

The International Corner

What's New in Australia

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The second **Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI) survey of work-life interaction in Australia** builds on the findings of the 2007 survey. Findings show that there has been little change in the overall work-life interaction of Australian workers between 2007 and 2008.

Some of the findings from the AWALI 2008 include:

- Men report higher levels of work-life conflict than women, but when the researchers statistically control for their differences in working hours, women have higher levels of work-life conflict (and this holds whether they are employees or self-employed).
- Part-time workers, on average, have a better work-life interaction than full-timers.
- The most common type of work-life interference is restriction of time with family and friends due to work. A quarter of employees agree that work often or almost always interferes with enough time with family or friends.
- Around 55% of employees frequently (often/almost always) feel rushed or pressed for time. Despite these pressures, most Australians remain satisfied with their work-life relationship: the majority (68.3%) are satisfied with their overall work-life balance and there is no gender difference in satisfaction.
- Patterns of work hours differ for men and women depending on their parenting status: fathers work longer hours and mothers work fewer hours than their counterparts without children. When these differences in work hours are statistically controlled, gender differences in the impact of parenting on work-life interaction are apparent.
- Mothers are especially affected by work-life conflict. Controlling for differences in hours, mothers have worse work-life interaction than women without children. However, there is no difference between men's work-life interaction whether they are fathers or not.
- Controlling for differences in hours, the authors find that those in lower income households (less than \$30,000 a year) as well as those on higher incomes (more than \$90,000) have worse work-life interaction than those on incomes in the mid-range. There is considerable discussion about work-life issues amongst professional, managerial and higher income workers. Findings suggest that there should be more attention to the work-life pressures facing those living on lower incomes.

To summarise, the authors point to seven issues of particular significance to work life interaction:

- Good first line supervisory and general workplace support for employees around work-life issues;
- Avoiding work overload;
- Avoiding long hours;
- Avoiding unsocial working hours;
- Providing permanent rather than casual employment;
- Providing employee-centred flexibility;
- Providing the means whereby workers can get a good fit between their actual and preferred hours.

The [full report](#) can be downloaded from the Centre for Work + Life.

Skinner, N., and Pocock, B. (2008) Work, life and workplace culture: The Australian work and life index (AWALI) 2008. Centre for Work + Life, Hawke Research Institute for Sustainable Societies, University of South Australia.

National Employment Standards

On June 16, 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Industrial Relations Minister Julia Gillard released the new National Employment Standards (NES) to take effect in 2010. The 10 standards will become the new minimum safety net for employees of businesses that operate under federal IR laws and cover:

- Standard 38-hour working week
- Request for flexible work arrangements
- More parental leave
- Annual leave
- Personal/carer's leave and compassionate leave
- Community service leave
- Long service leave
- Public holidays
- Notice of termination and redundancy pay
- Fair Work information statement

A [full copy](#) of the National Employment Standards can be accessed at workplace.gov.au.

Paid Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave

The Australian Government has asked the Productivity Commission to undertake a public inquiry into paid maternity, paternity and paternal leave. The inquiry will concentrate on support for parents of newborn children up to the age of two years. It will:

- consider the economic, productivity and social costs and benefits of providing paid maternity, paternity and parental leave;

- assess the current extent of employer-provided of paid maternity, paternity and parental leave in Australia;
- identify the models that could be used to provide such parental support and assess these against a number of criteria. These include their cost effectiveness; impacts on business; labour market consequences; work-family preferences of parents; child and parental welfare; and interactions with the Social Security and Family Assistance Systems;
- assess the impacts and applicability of the various models across the full range of employment forms (such as the self-employed, farmers, and shift workers); and
- assess the efficiency and effectiveness of Government policies that would facilitate the provision and take-up of these models.

The Commission will report on its findings by February 2009.

The Sloan Work and Family Research Network appreciates the extensive support we have received from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and the Boston College community.

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The Sloan Work and Family Research Network is funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation