

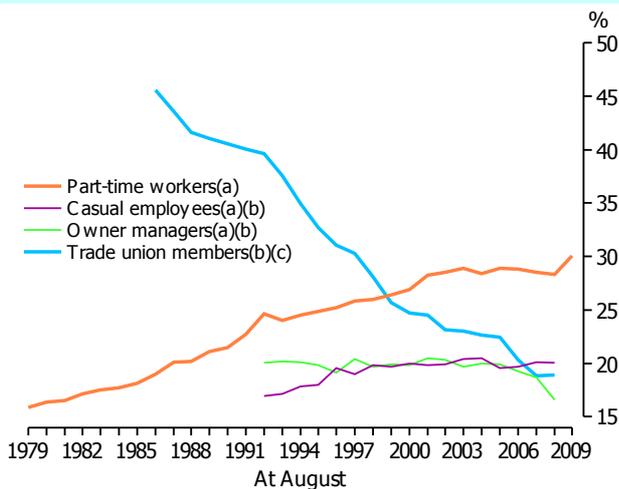
Patterns in work

In recent decades the labour market has witnessed trading hour liberalisation, anti-discrimination legislation, labour market deregulation, and enterprise bargaining. These developments have been accompanied by changes in the composition of the workforce, increased diversity of working arrangements and patterns, and falling rates of trade union membership.

The proportion of all employed people who were working part-time almost doubled between August 1979 (16%) and August 2009 (30%). The proportion of employed people working as a casual employee also increased between August 1992 (17%) and August 1996 (20%), but has since remained at this level. In contrast, the proportion working as an employee with paid leave entitlements decreased slowly between 1992 (62%) and 2004 (59%) before rising to 63% in 2008. The overall proportional increase in employees was offset by a proportional decline in owner managers (from 20% in 1992 to 17% in 2008).

For some people, the availability of jobs which allow them to work at night or on the weekend, or which offer flexible working hours, enable them to obtain and retain paid work. Many are unable or unwilling to work a 'traditional' full-time, Monday to Friday job that has fixed and regular daytime start and finish times.

Trends in selected working arrangements and types of jobs over recent decades



(a) As a proportion of all workers.

(b) In main job if a multiple job holder.

(c) As a proportion of all employees and owner managers of incorporated enterprises.

Source: [Labour Force, Australia, November 2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 6202.0); [Australian Labour Market Statistics, October 2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 6105.0); [Trade Union Members, Australia, August 1992](#) (ABS cat. no. 6325.0); [Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership, Australia, August 2008](#) (ABS cat. no. 6310.0)

Data sources and definitions

Information presented in this article has been sourced from various ABS surveys. The data describe employed people aged 15 years and older excluding those in certain jobs, dwellings and locations. Scope exclusions vary from survey to survey, and details about these scope exclusions can be found in:

- [Labour Force, Australia, November 2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 6202.0)
- [Forms of Employment, Australia, November 2008](#) (ABS cat. no. 6359.0)
- [Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership, Australia, August 2008](#) (ABS cat. no. 6310.0)
- [Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation, Australia, April to July 2007 \(Reissue\)](#) (ABS cat. no. 6361.0)

In this article:

People who usually *work at night* are people who usually work some or all of their hours (in any job) between seven in the evening and seven in the morning.

Part-time workers are those who work less than 35 hours a week (in all their jobs combined) and *full-time* workers are those who work at least 35 hours a week (in all jobs).

For the 6% of employed people who have more than one job, any job-specific arrangements presented (e.g. paid leave entitlements) pertain to their main job only.

Employees exclude owner managers of incorporated enterprises (OMIEs). OMIEs are people who work in their own limited liability company, and the ABS usually classifies them as employees. However, because OMIEs have more control over their work patterns, they've been excluded from the definition of 'employee' adapted for this article, and have been grouped with other owner managers.

Casuals are employees (excluding OMIEs) who are not entitled to paid sick or holiday leave (the ABS proxy measure for casuals).¹ *Other employees* are those who are entitled to paid sick leave and/or paid holiday leave.

Owner managers are people who work in their own business, with or without employees, whether or not the business is of limited liability.

However, for other people, the ability to plan and commit to family, social and leisure activities is adversely affected by working at night or on the weekend, or by working at irregular and/or unpredictable times. By their nature, jobs which require workers to be on call or standby offer unpredictable working hours. Other irregular work patterns include working varying days of the week, a varying number of hours from week to week, and different start and finish times from day to day.

Characteristics of workers(a) engaged in different types of employment(b) – 2008

Selected characteristics	Units	Employee			Owner manager	Total employed(c)
		Casual	Other	Total		
Average age	years	33.7	39.2	37.9	46.4	39.5
Proportion who are women	%	55.8	45.5	48.0	32.3	45.1
Proportion who work part-time(d)	%	70.0	16.7	29.5	28.2	29.3
Average hours usually worked by part-timers(d)	no.	16.3	23.1	19.2	18.9	19.2
Average hours usually worked by full-timers(e)	no.	42.7	42.9	42.8	51.4	44.4
Number	'000	2 075.7	6 586.6	8 662.2	1 972.2	10 634.5

(a) Employed people usually working less than an hour a week in all jobs are excluded from this table and all subsequent text.

(b) In main job if a multiple job holder.

(c) Those who are a contributing family worker in their main job are excluded from this table and all subsequent text.

(d) Employed people who usually work 1-34 hours a week in all jobs.

(e) Employed people who usually work at least 35 hours a week in all jobs.

Source: ABS 2008 Forms of Employment Survey

How common are 'traditional' work patterns these days?

In November 2008, according to the ABS Forms of Employment Survey, three-quarters (75%) of all employees with paid holiday leave and/or paid sick leave usually worked five days a week. However, the five day working week was not the norm among other workers.

Only 33% of casual employees usually worked five days a week. Reflecting their tendency to work part-time, the majority (56%) of casuals usually worked fewer than five days a week. Yet, despite the relatively small proportion of casuals who worked full-time (30% compared with 83% of other employees) casual employees were just as likely as other employees to usually work on six or seven days of the week.

Just under half (45%) of owner managers also usually had a five day week, though only 17% usually worked less than five days a week. Substantial proportions of owner managers usually worked six days a week (21%) or every day (18%).

How regular is work time?

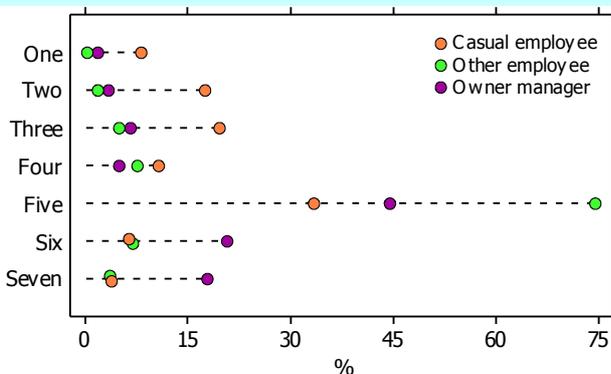
Also in November 2008, 15% of employed people worked on days of the week which varied from week to week. Variability of working days was more commonly experienced by casual employees (24%) than by other employees (11%) and owner managers (15%).

Around one in four workers (26%) did not usually work the same number of hours each week. Higher proportions of casual employees and owner managers (38% of both) worked variable weekly hours, while this pattern of work was more unusual among employees with paid leave entitlements (18%).

...different industries, different patterns

Some of the industry differences in work patterns in November 2008 can be attributed to the composition of each industry's workforce (i.e. the relative proportions of each who are casual employees, other employees and owner managers).

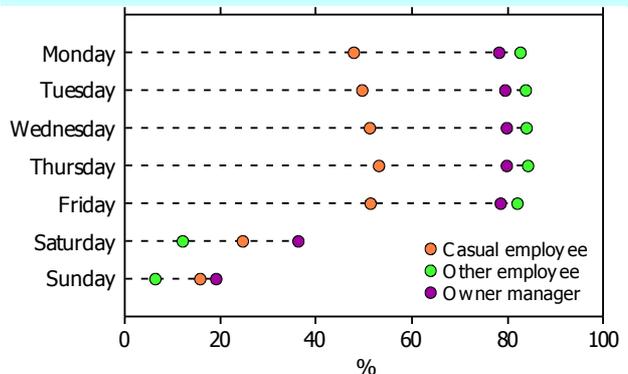
Number of days usually worked per week by employment type in main job(a) – 2008



(a) Employed people usually working less than an hour a week in all jobs are excluded from this graph and all associated text.

Source: ABS 2008 Forms of Employment Survey

Proportion(a) who usually worked on a given day of the week each week – 2008



(a) Employed people usually working less than an hour a week in all jobs are excluded from this graph and all associated text.

Source: ABS 2008 Forms of Employment Survey

However, other factors also influence the extent to which 'non-traditional' patterns are worked within an industry. Such factors include the nature of the work undertaken (e.g. seasonality in farming), negotiated entitlements and obligations (i.e. conditions of employment), the demographic profile and personal preferences of its workers, the preferences of its consumers, and levels of competition operating within the industry.

For example, 72% of people working in the very casualised and competitive Accommodation and food services industry usually worked on the weekend. Working mainly in this industry, 89% of bar attendants, 88% of hotel/motel managers and 83% of chefs usually worked on the weekend. In sharp contrast, only 8% of people employed in the Financial and insurance services industry usually worked on the weekend. This marked difference partly reflects heightened weekend demand for many services supplied by the Accommodation and food services industry.

Weekend work is uncommon in the Financial and insurance services industries, partly because few financial and insurance companies (e.g. banks) open their branches for face to face business on a Saturday or Sunday. New technologies have given consumers 24/7 access to many of this industry's products and services. In particular, ATMs and the rapidly expanding use of web-based technology has obviated many customers need for 'over the counter' service.

In some industries and occupations it's not only common to work on the weekend, but to work days which vary from week to week, and to work different numbers of hours each week. Conditions of employment, such as being able to choose work times and being on call, may contribute to such irregular work patterns. Among the occupations most likely to have variable days of work were midwives (81%), critical care and emergency nurses (81%) and

Employed people(a)(b), selected patterns of work and selected conditions of employment – 2008

Industry of main job	Selected patterns of work			Selected conditions of employment in main job			Number employed '000
	Days of the week worked varies from week to week %	Number of hours worked varies from week to week %	Usually works on the weekend %	Not entitled to paid sick leave or paid holiday leave (i.e. is a casual employee) %	Usually required to be on call or standby %	Has some say in time starts and finishes work %	
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	19.8	39.7	63.2	16.7	46.8	73.6	362.9
Mining	35.7	28.7	58.5	9.2	25.9	29.2	179.1
Manufacturing	9.6	21.8	20.7	13.8	19.6	40.6	1 009.6
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	10.1	23.6	15.5	6.9	34.0	50.1	127.0
Construction	8.6	32.6	27.9	13.5	24.4	57.5	988.7
Wholesale trade	4.4	19.9	16.5	13.4	22.6	55.3	378.8
Retail trade	19.2	23.9	55.6	36.1	24.2	42.5	1 184.5
Accommodation and food services	28.1	33.7	72.3	57.9	31.2	40.0	683.7
Transport, postal and warehousing	21.0	33.4	39.3	17.4	31.1	39.4	577.1
Information media and telecommunications	11.3	23.9	23.6	15.6	21.8	54.0	220.8
Financial and insurance services	*1.7	14.1	8.2	5.3	18.3	58.7	379.1
Rental, hiring and real estate services	15.5	27.5	40.0	17.4	38.6	61.0	204.4
Professional, scientific and technical services	6.9	27.3	16.6	10.6	22.8	70.3	811.5
Administrative and support services	11.9	26.2	24.8	24.0	22.9	53.9	339.7
Public administration and safety	15.6	18.4	20.7	7.4	23.0	58.1	648.9
Education and training	6.2	20.2	13.7	13.6	14.5	38.3	788.3
Health care and social assistance	23.8	24.9	36.0	17.8	26.9	44.5	1 105.7
Arts and recreation services	30.5	33.4	60.3	35.1	30.2	48.2	192.5
Other services	10.6	26.6	38.4	14.7	27.9	57.3	451.9
All industries	14.7	26.0	33.8	19.5	25.1	50.0	10 634.5

* estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution

(a) Those usually working less than an hour a week in all jobs are excluded from this table and all associated text.

(b) Those who are a contributing family worker in their main job are excluded from this table and all associated text.

Source: ABS 2008 Forms of Employment Survey

police officers (68%), while at least half of all photographers (57%), concreters (51%) and transport company managers (51%) worked a different number of hours from week to week.

In November 2008, half (50%) of all workers had some say in what time they started and finished work, and a quarter (25%) were usually required to be on call or standby. There were, however, considerable differences between industries. For example, Professional, scientific and technical services industry workers were more than twice as likely as Mining industry workers to have a say in their start and finish times (70% compared with 29%), and Agriculture, forestry and fishing industry workers were thrice as likely as Education and training industry workers to be on call (47% compared with 15%). Yet school principals were quite likely to be required to be on call (63%), along with 89% of ministers of religion and 69% of real estate agents.

Are people's usual work patterns their preferred patterns?

The ABS Survey of Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation, which was conducted between April and July in 2007, asked workers to describe some of their usual work patterns and then asked them what patterns they would prefer to work (taking into account any income changes that would or might occur).

Nearly two in three workers (64%) usually worked all of their hours during daylight hours (i.e. between seven in the morning and seven in the evening). The overwhelming majority (96%) of these people who only worked during daytime hours liked it that way. Among the other 36% of employed people who usually worked some or all of their hours at night (i.e. between seven in the evening and seven in the morning) over two-thirds (68%) actually preferred to be working some or all of their hours at night.

Similarly, among the 63% of employed people who didn't usually work at all on the weekend, virtually all (96%) were happy to have the weekend off. Of the other 37% of employed people who did usually work on the weekend, almost two-thirds (65%) were following their preference for working some or all of their hours on the weekend.

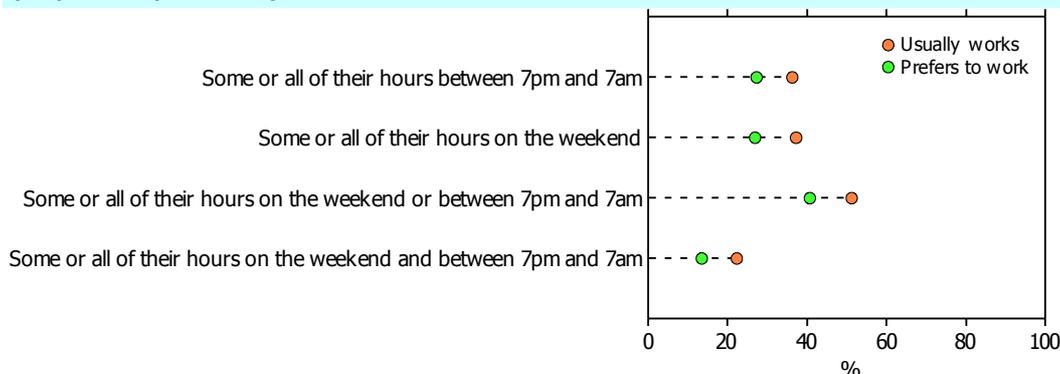
People who usually worked on the weekend and preferred to work on the weekend were a diverse group, even though some population groups were over represented. For example, 30% of people who usually worked on the weekend and preferred to work on the weekend were casual employees, 26% were owner managers, 59% were male, 26% were aged 15–24 years, and 17% were aged 55 years or older.

Among all employed people (excluding those who are a contributing family worker in their main job and those usually working less than an hour a week) 20% were casual employees, 20% were owner managers, 55% were male, 17% were aged 15–24 years, and 15% were aged 55 years or older.

In 2007, 41% of Australia's workers preferred to work some or all of their hours at night or on the weekend. An even larger proportion (51%) usually did work some or all of their hours at these 'non-traditional' times.

Entitlement to penalty rates of pay for working 'unsocial' hours may underpin some workers' preference for working on days which attract such higher rates of hourly pay. Weekend work may also be popular among students whose need to attend an educational institution during weekday daytime hours precludes paid work at such times.

Employed people(a)(b), proportion usually working at 'non-traditional' times and proportion preferring to work at such times – 2007

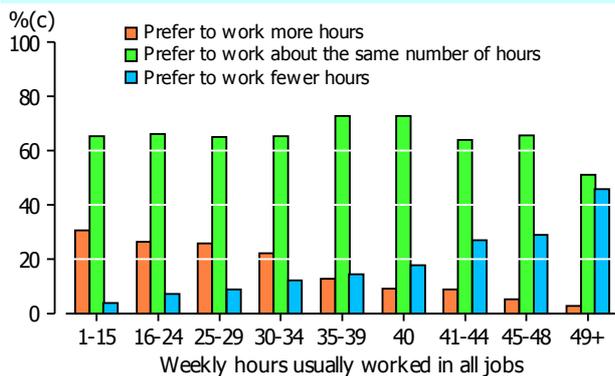


(a) Those usually working less than an hour a week in all jobs are excluded from this graph and all associated text.

(b) Those who are a contributing family worker in their main job are excluded from this graph and all associated text.

Source: ABS 2007 Survey of Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation

Employed people(a)(b), satisfaction with number of hours usually worked per week – 2007



- (a) Those usually working less than an hour a week in all jobs are excluded from this graph and all associated text.
- (b) Those who are a contributing family worker in their main job are excluded from this graph and all associated text.
- (c) People who did not know which option they preferred were excluded prior to the calculation of all percentages presented in this graph and its accompanying text.

Source: ABS 2007 Survey of Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation

...too much, not enough or about the right amount of time spent working?

When it came to the number of hours they usually worked each week, about two-thirds (65%) of employed people felt they were working close to their preferred number of hours. Nevertheless, 14% of workers wanted to work more hours than they were usually working, and 21% preferred to work less hours for less money. Part-time workers who were dissatisfied with the number of hours they were working tended to want more hours, and full-time workers who were dissatisfied tended to want fewer hours.

People who only just worked full-time hours (i.e. those who usually worked between 35 and 39 hours a week) were among the most content. Only 13% wanted to spend more time working, 15% preferred to cut back their hours, and 73% felt they were spending about the right amount of time working. At the other end of the full-time spectrum, half (51%) of the people who usually worked at least 49 hours a week felt they were working about the right number of hours. While some of them (3%) actually wanted more hours, nearly half (46%) preferred to work fewer hours and accept a drop in pay.

Employed people who wanted to work fewer hours were more likely than other workers to feel that their work and family responsibilities were rarely if ever in balance (24% compared with 13%). Still, 41% of them felt that their work and family responsibilities were often if not always in balance. This reflects the many and varied main reasons for wanting to work fewer hours. Some people wanted to work less mainly

to be able to spend more time caring for children, but the single most commonly cited main reason for wanting to work fewer hours was to spend more time on social and/or recreational activities.

Looking ahead

Recent and impending developments have the potential to shape the work patterns of the future. These include legislative, attitudinal and technological changes, the emergence and decline of industries and occupations, the existence of skill shortages, and pressures to boost productivity, competition and workforce participation.

Current government policies aim to maximise workforce participation and assist workers to realise their preferred work-life balance. A labour market which offers a more diverse and flexible array of working arrangements and work patterns may improve the chances of increasing workforce participation. It may also enable workers to optimally balance paid work with other aspects of their lives.

Endnotes

- 1 For more information on how casual employment may be defined, see [Measures of Casual Employment](#) in *Australian Labour Market Statistics*, October 2008, cat. no. 6105.0, ABS, Canberra.