2002), or what is referred to as ‘decent work’ by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (ILO, 1999; Boulin *et al.*, 2006). The concept of quality or decent work – which goes to the nature and content of jobs – is a broad one and there are a wide range of conceptual approaches to assessing job quality. Green, for example, focuses on the specific aspects of a job including skill, effort (including work intensity), job control and discretion, wages and risk (both in respect of job security and also health and safety (Green, 2006)). Other approaches employ a broader lens and measure aspects such as labour market status, intrinsic and extrinsic job characteristics, job satisfaction, and employee well-being, incorporating not only an assessment of the aspects of job quality but also of the outcomes for employees (Lowe, 2007).

While we acknowledge our metric is just one of many, our starting point is an employee-oriented perspective that focuses on the characteristics of jobs rather than employee satisfaction or wellbeing, which we conceptualise as outcomes of job quality (see, Lowe, 2007). Whatever approach is used, assessing both the different experiences men and women have of job quality and the extent to which job quality aligns with particular work hour quanta is relatively neglected (Burchell *et al.*, 2007; Fagan *et al.*, 2001). The importance of these themes is underscored by a recent analysis of job quality in the European Union context that suggests that gender, along with occupational status and job characteristics such as working time and sector, has more influence on an individual’s job quality than the country or national model in which they are situated (Smith *et al.*, 2008).

To a large extent, however, any assessment of job quality will be shaped by the purpose of the assessment, as well as by the availability and reliability of data. In this paper our focus is on the job quality of parents of young children. For parents some aspects of job quality will be particularly relevant, so the definition used in this study favours family friendly provisions, along with conditions that sustain parents’ well-

being (Strazdins *et al.*, 2007). Within the limitations of the LSAC dataset on which we draw, we classify the quality of jobs by the presence or absence of five conditions: job control, perceived job security, flexible hours, paid family friendly leave, and workload. This is a truncated index of job quality, orientated to family-friendliness, but each of the included conditions is recognised as a crucial dimension of job quality. Given the focus of this paper on the links between job contract, job quality, and work hours quanta, in the outline of each of the dimensions we include in the job quality index we indicate briefly below their possible relationship with contract type.

*Job control* relates to the methods, pace and order of tasks and the taking of breaks (European Foundation, 2002, p. 8). Arguably, the extent to which employees can control their jobs, the pace of work, control when and how to perform certain tasks and have a say in how work is done separates good quality jobs from bad quality jobs (Grönlund, 2007). The AWALI survey findings on working time flexibility, which include a measure of job control, suggest, however, that there is little difference in respect to job control between those on permanent, casual or fixed term contracts (Skinner and Pocock, 2008).

*Perceived job security* is a second element of job quality: employees lacking a sense of security are less likely to claim entitlements or ask for variations in working time arrangements (Chalmers *et al.*, 2005). The *Australia at Work* survey indicates that men and women have similar perceived levels of job security with both the length of job tenure and skill level increasing perceptions of job security (van Wanrooy *et al.*, 2007). Perceived job security is broader than employment status and contract type. In Australia casual employees by definition have no formal entitlement to job security, however significant proportions of casual employees have a reasonable expectation of ongoing employment (Pocock *et al.*, 2004). On the other hand, in the context of downsizing, particularly in manufacturing, and the relocation of businesses offshore, some employees on permanent contracts may feel insecure in their job (Skinner and Pocock, 2008).

Work hour *flexibility* is the extent to which employees can control the scheduling of hours, including starting and finishing times (Fagan, 2004). Such flexibility is particularly valuable for those with caring responsibilities, with their fluctuating pressures and demands. In Australia there is some evidence that certain workers view working casually as a way to secure control over the scheduling of their working hours (see, for example, Pocock *et al.*, 2004; Campbell and Chalmers, 2008). However ABS data also suggests that casual workers are less likely than other employees to have a say over the days they worked, when they take holidays or to be able to choose to work extra hours in order to take time off, than other workers (ABS, 2010).

*Paid family-friendly leave* (including paid maternity/parental leave and paid leave for caring purposes) enables parents to give care to their children at critical times, without imposing an income penalty. Until Australia's new national system of paid parental leave came into force in January 2011, the incidence of paid leave outside the public sector was relatively low (Whitehouse *et al.*, 2006). Casual employees are typically excluded from paid family-friendly leave.

*Workload*, the fifth job quality dimension in our index, refers to the pace or intensity of work, and the amount of work expected. Job Quality Canada describes a reasonable workload as 'having enough time to do your job well, being able to balance

work and personal life and not constantly feeling stressed or frenzied' (CPRN, 2008). While associated with long-hour jobs in managerial and professional occupations, work overload can also be found in jobs where the hours are reduced to part-time, but a full-time workload remains (Fagan, 2004).

While other dimensions of job quality would contribute to a more complete analysis of job quality from a family friendliness perspective (including wage levels, career progression, workplace decision-making (see, Chalmers *et al.*, 2005) these items are not captured in the LSAC data set. Individual wages data is also unavailable in LSAC and we have not included the level of wages in our analysis of job quality and its links with employment contract. This is an important limitation as wages are an arguably crucial dimension of job quality. The level of wages influence not only a person's current income, and thus their capacity to buy material goods and the extent to which they can participate in society, but also income in retirement, which depends largely on former wages (Leschke and Watt, 2008). While reduced hours of work imply reduced aggregate wages, the different occupations in which an individual is employed and the industry within which they work will all contribute to the level of wages. In Australia most industrial awards provide for an additional 25 per cent loading on top of ordinary time rates for casual workers. There is some debate about the extent to which casual workers may trade off job security for increased hourly earnings and indeed the extent to which casual workers actually receive a 25 per cent premium on their wages (Pocock *et al.*, 2004; Watson, 2005; Wooden and Warren, 2004).

In this paper we assess the extent to which a gendered polarization in work time is also accompanied by uneven distributions in the quality of work and in income security (employment contract). We first document the hours worked by the mothers and fathers in our data set before examining the relationship between job quality and employment contract, expecting quality to be poorer in casual and fixed term jobs (relative to permanent contracts). Next we consider work hour categories and contract type, to determine whether shorter hour jobs also involve greater financial risk to employees (that is, they have less formally secure employment contracts). Finally we consider whether shorter hour jobs are also characterised by poorer quality conditions (low job control, perceived job insecurity, inflexible hours, no access to paid family friendly leave, and excessive workload).

### 3. Data Source, Study Design and LSAC Population

Data for the LSAC Wave 2 was collected from April 2006 to early 2007 for participating families of 6-7 year old children living in all states and territories in Australia. LSAC employed a clustered sampling design (see, Soloff *et al.*, 2005). Comparisons with Australian Census data indicated that the sample was broadly representative of the Australian target population on most demographic characteristics (Mission and Siphthorp, 2007). The response rate for LSAC Wave 2 was 89.9 per cent of the originally recruited sample (Soloff *et al.*, 2006).

Our target population was LSAC employee parents of six to seven year old children who had worked at least one hour in the previous week in a paid job. Self-employed parents were excluded from the sample because our own analysis and other research shows they differ significantly from other employees on four of our main variables, job control, work hours flexibility, length of average work hours (Lee *et al.*,

2007; Skinner and Pocock, 2008). Furthermore it is difficult to classify self employed parents in terms of access to paid leave.

Table A1 in Appendix A presents the key socio-demographic characteristics of our study sample. There were clear differences between mothers and fathers in terms of socio-demographic and work characteristics. Dual-parent or couple families were the most common family type for mothers and fathers in our sample, although 12 per cent of mothers were sole parents compared to less than one per cent of fathers. For both mothers and fathers, the most common family employment type was a couple dual-earner family. Of couple fathers, 29 per cent were the sole breadwinner compared to less than three per cent of couple mothers. The median annual income range for families was between \$78,000 and \$114,399. However, the median individual income for mothers was \$32,500 and \$62,782 for fathers, indicating a large income gap.

## **Measures**

### **Work hours**

Work hours was measured by one item from the Labour Statistics Survey (ABS, 2005); 'How many hours do you usually work per week including paid or unpaid overtime?' Following the definition used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, part-time hours are defined as working 1-34 hours and full-time as 35 hours or more per week. Our measure of work hours was calculated by collapsing reported average work hours into a ten point scale that started at 10 hours or less, and increased by 5 hour increments before the final point of 50 hours or more. This work hour scale was sensitive to trends in the data despite skewed distributions of work hours and was appropriate because people tend to report average work hours in five hour blocks. However for clarity of communication in the results section we have aggregated work hours more simply into six categories: 1 = short part-time (1-15 hours); 2 = moderate part-time (16-25 hours); 3 = substantial part-time (26-34 hours) (Lee *et al.*, 2007); 4 = moderate full time (35-39 hours); 5 = long full time (40-49 hours); and very long full time (50 + hours) (Fagan *et al.*, 2001).

### **Contract type**

Parent contract type was derived from three parent employment items taken from the Labour Statistics Survey (ABS, 2005). One item ascertained if the parent was employed and a second item asked if employment was for an employer or in own business; these items were used to select our sample of working parents with an employer. The final item asked about the type of tenure with four response choices: in a fixed or ongoing position; on a fixed term contract; on a casual basis; on some other basis. Parent employment type was derived by recoding parent employment status into the following three categories: 1 = permanent or ongoing position, 2 = fixed term contract, 3 = casual. Other status types, including self-employment were coded as system missing.

### **Job quality**

The job quality index 2 (JQI2) we employ here extends the one developed by Strazdins *et al.*, (2007) from the LSAC data. This brief index is orientated towards supports for parent work/life balance and well-being and uses five work conditions or components of job quality: *job control*, *job security*, *flexibility* (flexible start and finish times),

*family friendly leave* (family-related paid leave) and *workload*. The details of these items are provided in table A2 in Appendix A. To create a score for the JQI2, the listed work condition components were coded into dichotomous variables so that a value of 0 = unfavourable work condition and a value of 1 = favourable work condition (see, table 2 for items, score cut-offs and response formats). The recoded scores were then summed to create a measure of job quality. Scores range from 0 to 5 with higher scores indicating better job quality.

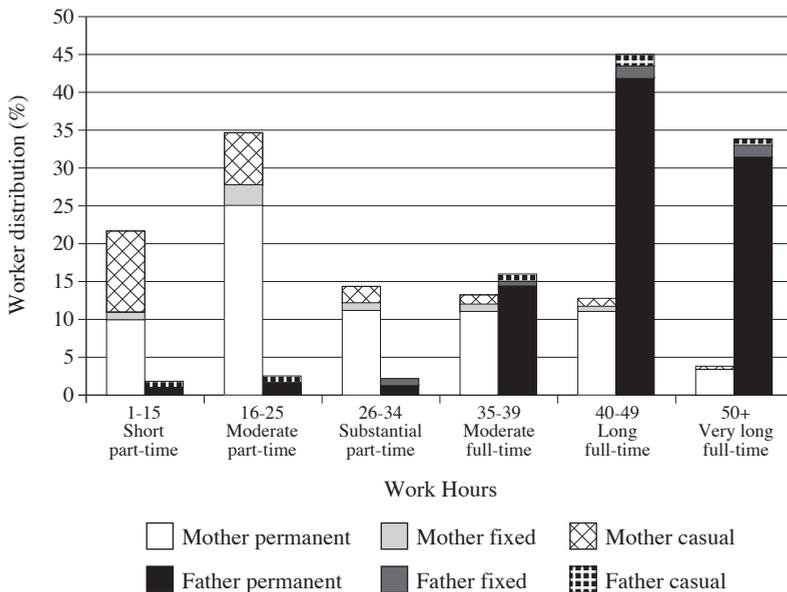
### 4. Results

We conducted separate analyses for mothers' and fathers' work hours, contract type and job quality. All analyses accounted for sample clustering and used weights to ensure that the sample was representative of parents in Australia (Misson and Siphthorp, 2007). These weights accounted for the marginal under-representation of families with lower-educated mothers and mothers who have English as a second language.

#### Work Hours

Figure 1 presents a break down of mothers and fathers in jobs by work hour categories. The bars on the left represent the proportion of mothers, while the bars on the right represent the proportion of fathers. The figure clearly illustrates the gendered polarisation of work time among these Australian parents, with 70 per cent of mothers working part-time hours of 34 or fewer a week and 94 per cent of fathers working full-time hours of 35 or more hours a week. Further, far higher proportions of fathers work long to very long hours, mirrored by the preponderance of mothers in short and moderate part-time jobs.

Figure 1 - Distribution of Mothers' and Fathers' Work Hours by Contract Type



Mothers tend to work part-time hours with 22 per cent working 15 or less hours per week (compared with only 1.3 per cent of fathers). Fathers tend to work longer than moderate full-time hours (35-39 hours a week), with more than a third of fathers working 50 hours or more per week (compared with only 3.7 per cent of mothers).

### **Job Contract**

We next examined how job quality was related to contract type for men and women. Table 1 shows the job quality enjoyed by mothers and fathers holding jobs of different contract types. For both mothers and fathers there was a trend where permanent contract jobs had the highest quality, on average, for both mothers and fathers, and casual contract jobs had the lowest quality. Initial univariate analyses showed that there were statistical differences in job quality based on contract type for mothers, Wald  $F(2, 260) = 90.66$ ,  $p < .001$ , and fathers, Wald  $F(2, 257) = 40.29$ ,  $p < .001$ .<sup>1</sup> Further comparisons confirmed that the average job quality differences between contract types were significant for mothers and fathers.

Table 1 - Contract Type and Quality of Mothers' and Fathers' Jobs

		<i>Mothers</i> ( <i>n=1443</i> )		<i>Fathers</i> ( <i>n=1563</i> )	
		<i>Job Quality</i> ( <i>M (SE)</i> )	<i>Distribution (%)</i>	<i>Job Quality</i> ( <i>M (SE)</i> )	<i>Distribution (%)</i>
Job Contract	Permanent	4.07a (.03)	72.36	4.16a (.02)	91.39
	Fixed term	3.59b (.11)	6.10	3.49b (.17)	3.68
	Casual	3.13c (.07)	21.54	3.06b (.13)	4.93

*Note:* Means in the same column that do not share superscripts differ at  $p < .001$ .

The patterning of job quality by different contract types was similar for mothers and fathers. However, distributions presented in table 1 showed that mothers were more likely to hold contracts with lower job quality. Compared to fathers, mothers were 1.6 times more likely to hold a fixed term contract and 4.3 times as likely to hold a casual contract. The results support our contention that job quality and employment contract are interlinked, and gendered.

Finally, we explored the overlay of contract type with a gendered work hours regime. In figure 1, mothers' and fathers' columns within each work hour category is further shaded to represent the proportions of different contract types held. The figure supplies some support to our contention that shorter hour jobs are much more likely to offer insecure employment contracts whereas longer hour jobs are more likely to be permanent. The proportion of casual jobs in short hour jobs was much higher relative to long hour jobs and they were much more likely to be worked by mothers. Just over

<sup>1</sup> Comparisons between the different contract types were then conducted. Sample sizes differed widely across contract, however, when Fmax scores were calculated using the variance of each cell, all scores were less than 1. This indicated that there was sufficient homogeneity of variance for univariate analyses.

80 per cent of casual jobs held by parents were worked by employed mothers, and most of these were for jobs with short (1-15) and moderate (16-25) part-time hours. 49.9 per cent of all short hour part-time jobs were casual as were 18.8 per cent of all moderate hour part-time jobs. Permanent contract mothers were more likely to hold moderate part-time jobs. Fathers predominantly work in permanent jobs. It was found that fathers on fixed term contracts tend to work longer than full-time hours and fathers on casual contracts are most strongly represented in long (40-49) hours jobs. However, only 3.0 per cent of father's long hours jobs have casual contracts.

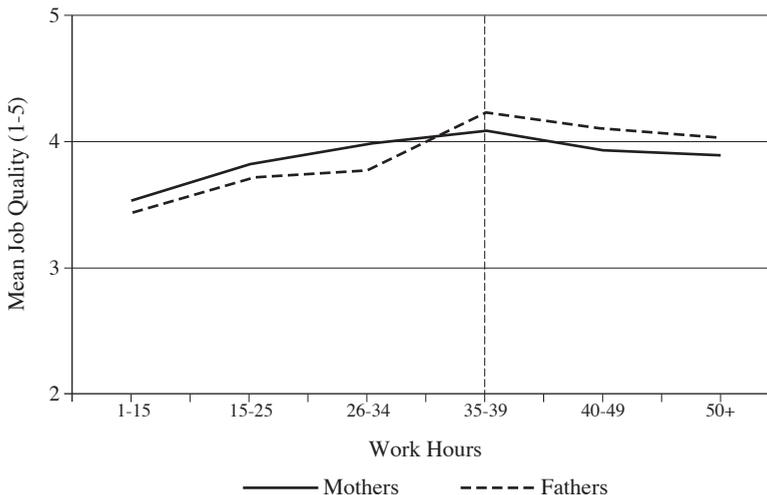
Table 2 then shows the breakdown of job quality by work hours. For both mothers and fathers job quality was highest for jobs in the moderate full-time category and lowest in those jobs with the shortest hours. As expected, increasing work hours meant better job quality but only up to the point of moderate full-time hours. After this point, increasing work hours were associated with a slight reduction in job quality, a finding we did not anticipate.

Table 2 - The Interaction between Work Hours and Quality of Mothers' and Fathers' Jobs

	Work hours					
	Short PT 1-15hrs	Moderate PT 16-25hrs	Substantial PT 26-34	Moderate FT 35-39	Long FT 40-49	Very long FT 50+
Mothers JQ	3.54 (.06)	3.82 (.05)	3.99 (.07)	4.09 (.08)	3.93 (.08)	3.93 (.13)
Fathers JQ	3.43 (.23)	3.71 (.19)	3.77 (.20)	4.22 (.06)	4.11 (.04)	4.04 (.04)

These curvilinear relationships are represented in figure 2 and their statistical significance was tested using quadratic regression (regressing the job quality measure and a squared job quality term on to work hours, and testing for both linear and quadratic relationships between job quality and work hours).

Figure 2 - The Curvilinear Relationship between Job Quality and Work Hours for Mothers and Fathers



The regressions showed that the relationship between job quality and mothers' work hours is curvilinear, not linear ( $b$  linear term =  $-0.39$ ,  $SE\ b = 0.37$ ,  $\beta = -.17$ ,  $p = .30$ ;  $b$  curvilinear term =  $0.11$ ,  $SE\ b = 0.05$ ,  $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Moderate full-time hours are associated with optimum job quality for mothers. The regression for fathers showed that there was both a significant linear and curvilinear relationship between job quality and work hours ( $b$  linear term =  $0.98$ ,  $SE\ b = 0.38$ ,  $\beta = .54$ ,  $p = .01$ ;  $b$  curvilinear term =  $-0.13$ ,  $SE\ b = 0.05$ ,  $\beta = -.53$ ,  $p = .01$ ). Thus fathers' job quality improves as work hours lengthen (the angle of the curve drawn by the broken line in figure 2). However this linear relationship is qualified by a tendency for job quality to lessen once fathers work longer than moderate full-time hours.

To explore why job quality had a curvilinear relationship with work hours, we examined which components of job quality tended to be present in part-time, full-time, and long hours jobs. For both mothers and fathers, these analyses are presented in Appendix B and indicate that the job quality in part-time jobs (usually worked by mothers) tends to be lowered by poor family leave conditions. In contrast, the job quality of long hour jobs (usually worked by fathers) tends to be lowered by unreasonable workload.

Additional analyses also explored whether job contract (which is associated with work hours, see figure 1) was the explanation for the inverted U shaped relationship between work hours and job quality. Small numbers in casual and fixed term contracts prevented analysis within these contracts; however the permanent contract subsamples were large enough for analysis. We found the same curvilinear trend (with full-time hours having the best job quality) among fathers in permanent jobs ( $b$  fathers' linear term =  $0.95$ ,  $SE\ b = 0.31$ ,  $\beta = .55$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $b$  curvilinear =  $-0.14$ ,  $SE\ b = 0.04$ ,  $\beta = -.61$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Skewed distributions undermined statistical significance for mothers ( $b$  mothers' linear term =  $-0.30$ ,  $SE\ b = 0.57$ ,  $\beta = -.12$ ,  $p = .60$ ;  $b$  curvilinear term =  $0.05$ ,  $SE\ b = 0.08$ ,  $\beta = .15$ ,  $p = .5$ ). These results indicate contract type overlaid but did not confound the observed job quality and work hour inter-relationship. Contract, quality and hours therefore represent distinct, but related (and gendered) dimensions to employment.

### **Skills Versus Gender?**

An alternative explanation of our results is that skills, as represented in the occupational profiles of jobs,<sup>2</sup> underlie our observed clustering of shorter hour jobs with poor quality conditions and insecure employment. If this were the case then we would expect to see clear differences in occupational status across work hour categories, especially for mothers, with mothers in shorter hour jobs located in jobs of a lower occupational status. We therefore compared the characteristics of the two largest occupational groups across the spectrum of very short to very long work hours, and the percentage of mothers and fathers in these dominant occupational groups. In

<sup>2</sup> The Australian Bureau of Statistics ASCO classification of occupations used in LSAC represents a five level hierarchy of skill. Skill level is measured operationally as the amount of formal education, on-the-job training and previous experience usually necessary for the satisfactory performance of the set of tasks (ABS, 2009b). Thus the occupations of labourers and elementary clerical, sales and service workers are at the bottom of the skills hierarchy with professional and managerial and administrative occupations at the top.

particular, we compared mothers and fathers with poorer quality jobs, concentrated in the short hour end of the work hours spectrum with those who work in the highest quality jobs, concentrated in the moderate full-time hours (note long full-time hour jobs tended to have unreasonable work loads and therefore were of lower quality than moderate full-time jobs).

The occupational characteristics of mothers with short hours part-time jobs did not vary substantially from mothers in moderate full-time hours jobs. In jobs of between one and 15 hours, the majority of the 313 mothers worked in advanced clerical and service (41.6 per cent) and professional (22.1 per cent) occupations. In jobs of between 35-39 hours, the majority of the 185 mothers also worked in advanced clerical and service (42.4 per cent) and professional (26.7 per cent) occupations. This suggests that, while higher occupational status may typically be seen as being associated with better quality jobs (Smith *et al.*, 2008), that quality can be trumped by gendered patterns of work. That is, the relatively high occupational status found in short part-time hours work held by mothers does not quarantine them from poorer quality jobs.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, for fathers occupational status tended to increase with hours worked. The 244 fathers who worked moderate full-time hours, and were concentrated in professional and tradesperson occupations (27.7 per cent and 17.5 per cent per cent respectively). However, the 535 fathers who worked very long hours of 50 hours and over tended to be in a mix of managerial/administrator and professional occupations (23.3 per cent and 21.3 per cent per cent respectively). The parallel increase of occupational status and work hours for fathers also cast further light on the findings for job quality amongst fathers. For fathers, poorer job quality in very long full-time hours work was driven by heavy workload (as reflected in figure B1 in Appendix B), which is often associated with managerial and professional work.

## 5. Discussion

The polarisation of work time by gender is a crucial element of each country's work/care regime. Australia, like many OECD countries, shows a clear, gendered distribution of work hours with mothers working part-time hours and father working full-time hours, reflected in figure 1. What is distinctive about Australia is the extent of work hour polarisation in the labour market, with mothers clustered in short to moderate part-time hour jobs and fathers in long and very long hour full-time jobs.

The quanta of hours actually worked by employee parents will be shaped not only by the hours an employee worker may want to work, but by the hours demanded by the employer and the organisational and broader institutional environment in which hours decisions are mediated (Golden, 1998 cited in Clarkberg and Moen, 2001, p. 1118). A major factor that shapes the hours an employee wants to work is the wage rates or what is often referred to as the 'time money exchange' (Fagan, 2001). While in this paper we have been unable to examine the relationship of hours worked to the wages received by the employee parents in our sample, it is likely that low wage

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<sup>3</sup> Professional mothers had an occupational status higher than 99.9 per cent of other mothers working the same 1-15 hours. Nonetheless, those professional mothers tended to have a level of job quality ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SE = .11$ ) slightly, but significantly, below the average of other mothers working 1-15 hours ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SE = .06$ ),  $t(261) = 3.71$ ,  $p < .001$ .

workers may be more pressured than higher wage workers to work longer hours to earn sufficient income. Conversely higher wage workers or those with a relatively high household income may feel more able to work shorter hours. In addition, the push and pull between employer demands and labour or skills shortage could add further tensions into work hours polarisation.

In Australia there seems to be a strong interest, particularly by mothers, in jobs with reduced hours of work (Pocock, 2003; Probert, 2002). While preferences express an individual desire for change, they are also shaped by the current reality and objective factors within an individual's life including their labour market status, household income levels, the parenting phase and presence of child care and other social supports (Fagan, 2004). The cultural and social embeddedness of women's and men's employment decisions (Stier and Lewin-Epstein, 2003, p. 305) also influence the quantum of hours an individual employee actually works. In Australia, dominant gender norms do support women's greater access to work outside the home, but the support is conditional on work not interfering with women's 'primary' responsibilities as mothers and not altering gendered divisions of labour in the home (van Egmond *et al.*, 2011).

In Australia, taxation arrangements also underpin the normative one-and-a-half-earner model in couple families, where fathers typically work full-time and mothers work short part-time hours, as reflected in our findings. High effective marginal tax rates apply to second earners, and this discourages mothers working part-time from increasing their hours, and consequently their income (Brennan, 2007). As a result of such social and economic influences, many workers, particularly mothers and fathers, are working longer or shorter hours than they would prefer. Although our concern here is with the hours mothers and fathers actually work rather than their working hours preferences, it is worth mentioning that poor job quality for mothers working part time jobs is probably a further discouragement from wanting to work longer hours.

We hypothesised that the inequity embedded in work time polarisation is multi-dimensional (contract and job quality) and more pervasive than currently understood, and explored the relationship between parents' quantum of hours in paid employment, their contract type and job quality. Our findings, set out in tables 1 and 2 and figures 1 and 2, support our contention. Shorter hour jobs are also much more likely to have poor quality conditions, and are likely to be more financially risky over the longer term, because they are more likely to be casual. Unexpectedly, we also found that long and very long hour jobs can come at a cost. Long hour jobs are increasingly common in the Australian labour market, and in our study, were mostly worked by fathers. Although overwhelmingly offering permanent contracts, these jobs dipped in their quality because of the heavy workloads they entailed (see, figure B1 in Appendix B). The 'optimal' jobs, in the sense that they combined good conditions with stable employment contracts, were in most instances moderate full-time hour jobs (35-39 per week). Furthermore this optimal coalescence of hours, contract and quality was observed for both mothers and fathers. Given the cross-sectional nature of the dataset we use, we are not able to determine the direction of causation between job quality and work hours, but rather focus on the reliable association between these job characteristics.

Our findings are consistent with an earlier study using a truncated measure of parental job quality (Strazdins *et al.*, 2007). That study found that there were few good quality casual jobs, and optimal quality was usually associated with permanent status. Using a simple part-time versus full-time division, Strazdins *et al.*, 2007 also found that part-time hours were associated with poorer quality jobs. Our study, however, points to a more nuanced understanding of parental quality and quantity of work time, finding that poorer quality jobs are found at both ends of the work hour spectrum. For mothers in particular, jobs of less than 15 hours offer them significantly worse conditions compared with those with substantial part-time hours. Overlaying this finding, mothers on a casual contract had the poorest quality job of all groups of parents. At the other end of the hours spectrum we found that fathers in long full-time hours jobs had poorer job quality than those in moderate full-time hours jobs, even if they were on a permanent contract. However contract type did matter for fathers as well; those with a casual contract had poorer job quality than those with permanent or fixed term contracts. Our findings in this respect are generally consistent with those from the AWALI survey that suggest that contract type is a critical element of employment for parents, with casual status being associated with worse work/life interaction than employees on fixed term contracts or permanent /ongoing contracts (Skinner and Pocock, 2008). However, our study underlines the way quality, contract and hours are inter-related, revealing multiple and dimensional layers to Australia's gendered work time regime.

The data and approach we use in this study have two main limitations. The job quality index was constrained by the data available from the LSAC survey, which did not account fully for all the dimensions of job quality. For example, it did not allow a more nuanced examination of different aspects of job control and flexibility discussed above, nor does it incorporate individual rates of pay as discussed above. Secondly, while the five items in our brief job quality index deal with important job conditions, they do not account for other factors in the workplace or broader context which may also affect the family-friendliness of parents' jobs, such as the workplace cultures or social infrastructure. A supportive workplace culture is particularly crucial for parents work/family balance. An analysis of the 2008 AWALI survey data shows that an unsupportive organisational culture and work overload were the strongest predictors of poor work-life integration (Skinner and Pocock, 2008). Our index does capture workload, but we did not have direct data on workplace culture. Similarly, it would be worthwhile to examine the role played by other aspects of work/care regimes, including social provisions and infrastructure such as child care or out of school hours care that many of the parents in our cohort might access (see, Fagan and Walthery, 2007; Brennan, 2007). The strengths of our study rests on the representative sample of parents with young, six to seven year old children: a point in the family lifecycle when care loads remain high but most mothers have returned to employment. Furthermore, the LSAC contains sufficient numbers of mothers and fathers to stratify the sample and compare across hour and contract categories. Thus our research provides a limited but important snapshot of working life for parents in Australia.

## 6. Conclusion

Finding sufficient time to care for children poses a dilemma for many employed parents. As in other OECD countries, the Australian government has been concerned to increase employment participation, including by helping employees reconcile working with raising children or caring for elders. However, the dominant policy response to date has been to use taxation and family benefit arrangements that encourage a one-and-a-half-earner family strategy where most mothers stay in the labour market and return to part-time work after taking a short period of (typically unpaid) leave. This approach limits workforce participation by secondary earners, overwhelmingly mothers (Brennan, 2007).

The Australian model is more gendered and skewed both in policy and outcomes compared to those in other countries that also have high part-time employment. Fathers typically work long full-time hours, and mothers work part-time, enabling care, but leading to unequal income and opportunity in the labour market. In the Netherlands, in contrast, mothers tend to work substantial part-time hours and fathers to work more moderate full-time hours, with pressure mounting for a policy shift from a one and a half model to a shared care/earner model with both parents working substantial part-time hours or moderate full-time hours (Plantenga, 2002).

Our findings show that the gendered working time regime for Australian parents has direct implications for the quality of jobs in which parents work, and the extent that they shoulder longer-term financial risk in the labour market. Interestingly our study has found that moderate full-time hours were much more likely to offer better conditions to both mothers and to fathers, and they were less likely to be contingent or casual. However, very few mothers (9.3 per cent) or fathers (6.7 per cent) in our sample were in jobs with the optimum combination of hours, quality and contract. The current Australian one-and-a-half-earner strategy thus fails to deliver full participation for mothers because it locks them into short hour jobs, making it difficult for them to earn a decent income and advance in their careers, with consequent hardship in later life and retirement (Preston and Whitehouse, 2004). This not only reinforces gender inequality in income and opportunity, it also reinforces gender inequality in job contract and quality. Neither does it challenge gender inequality in the household, as working long hours makes it harder for fathers to fully engage in parenting (Gornick and Myers, 2003). Further, despite secure better income and more financial certainty, long hours also erode fathers' own job quality, suggesting there is a lose-lose consequence to polarised work time.

Our findings suggest that any trend towards longer full-time work hours in other OECD countries may be accompanied by a gendered polarisation of good quality jobs, and the alignment of mothers' jobs with casual or precarious employment. More positively, they suggest that minimising work time polarisation might also maximise the quality of parent's jobs, and help to reduce the gender gap in working conditions.

**Appendix****Appendix A**

Table A1 - Selected Sample Socio-demographic Characteristics

<i>Characteristics</i>		<i>Mothers (%)</i> <i>n=1443</i>	<i>Fathers (%)</i> <i>n=1563</i>
Family Employment Type	Two parent-dual earner	84.39	68.56
	Two parent-single breadwinner	2.72	30.78
	Lone parent employed	12.89	.66
Family Type	Dual parent family	87.11	99.34
	Single parent family	12.89	0.66
Number of children	1	12.49	6.88
	2	52.71	49.06
	3	27.21	31.51
	4+	7.59	12.55
Age	M = 37.44, SE = .16	M = 39.33, SE = .17	
Education level	Less than year 12	15.94	12.11
	Up to year 12	10.29	9.01
	Certificate or Diploma	38.80	45.55
	Graduate Degree	26.51	22.54
	Post-Graduate Degree	8.47	10.79
Family annual gross income	Nil to 31,1999	4.95	1.08
	31,200 to 51,999	10.99	8.68
	52,000 to 77,999	24.49	28.82
	78,000 to 114,399	34.73	36.81
	114,400 or more	25.16	24.61
Individual annual gross income	Mean	36,808.29	69,961.75
	Standard error	761.88	1464.63
	Median (unweighted)	32,240	62,782.68
	Mode (unweighted)	39,862	69,758.53

Table A2 - Items, Score Ranges and Cut-points for Components of Parents' Job Quality

Components	No of items	Items	Score range	Cut point	Response coding		Source
					1	0	
Job Control (1)	1	I have a lot of freedom to decide how I do my own work	1-5	≥3	Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree	Disagree, strongly disagree	Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (FaCSIA, 2002)
Job Security (1)	1	How secure do you feel in your present job?	1-4	≥3	Very secure, secure	Not very secure, very insecure	PATH Through Life Project (CMHR, 2005)
Flexibility (1)	1	If you sometimes need to change the time when you start or finish your work day, is it possible?	1-4	≥3	Yes I am able to work flexible hours; Yes, with approval in special situations	No, not likely; No definitely not.	National Study of the Changing Workforce (Bond <i>et al.</i> , 2002)
Family Friendly Leave (2)	2	Does employer provide you with paid maternity leave or parental leave?	0-2	≥1	Yes	No	Modified from 1995 Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (DEWRSB, 1997)
		Does employer provide you with paid personal or family leave?	0-2	≥1	Yes	No	LSAC
Workload (1)	1	I never have enough time to get everything done on my job?	1-5	≥3	Strongly agree and agree	Neither agree or disagree, disagree and strongly agree	LSAC

Notes: 1. Cut-point is used to allocate a score of 1 (positive job condition).

## **Appendix B**

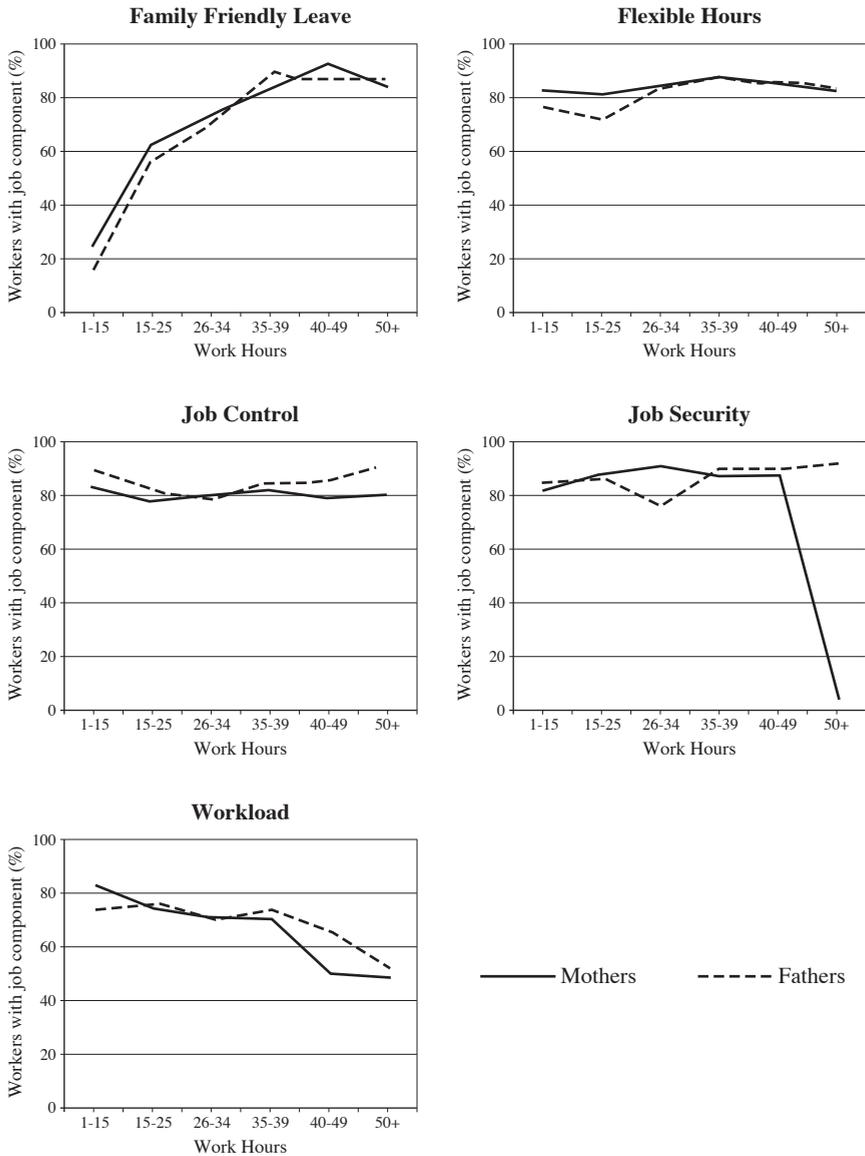
### ***The relationship between work hours and the different components of job quality***

The percentages of mothers and fathers who have the different job quality components in their jobs are presented in figure B1. For mothers and fathers, family leave improved as work hours increased, while workload became unreasonable as work hours increased. Figure 1 shows the pattern clearly, and point bi-serial correlations showed that the positive relationship between work hours and the presence of family leave was significant (mothers:  $r = .44, p < .001$ , fathers:  $r = .18, p < .001$ ), as was the negative relationship between work hours and workload (Mothers:  $r = .21, p < .001$ , fathers:  $r = -.15, p < .001$ ). All other correlations showed no significant associations between work hours and the other components of job quality that were greater than  $r = .1$ .

It was noticeable that job security also sharply decreased for mothers in the very long (50+) full-time hours category. However, only 51 mothers of the 1443 in the sample worked these hours and a partial correlation indicated that job security accounted for less than 7 per cent of the variance shared between job quality and work hours. A follow up analysis of the occupations held by these mothers indicated that 45.9 per cent of them were professionals while another 22.0 per cent worked as managers and administrators. These occupations were also the most common for fathers working very long hours, with 23.4 percent working as managers and administrators and 21.3 percent working as professionals. Thus the anomalous result for the job security of mothers working very long hours did not appear to be a function of broad occupation type. In any case, given the small numbers involved, job security had little impact on the curvilinear pattern between job quality and work hours examined in the main analyses.

An uneven distribution of participants meant that it was not possible to examine the components of job quality within casual and fixed term contracts; however they were examined within the permanent contract subsamples for mothers and fathers. These analyses showed the same pattern of poor family leave for part-time workers and unreasonable workload for long hour workers for mothers and fathers who worked permanent contract jobs.

Figure B1 - Mothers and Fathers' Job Quality Components Plotted against Work Hours



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