

Excessive Hours and Unpaid Overtime: 2019 Update

By Bill Browne

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November 2019

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Bill would like to thank the authors of previous Go Home on Time Day reports: Troy Henderson, Tom Swann and Jim Stanford.



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Introduction and Summary

2019 marks the eleventh annual *Go Home on Time Day* (GHOTD), an initiative of the Centre for Future Work at the Australia Institute that shines a spotlight on overwork among Australians, including excessive overtime that is often unpaid.

Over many years, the Centre for Future Work and the Australia Institute have commissioned regular annual opinion polls to investigate overwork, unpaid overtime, and other instances of “time theft” in Australia. This year’s poll of 1,464 Australians was conducted between 23 and 30 July, with a sample that was nationally representative according to gender, age and state or territory.

Of the 1,464 respondents, 884 (or 60 percent) were currently in paid work. That sub-sample was then asked several questions regarding their hours of work, whether they wanted more work or less, and whether they worked unpaid overtime in their jobs.

This report summarises the results of that polling, and places it in the context of national labour force trends:

- There is growing evidence of a sharp polarisation in Australian employment patterns, between those with full-time, relatively secure jobs, and a growing portion working part-time, casual, temporary, or insecure positions.
- In the survey, 59 percent were employed in permanent full-time jobs, while 41 percent were employed as part-time, casual or self-employed workers. In other words, **over two in five of the employed people in our sample experienced one or more degrees of precarity or insecurity in their jobs.** This is broadly consistent with the reported incidence of precarity in the overall labour market.¹
- In the survey, **21 percent of full-time workers said they would prefer to work fewer hours, and 31 percent said they wanted more.** 48 percent said their hours were about right.
- By contrast, **those in part-time or casual positions work fewer and more uncertain hours, and many would prefer to work more – 48 percent of part-time workers and 64 percent of casual workers.** This highlights the problems of underemployment and inadequate incomes experienced by the growing proportion of Australian workers in insecure jobs. Only 9 percent of part-time employees and 4 percent of casuals wanted fewer paid hours.

¹ Carney and Stanford (2018) reported that workers in permanent full-time paid jobs with normal paid leave entitlements (for holidays, sickness, etc.) now constitute just under 50% of total employment in Australia – somewhat more than the incidence of precarity in this sample.

- **At the same time as many Australian workers report they would prefer more hours of *paid* work, *unpaid* overtime is a frequent occurrence:** including coming in early, leaving late, working at home or on weekends, and working through regular breaks and lunch hours. Across all forms of employment, our respondents reported working **an average of 4.6 hours of unpaid labour per week.**
- This translates into an annual average of 240 hours of unpaid overtime per year across all forms of employment. Based on a standard 38-hour workweek, this is equivalent to **more than 6 weeks of unpaid work per worker per year.**
- Full-time workers reported the greatest incidence of unpaid overtime: on average 5.2 hours per week.
- Part-time workers worked on average 3.6 hours per week unpaid, while even casual workers worked on average 2.6 hours unpaid.
- The aggregate value of this “time theft” is substantial. Across the workforce, we estimate **2.4 billion hours of unpaid overtime in 2019, worth a total of \$81.5 billion.** This widespread non-payment for so much of Australians’ working time reduces family incomes, weakens consumer spending, and exacerbates the challenge of work-life balance.
- In an era of wage stagnation, underemployment, insecure work and significant cost of living pressures, Australian workers cannot afford to give their time away to employers for free.

Hours of Work

Table 1 summarises the employment status and normal hours of work reported by respondents to the survey. 60 percent of respondents were employed. This figure is broadly consistent with the average employment rate reported by the ABS in its monthly labour force survey.²

Of those employed, 59.3 percent worked in standard full-time positions, while the remainder worked in part-time (23.6 percent), casual (10.1 percent) or self-employed (7.0 percent) positions. In our sample, therefore, more than two in five employed Australians reported experiencing one or more dimensions of non-standard or insecure employment – somewhat less than but broadly consistent with overall labour market averages.³

Table 1. Employment Status of Sample

Of all respondents:				
	Employed		Not Employed	
Employment Status	60%		40%	
Of employed respondents:				
	Full-Time	Part-Time	Casual	Self-Employed
Percent of Employed	59.3%	23.6%	10.1%	7.0%
Average Hours/Week	38.8	21.4	18.4	29.1

Source: Survey results as described in text.

Full-time workers in the sample reported working an average of just under 39 hours per week. Regular part-time workers worked an average of 21.4 hours per week, compared to 18.4 hours per week for casual workers and 29.1 hours per week for the self-employed.

Average hours worked by full-time, part-time and self-employed workers were slightly lower than in our 2018 survey (down from 39.6 hours, 22.8 and 32.0 hours respectively), and hours worked by casual workers were higher (up from 16.7 hours).

² The employment to population ratio was 62.6 percent in August 2019; see ABS Catalogue 6202.0.

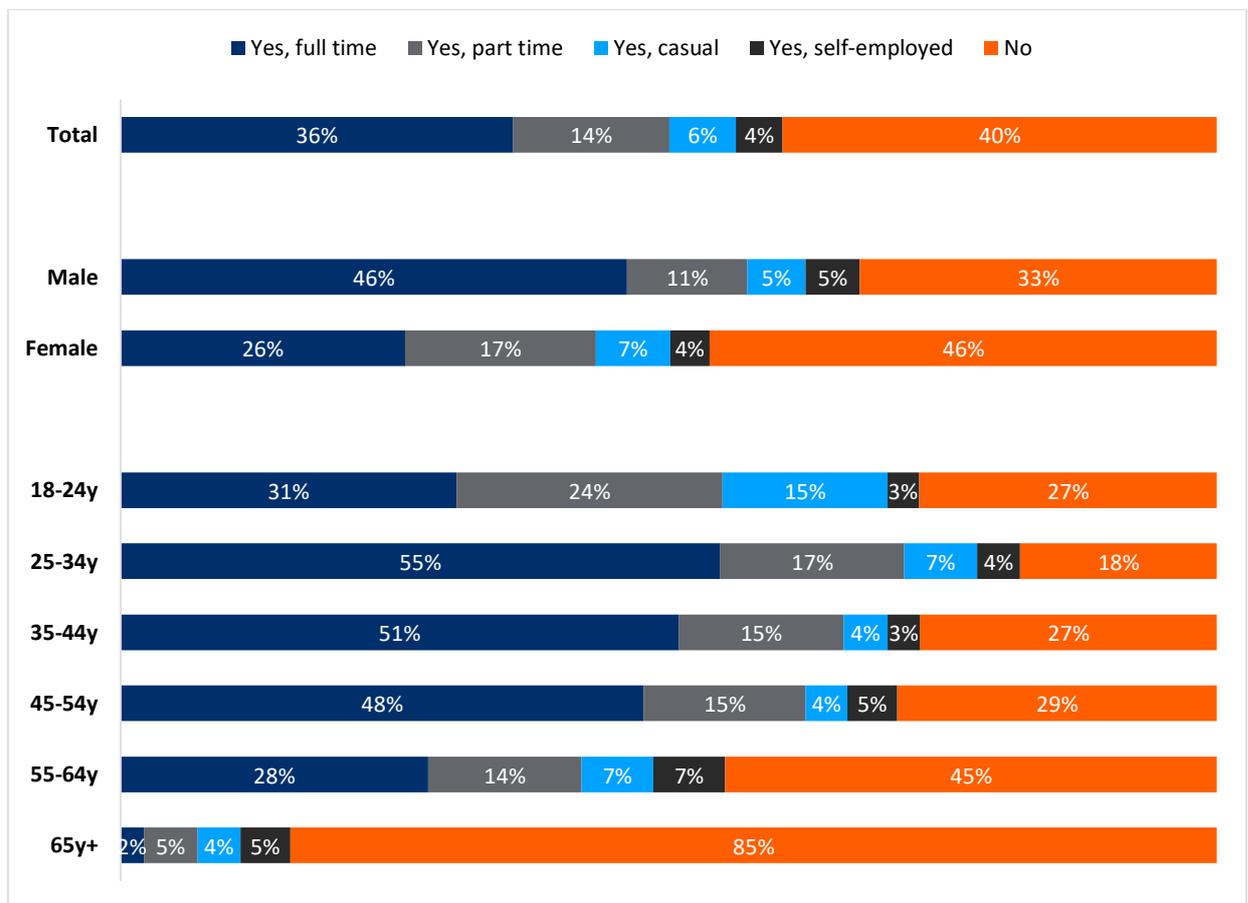
³ Carney and Stanford (2018) report that in 2017 slightly over half of all employed Australians experienced part-time, casual, or self-employment. The size of these specific categories of non-standard work vary in our sample from overall labour market averages; but the overall incidence of non-standard work in our sample is reasonably accurate.

In contrast, aggregate labour market data indicates a slight increase in average working hours over the past year. A longer-term decline in average working hours is still visible, however, driven primarily by continued growth in part-time work and growing underemployment (especially severe for workers in precarious jobs).

Figure 1 describes employment status by gender and age. Women were far more likely to work in part-time or casual roles (24 percent of all respondents) than men (16 percent). Those aged 18-24 were the most likely to be in part-time or casual work (39 percent), compared to 20 percent overall.

Figure 1. Employment Status by Gender and Age Cohort

(percentage of all respondents)

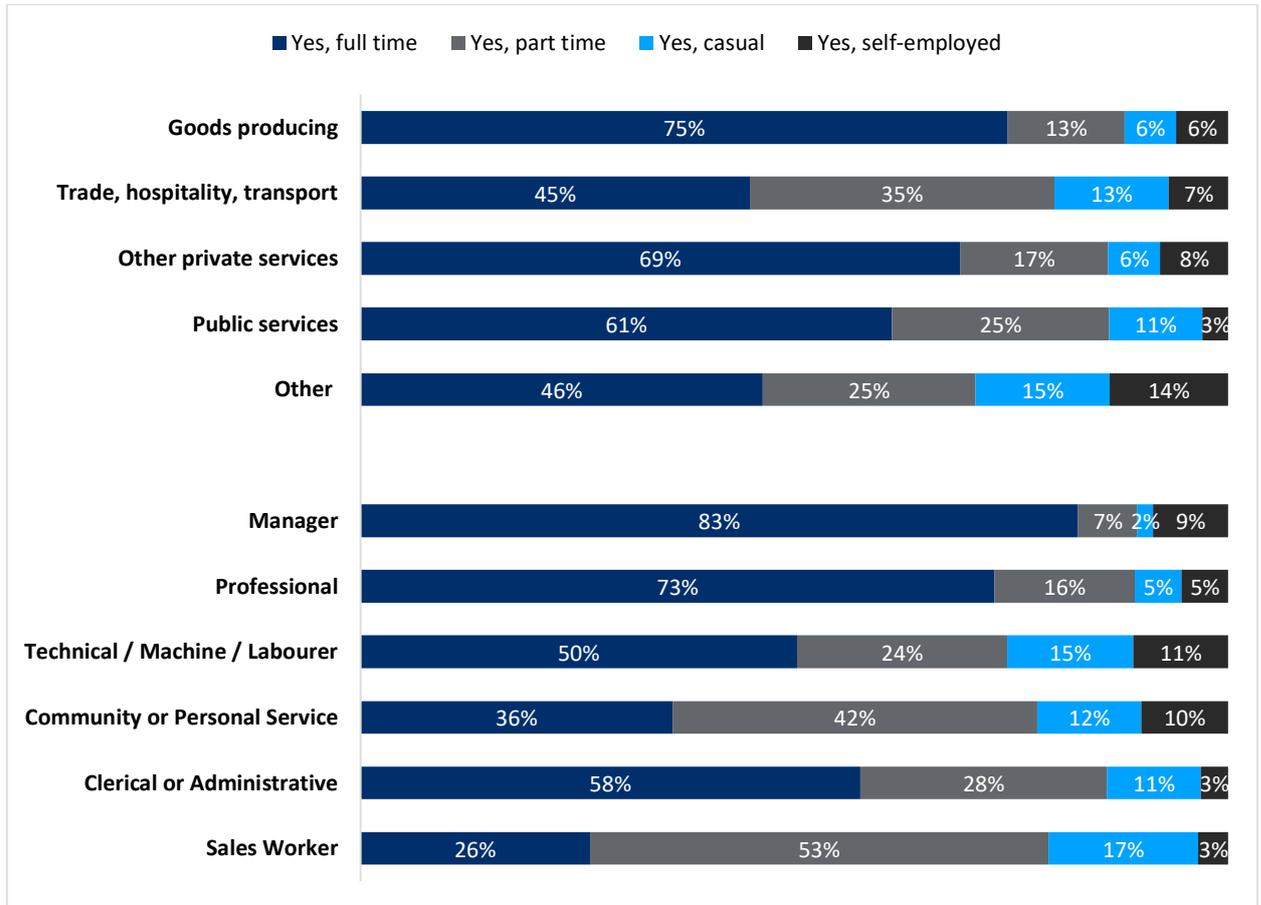


Source: Survey results as described in text.

Figure 2 illustrates the breakdown of employment status by industry. There are stark differences in employment status between different sectors of the Australian economy, attesting to the growing polarisation of working conditions across the labour force.

Figure 2. Employment Status by Industry and Occupation

(percentage of employed persons)



Source: Survey results as described in text.

Goods-producing industries including mining, manufacturing, utilities, construction and agriculture were the most likely to have workers in full-time work (75 percent). In contrast, fewer than half of workers in trade, hospitality and transport were in full-time work (45 percent), less than the proportion (48 percent) in casual or part-time work. Public services, like health, education and administration, were more likely to be full-time (61 percent).⁴

Figure 2 also illustrates the incidence of full-time work across different occupations. Managers and professional staff were most likely to be in full-time work (83 percent and 73 percent respectively), but less than half of sales workers (26 percent) and

⁴ Our survey data also includes a significant proportion of responses which indicated they worked in a catch-all “Other” category, other than the first 4 groupings. Most of these respondents likely did not know how to precisely categorise the industry where they work.

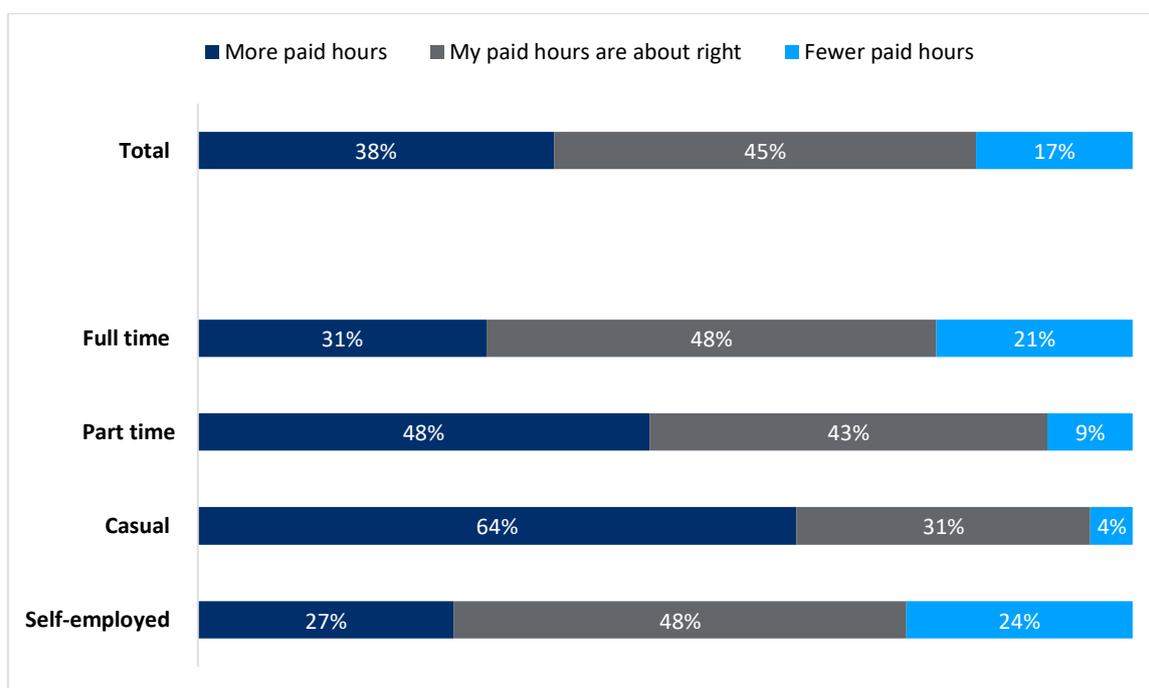
community and personal service workers (36 percent) had full-time jobs. Most sales workers (70 percent) and community and personal service workers (54%) were employed in casual or part-time positions.

Polarisation of Working Hours

Slightly under half of all employed workers in our survey indicated that their hours of work were “about right.” About one-sixth of employed workers preferred to work fewer paid hours (17 percent), while over one-third wanted more paid hours (38 percent).

Not surprisingly, there were major variations in attitudes toward working hours depending on current working hours and employment status, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Hours of Paid Work Preferences



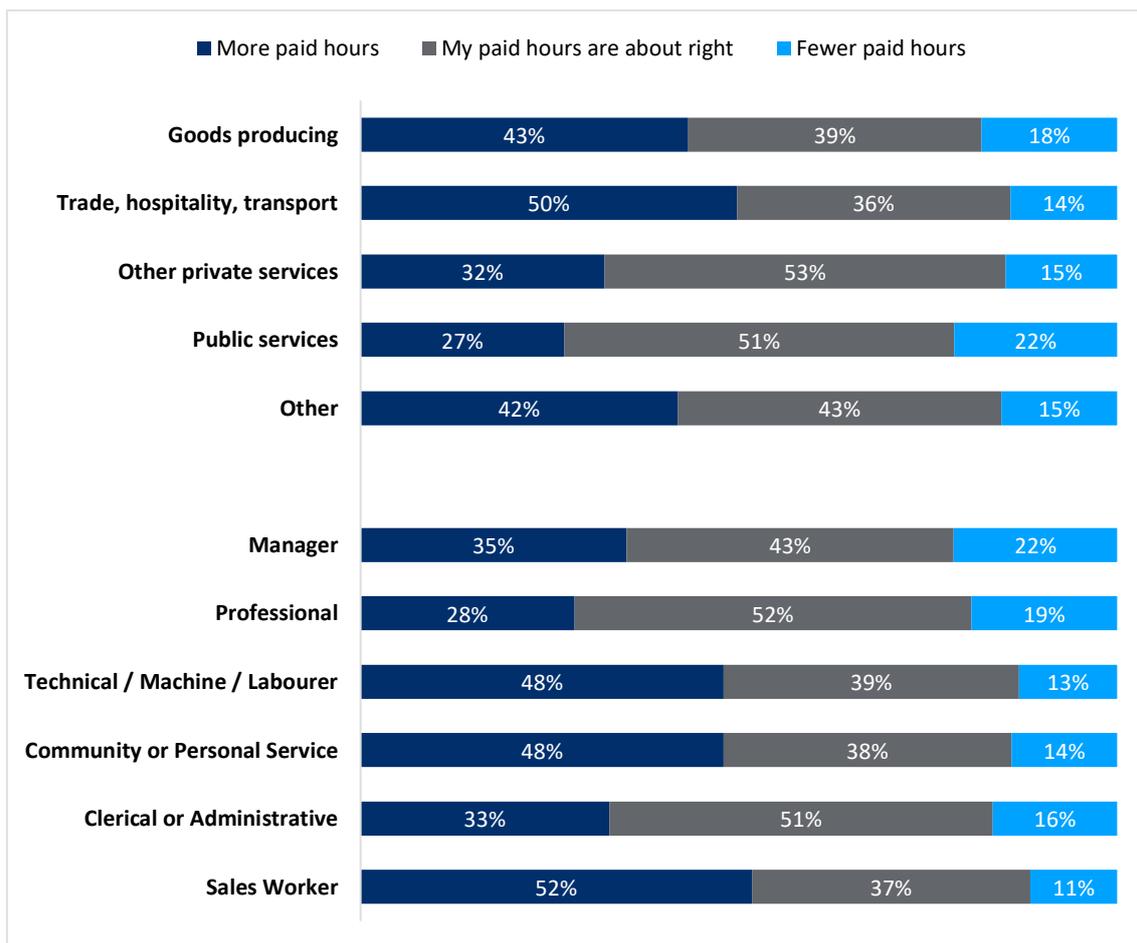
Source: Survey results as described in text.

People in full-time work were far more likely to say they preferred to work fewer paid hours (21 percent) compared to part-time (9 percent) and casual (just 4 percent). On the other hand, about half of part-time workers (48 percent) and two-thirds of those in casual jobs (64 percent) wanted more paid hours. Between one-quarter and one-third of full-time workers (31 percent) and self-employed (27 percent) indicated they would like to work more hours.

These results confirm a continuing polarisation of working hours in Australia’s labour market. Many workers (especially those in part-time and casual positions) want more

hours of work, while some workers (particularly in full-time jobs and self-employment) want less. The growing problem of underemployment, experienced particularly by those in casual and part-time work, is another indication of this polarisation in hours.⁵ Already facing chronic insecurity in hours of work and hence incomes – exacerbated by low wages in most part-time and casual jobs – these workers indicate a strong preference for more paid work.

Figure 5. Preferences for More or Less Hours of Paid Work by Industry and Occupational Category



Source: Survey results as described in text.

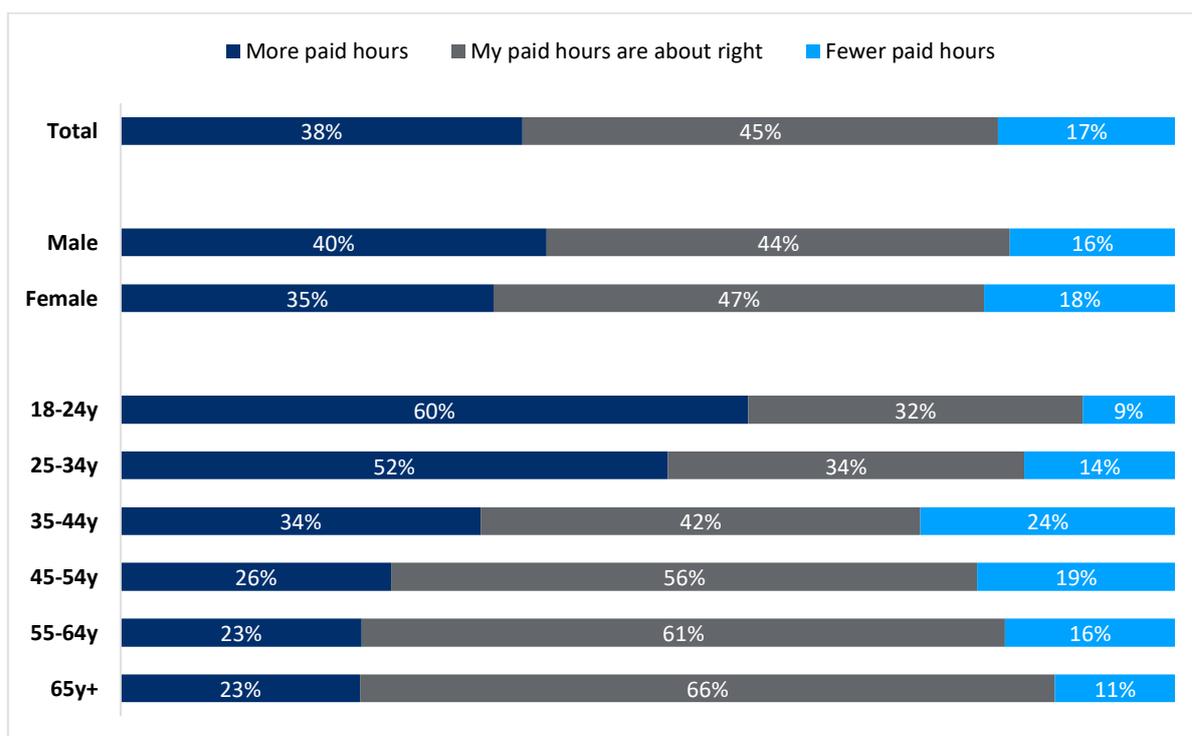
There are also substantial differences in attitudes toward working hours across industry and occupation groupings (illustrated in Figure 5). Workers in goods-producing industries (43 percent), and trade, hospitality and transport were most likely

⁵ The ABS reports that around 9% of employed workers would prefer more hours of work, near to record highs (Catalogue 6202.0, Table 22). Underemployment is more than twice as high (around 20%) for young workers (aged 15-24).

to want more hours (50 percent), while those in public services (education, health and public administration) were least likely (27 percent).

In terms of occupational attitudes, sales workers were most likely to want more work (52 percent), followed by technicians, machine operators and labourers (48 percent). The heavy incidence of part-time and casual work in these occupations helps to explain their preference for more hours. Managers were most likely to want less paid work (22 percent), followed by professionals (19 percent).

Figure 6. Hours of Paid Work Preferences by Gender and Age



Source: Survey results as described in text.

Men are somewhat more likely to want more paid hours than women: 40% for men, versus 35% for women (see Figure 6). This is somewhat surprising, given that men are more likely to be in full-time work, and (as noted above) full-time workers are more likely to be satisfied with their current hours. To some degree the higher incidence of part-time work among women reflects their preferences for shorter working hours – largely because of the difficulties of balancing paid work and caring responsibilities (given Australia’s inadequate early child education and other family-supporting services).

More expectedly, younger workers are much more likely to want more paid hours. Fully 60 percent of workers under 24 would prefer more hours, as would over half of

those aged 25-34. The desire for more hours declines monotonically with age; less than 30 percent of workers over 45 would prefer more hours. Since younger people are much more likely to be in casual and part-time work, their desire for more hours is not surprising. Workers between 35 and 44 years old were most likely to prefer fewer hours (24 percent).

In summary, younger people and those in casual and part-time work express a strong preference for more hours of paid work. A substantial proportion of those in full-time employment reported a desire for shorter working hours, while a dominant share of part-timers and casuals prefer more hours of paid work. These findings confirm that the simultaneous and seemingly inconsistent problems of overwork and underemployment remain persistent features of Australia's labour market.

It seems ironic that many Australians would prefer to work less paid hours, while many would prefer to work more paid hours. It would thus be mutually beneficial to shift working hours from those with too many hours, to those with too few. However, the staffing strategies of employers block this seemingly logical shift in working patterns. The polarisation of working hours reflects the dichotomy in employer strategies between utilising a precarious, "just-in-time" workforce for many jobs (shifting the risk of fluctuations in business conditions and consumer demand onto the shoulders of part-time, casual, and contingent labour), while demanding very long hours (including large amounts of unpaid overtime) from a separate group of core, largely full-time workers.

Resolving the evident polarisation of working hours in Australia's labour market will require a multitude of policy responses. In the more precarious segment of the labour market, limits must be placed on the ability of employers to mobilise a contingent workforce into jobs with inadequate and uncertain hours. Casual work should be used for its intended purpose (as a supplementary workforce to help smooth out seasonal or cyclical fluctuations in business), not as a regular, permanent staffing system. Workers need more stability in rosters and work schedules: including the right to advance notice for regular rosters, and compensation when schedules are changed. These measures would place limits on employers' current preference for using workers as a hyper-flexible just-in-time resource, causing disruption and poverty among many workers in precarious jobs.

At the other end of the labour market, full-time workers also need support to attain a better balance of work and life responsibilities. This includes limits on overtime work, more personal freedom to turn down overtime, and better access to leave⁶ (including

⁶ Research conducted for our 2016 "Go Home on Time Day" report showed that a shocking share of workers in Australia do not have effective access to regular paid annual holidays. Close to one-third of

long-service, educational and family leaves). The long historic progress made over the postwar era in reducing standard hours of work has ground to a halt in the last generation – mostly due to employer opposition and a long erosion in workers’ collective bargaining power. It is now 35 years since the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission reduced the standard work week to 38 hours. Ongoing labour productivity growth provides a real economic foundation for shorter working hours; and the pressing need to help families balance work and home responsibilities (especially since most women are now employed in paid work) makes this goal all the more relevant.

Revitalising the historic trend toward shorter working hours (for full-time workers) would help to strengthen employment opportunities (including for currently underemployed workers), support healthier family life, and even address environmental concerns.⁷ There is ample evidence that shorter working hours generates important benefits for employers, as well as workers – in the form of increased productivity, reduced absenteeism and “presenteeism,” and better workforce satisfaction and retention. A recent experiment at a major Microsoft office in Japan with a four-day workweek is just the latest example of many successful trials of shorter working time (Paul, 2019).

workers do not have access to paid leave, and more than another third did not use all the leave they were entitled to. See Henderson (2016) for details.

⁷ By capturing some of the benefits of higher productivity in the form of increased leisure time rather than increased material consumption, the environmental consequences of economic growth can be reduced.

Unpaid Overtime

Survey respondents were also asked about the number of hours they worked unpaid for their employer in the past seven days. This could include arriving at work early, staying late, working through breaks (such as tea or lunch breaks), working from home in the evenings and on weekends, taking calls or e-mails out of working hours, and other forms of unpaid labour.

Across all forms of employment, our respondents worked an average of 4.62 hours of unpaid labour for their employers in the preceding week.

There are significant differences in the incidence of unpaid overtime across different forms of employment. Unpaid overtime is more severe for full-time workers, who reported an average of 5.18 hours per week. Self-employed workers also reported heavy unpaid overtime: 6.27 hours per week.⁸ But even among part-time and casual workers, who are anxious to attain more *paid* work (as reported above), unpaid overtime is endemic: 3.58 hours per week for part-time workers, and 2.64 hours per week for casual workers.

Table 2. Unpaid Overtime by Employment Status

	Full-Time	Part-Time	Casual	Self-Employed	Total
Unpaid Overtime per Week, 2019	5.18	3.58	2.64	6.27	4.62
Share of Paid Hours Worked	13%	17%	14%	22%	14%

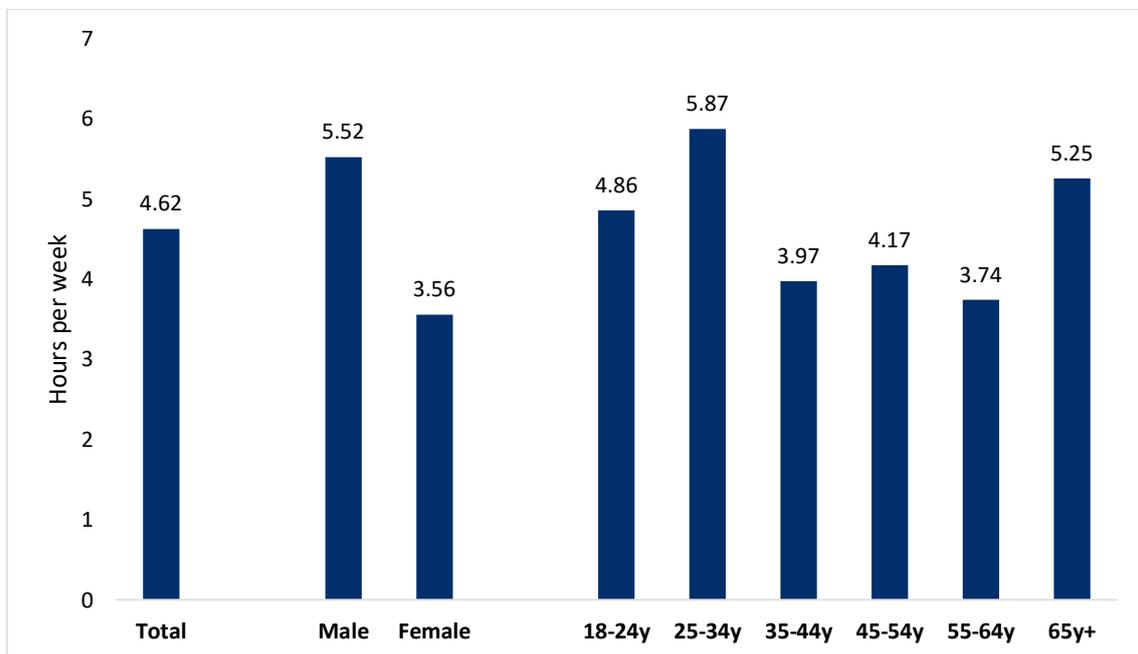
Significant amounts of unpaid overtime are thus incurred across all major employment categories (see Table 2). This unpaid overtime is particularly concerning during a period of low wage growth, high underemployment and record levels of insecure work. For all categories of paid employees (that is, excluding self-employed workers), unpaid overtime represents between 13 and 17 percent of total paid work time. For the self-employed, unpaid overtime exceeded one-fifth of paid work time.

⁸ The concept of “unpaid overtime” is somewhat imprecise for self-employed workers, who in addition to any formal wage or salary payment from their businesses are also compensated through the business’s profits.

On an annualised basis (assuming a constant rate of unpaid overtime throughout the year), this translates into an annual average of 240 hours of unpaid overtime per year per worker across all forms of employment. Based on a standard 38-hour workweek, this is equivalent to more than 6 weeks (or one and a half months) of unpaid work per worker per year. **Extrapolated across Australia’s workforce, this implies total unpaid overtime worked of some 2.4 billion hours per year.**

Figure 7 illustrates average unpaid overtime per week by gender and age cohort. Men reported an average of 5.52 hours of unpaid overtime per week, compared to 3.56 hours for women.⁹ It is interesting that those aged 25-34 (5.87 hours) and 65 years and over (5.25 hours) performed the most unpaid overtime. These groups of workers may feel more pressure to “prove themselves” in their workplaces than workers in core age cohorts (35 through 65), and hence are more vulnerable to employer expectations or demands for unpaid time.

Figure 7. Unpaid Overtime by Gender and Age



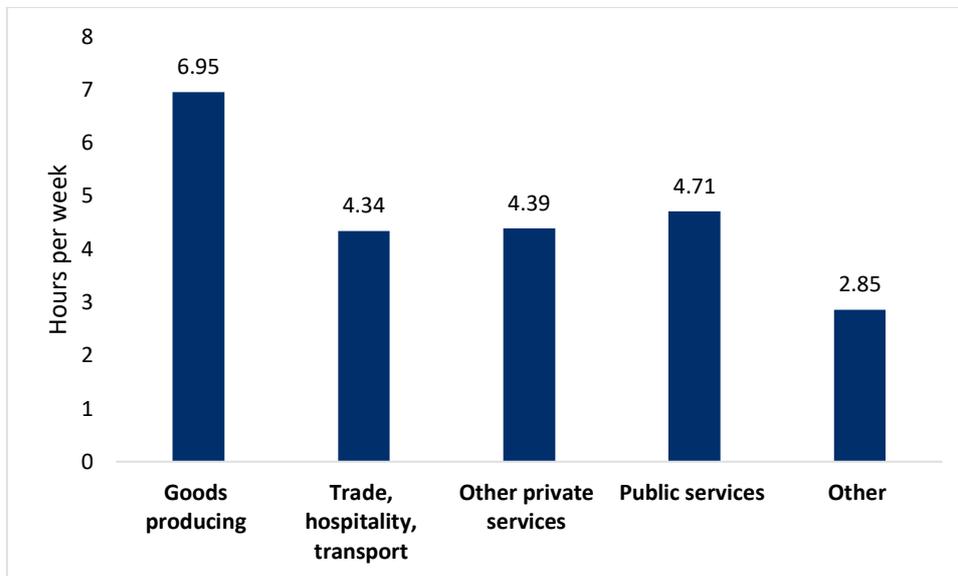
Source: Survey results as described in text.

Figure 8 reports the average amount of unpaid work by industry grouping. Workers in goods-producing industries (agriculture, mining, manufacturing, utilities and construction) report the highest levels of unpaid overtime, at 6.95 hours per week.

⁹ Of course, these figures are not including hours of unpaid caring and household work, a disproportionate share of which is performed by women.

Workers in private services industries¹⁰ worked in excess of 4.3 hours unpaid overtime per week, while public services workers (in education, healthcare & social assistance, and public administration) worked 4.71 hours per week.

Figure 8. Unpaid Overtime by Industry

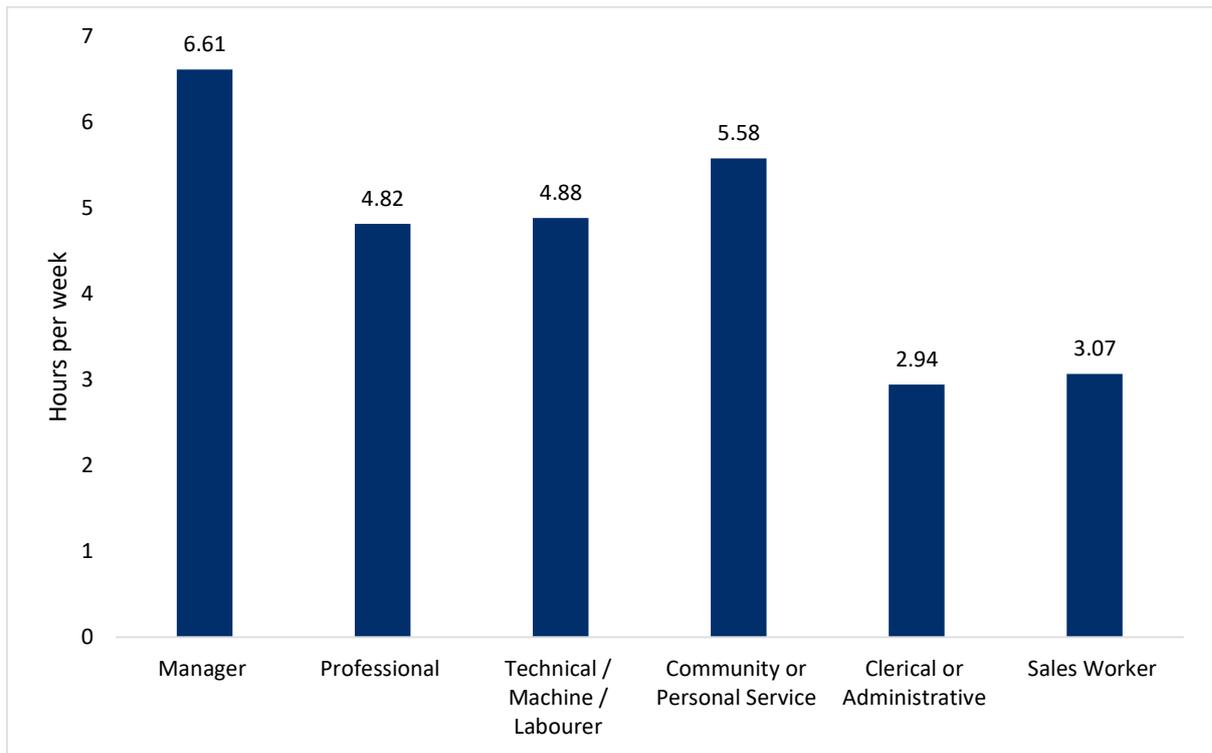


Source: Survey results as described in text.

Figure 9 breaks down average unpaid overtime by occupational category. Managers (6.61) and professionals (4.82) report the highest levels of unpaid overtime. Clerical, administrative and sales workers experienced the least unpaid overtime. Again, these differences are correlated to the form of employment most common in each of those occupations: managers and professionals are the most likely to fill full-time permanent jobs, which is where the incidence of unpaid overtime is the highest.

¹⁰ Our results include two amalgamated private services categories: trade, hospitality and transportation; and other private services. Both categories recorded similar levels of unpaid overtime

Figure 9. Unpaid Overtime by Occupational Category



Source: Survey results as described in text.

The Costs of “Time Theft”

Our survey results paint a seemingly contradictory picture of overwork for many workers, inadequate paid hours for other workers, and demands for unpaid overtime imposed on all types of workers. This seemingly ironic combination of outcomes imposes significant negative consequences on Australia’s economy and society. The frequent incidence of unpaid overtime described above means that Australian workers are losing substantial amounts of income. This is particularly concerning when workers’ share of national income has fallen to record lows,¹¹ and wage growth has decelerated to the slowest sustained pace in Australia’s postwar economic history. Australian workers can hardly afford to not be paid by employers for such a significant proportion of their total working time.

The phenomenon of time theft (through endemic unpaid overtime) also compounds the more general experience of time pressure and work-life balance experienced by so many Australian household.¹²

Table 3 quantifies the aggregate value of unpaid overtime in the overall labour market in Australia, by estimating the income that would have been received by workers if their unpaid labour had in fact been compensated. Recall that our survey results indicate that employed workers perform an average of 4.62 hours of unpaid overtime per week (across all classes of employment). This varied from an average of 5.18 hours for full-time workers, to 3.58 hours for part-time employees, and 2.64 for casual workers.

Published ABS data reports the total number of Australian employees working in each of those main categories of waged employment.¹³ The ABS also reports median hourly earnings for each category of worker. Therefore, we can calculate an estimate of the aggregate income lost to workers by the failure of employers to pay for unpaid overtime. This calculation assumes that overtime hours would have been paid at the same rate as average median earnings;¹⁴ for part-time and casual workers we also include a 9.5 percent margin reflecting the minimum superannuation contributions

¹¹ Stanford (2017).

¹² See, for example, Wade (2018).

¹³ We exclude self-employed workers from our calculation of the value of unpaid overtime and “time theft,” given the dual nature of self-employed workers’ relationship to their own businesses.

¹⁴ In practice, most overtime work should incur a higher hourly rate, so this assumption is very conservative.

which should accrue to workers for this time.¹⁵ As indicated in Table 3, this suggests that **unpaid overtime represents a collective loss of some \$81.5 billion in foregone income for Australian workers in 2019.**

To put this figure in perspective, \$81.5 billion is equivalent to 16 percent of projected expenditure (\$501 billion) in the Federal Budget for the financial year 2019-20. It matches the Commonwealth's expenditure on healthcare (\$81 billion) and is around seven times the budget for unemployment assistance such as Newstart.¹⁶

Table 3. Aggregate Value of Unpaid Overtime, 2019

Job Status	Number Employed (million)	Median Wage (\$/hr)	Avg. Unpaid Overtime (hrs/wk)	Total Value (\$billion) ¹
Permanent Workers				
<i>Full-Time</i>	6.491	\$35.00	5.18	\$61.2
<i>Part-Time</i>	1.582	\$30.00	3.58	\$9.7
Casual Workers				
<i>Full-Time</i>	.871	\$28.60	2.64	\$3.7
<i>Part-Time</i>	1.828	\$25.00	2.64	\$6.9
Total	10.771	\$30.00	4.62	\$81.5

Source: Authors' calculations from survey results, ABS Catalogue 6291.0.55.003, Data Cube EQ04, and ABS Catalogue 6333.0, Table 7.2.

1. Includes superannuation contributions for part-time and casual workers.

From the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia to the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the calls for Australian workers to get a pay rise are getting louder. In a labour market that is suffering unprecedented wage stagnation, underemployment, insecure work and cost of living pressures, the loss to working families from billions of hours of unpaid overtime per year is not sustainable.

¹⁵ We do not include superannuation costs for full-time workers, since superannuation contributions are not legally required for genuine overtime income.

¹⁶ See Kesper, Elvery and Spraggon, (2019).

Conclusion

This eleventh annual *Go Home on Time Day* report has once again highlighted the persistent and simultaneous problems of unpaid overtime, inadequate hours, and overwork in Australia. A high proportion of workers in part-time and casual jobs want more hours of paid work, reflecting the increasingly insecure nature of work and their low and stagnant wages. But many full-time workers would prefer to work less, in part to balance the demands of work and home life.

This ironic outcome is compounded by the large amounts of unpaid overtime that are regularly worked in Australia. On average, employed Australian work 4.62 hours of unpaid time for their employers per week, or 260 hours per year. Individually, this practice adds to the stress and exploitation of work life. Collectively, it amounts to an enormous theft of time and money from working Australians. The cumulative tally of unpaid overtime amounts to 2.41 billion hours of working time each year, with an aggregate value of unpaid wages worth \$81.5 billion.

Given the evidence presented in this and previous reports, the need for change is clear and pressing. Employers and government must respect the needs of workers – in the workplace, and outside of paid work. This means converting precarious jobs into regular secure jobs, and providing more hours of paid work to underemployed Australian workers. To end the epidemic of “time theft,” regulators must enforce existing rules regarding maximum hours of work on a more consistent basis, and provide workers with more choice to refuse overtime and work shorter hours. Finally, workers (individually and through their unions) must demand that employers respect their right to leisure time – for their own benefit, and for the good of Australian society.

Appendix A - Survey Questions

These are the questions that were asked in the survey described in this report.

Q. Are you currently in paid work?

1. Yes, full time
2. Yes, part time
3. Yes, casual
4. Yes, self-employed [SKIP TO Q39]
5. No [SKIP TO Q39]

Q. How many hours a week do you generally work (e.g. the number of paid hours of employment)?
[NUMBER Open answer] __ hours

Q. Would you like to work....?

1. more paid hours
2. fewer paid hours
3. my paid hours are about right

Unpaid work may include things like arriving early, staying late, working through lunch or breaks, working at home, and so on.

Q. How many unpaid hours of work did you perform for your employer in the last 7 days (i.e. unpaid overtime)?

[NUMBER Open answer]__hours

Q. What best describes the industry you work in?

1. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
2. Mining
3. Manufacturing
4. Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services
5. Construction
6. Wholesale Trade
7. Retail Trade
8. Accommodation and Food Services
9. Transport, Postal and Warehousing
10. Information Media and Telecommunications
11. Financial and Insurance Services
12. Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services
13. Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
14. Administrative and Support Services
15. Public Administration and Safety
16. Education and Training
17. Health Care and Social Assistance
18. Arts and Recreation Services

19. *Other Services*
20. *Don't know / not sure*

Q. Which of the following best describes the kind of work you do?

1. *Manager*
2. *Professional*
3. *Technician or Trades Worker*
4. *Community or Personal Service Worker*
5. *Clerical or Administrative Worker*
6. *Sales Worker*
7. *Machinery Operator and Driver*
8. *Labourer*
9. *Don't know / not sure*

Appendix B - Sample Distribution

	N=	% sample
Total Employed:	880	
Male	480	54%
Female	404	46%
Age:		
18-24 years	126	14%
25-34 years	210	24%
35-44 years	199	23%
45-54 years	187	21%
55-64 years	118	13%
65 years or older	44	5%
Employment Status:		
Yes, full time	524	59%
Yes, part time	209	24%
Yes, casual	89	10%
Yes, self employed	62	7%
Occupation		
Manager	162	19%
Professional	223	26%
Technician or Trades / Machine / Labourer	165	20%
Community or Personal Service Worker	50	6%
Clerical or Administrative Worker	158	19%
Sales Worker	87	10%
Industry		
Goods producing (agriculture, mining, construction, manufacturing, utilities)	134	15%
Trade, Hospitality, Transport	205	23%
Other Private Services (professional, IT, financial, rental, administration, arts)	217	25%
Public services (health, education, admin and safety)	204	23%
Other	124	14%

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