The Home as the Workplace: 
Developments in Homeworking in Australia

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INTRODUCTION

For the purposes of this discussion, homework is defined as officially classified employment being performed from the home. It includes those who work exclusively at home and those who perform part of their work duties from home. Homeworking is one of the most ambiguous employment arrangements since it is located where the market and non-market sectors merge. Domestic and market activity in functional terms is not distinguishable. The home can accommodate different types of economic activity, from being a location for a business to being a workplace. Interest in homeworking is increasing as a result of IT developments and their potential to restructure the traditional relationship between work and an official workplace. Homeworking is largely connected to small business operations from the home and with traditional outsourcing arrangements in manufacturing. It is manufacturing employment, especially clothing and textiles, which has captured the publicity and the attention of trade unions with respect to employment conditions and wage standards. Homeworking largely takes place in an unregulated workplace. This raises a number of issues including health and safety and worker’s compensation. Homeworking also blurs the distinction between market and non-market activities. The employment status of homeworkers is often ambiguous. Homeworking also offers employers the potential to restructure the workforce and to reduce employment overheads. Finally, a distinction needs to be made between production and employment at home.

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The number of homeworkers is growing in Australia. Its growth does appear to be in part associated with developments in telecommuting, yet it remains largely ambiguous in terms of its legal status, its regulation and its link to formal employment arrangements. Overall, around 20 percent of the workforce engage in homework, though over half combine homework with work elsewhere. Homework is not domestic housework given the conventions that govern the classification of productive activity and employment. However, these conventions are becoming less supportable given the shifts occurring between the household, private, public and not-for-profit sectors in the allocation of economic activity. These shifts highlight the arbitrary nature of conventional employment and production classification. Nevertheless, the ambiguity surrounding homework means that it has generally been under-researched, neglected in public policy and neglected in employment regulations. This paper analyses and reviews homework developments in Australia.

The first task is to identify and conceptualize homework, highlighting its ambiguity and its underrepresentation in official employment surveys. The article then discusses the organization, payment systems and regulations surrounding homework. For reasons outlined, homework is largely unregulated and offers a domain for shifting costs and regulatory requirements outside of the workplace. The trends and developments in homeworking in Australia are then reviewed. In particular the discussion looks at the characteristics of homeworkers and the characteristics of homework. It also reviews some sketchy evidence on why people engage in homeworking arrangements. There follows a discussion of telecommuting and the impact of IT on homeworking arrangements in Australia. The analysis then discusses the position of homeworking in the ongoing spatial and intertemporal restructuring of work.

**HOMEWORK: WHAT IS IT? HOW MANY FORMS ARE THERE? WHY IS IT ARBITRARY AND AMBIGUOUS?**

There is no clear definition of homework. This is due to the performance of market-based and non-market work from home together with home-based work supplementing employment elsewhere. Even the home is an ambiguous concept. Officially, homework is not the sum of persons working at home. It is the sum of persons performing officially classified employment duties from home. The home can be a workplace for official and unofficial work, the distinction being a matter of convention. The ambiguity of homework, and indeed of the production boundaries differentiating formal and informal work, has been emphasized by the shift of production from the home to market sector: take-away food, restaurants, childcare, gardening and professional cleaning. Indeed, there have been very large shifts in activity across the sectors through the privatization of public-sector activities and through the contractualization of the not-for-profit sector to undertake activities in health, education, aged care and employment services from both the private and public sectors. Since many small business operations are based at the home there is often ambiguity surrounding the participation of family members in home-based businesses.

What is the home? This in itself is ambiguous. Is there separation between the home and workplace in the case of a family run farm? Is there separation between home and work where the business and the home share the same premises e.g., retailing downstairs and living accommodation upstairs. These issues are compounded by IT and communications developments where the home can become a business base for production and business away from the home. In addition to the ambiguities associated with official production and employment boundaries, homeworking itself includes a variety of different arrangements:

a. **status:** homeworkers can be employers, own-account workers, unpaid family business workers and employees – homeworking takes in all employment arrangements

b. **location:** homeworking can exclusively take place in the home, between the home and another workplace, or between the home and many workplaces – it can be part of multiple locations of work – a business operation can be home-based but production and employment can take place outside of the home

c. **hours:** employment at home can be on a full-time, part-time, temporary, irregular or fixed-term basis

d. **production relations:** home workers can be full-service providers, contracted to provide an input for some other productive activity, or an integral part of production in an external workplace

e. **systems of payment:** wage, salary, profit share, commission, piece rates or in-kind payments

Developments in IT have opened up the possibilities for extending the range of activities and occupations that can engage in home-based employment. These range from clerical services through to professional services such as architecture and the law. This has given rise to the phenomenon of telecommuting – maintaining
establish their rights and entitlements. Also it is difficult for trade unions
to collectivize and organize homeworkers due to their isolation, being located outside
of an establishment and having ambiguous employment status.

Second, there are profound difficulties in enforcing any applicable regulations.
It is difficult to identify the workplace and to gain access to homeworking
arrangements. In some cases, the work arrangements may be designed to avoid
regulations (Luz 1992). Where homework is additional or ancillary to employment
at an external establishment, there is scope for extending working hours and the
times of work outside of collective agreements and for avoiding overheads associated
with occupational health and safety regulation, and workers compensation coverage.
The advent of IT-based employment away from the workplace has in many cases
post-dated regulations that are based on "traditional" homeworking arrangements
(EIRR 1990).

In Australia, regulatory issues associated with homework have been dominated
by outwork in the clothing, footwear and textile sector (Weller 1998). Media
attention to "sweat-shop" employment conditions, the employment of child labour and
onerous working conditions have led to an extension of employment regulations to
such workers. However, supervision and enforcement remain an issue that has only
progressed through the publicity and exposure associated with compliance labeling
of clothing products in retail outlets (Burgess and Macdonald 1998). The trade
union campaigns against exploitative clothing outwork have been successful in
recruiting consumers into action in accord with retailers who wish to present a
public face as responsible corporate citizens. In general, those operations outside of
regulatory guidelines are often small business operating at the boundaries of
regulations and the law in a range of areas including labor, production, the
environment and taxation. The state government of New South Wales has recently
announced the establishment of an Ethical Clothing Trades Council to protect the
employment conditions of clothing outworkers (Humphries 2001).

Across awards and agreements, there appears to be relatively little regulation of
work at home. The major exceptions are the clothing industry and parts of the
public service. The clothing industry was noted for the breaches and "blatant
evasion" of award conditions (Australian Industrial Relations Commission 1987:
26). Concern for the conditions of clothing outworkers resulted in an industrial
commission case in 1987. The judge noted that
the remuneration and treatment of generally of tens of thousand of persons performing
work in the clothing trade as "outdoor workers" is scandalous and represents a serious
affront to the moral and social conscience of the community. The present situation

THE REGULATION OF HOMEWORK

The regulation of homework generally falls into production regulation and
employment regulation. Production regulation includes laws relating to
environmental protection, health regulations, planning permission and product
standards. As a generalization, home-production is in theory subject to the same
regulations as govern official establishment production. Nevertheless, since there is
multiple use of the home as a residence and as a workplace there exists some scope
for home production to evade official regulations that govern employment and/or
to be subject to fewer inspections or less strict enforcement of regulations as would
govern official establishments. The home provides a screen behind which
unregulated production can be carried out.

International surveys of homeworking highlight the diversity in the type and
extent of regulations (European Industrial Relations Review (EIRR): 1990) together
with the differences in the extent to which regulations are enforceable. In the main
there are two fundamental problems associated with homeworking. First, clearly
establishing their status in labour law. This makes it difficult to establish rights and
protections but can also limit the effectiveness of collective organization and
coverage. This problem arises since the type of work carried out at home is often
associated with small business activities or with sub-contracting and third-party
contractual arrangements. Similarly, the ambiguity of the location can lead to
homework operating outside of the regulations governing employment. Many
home-workers have an ambiguous employment status, hence it is difficult to

This problem no longer exists in the context of "on-site" homeworking arrangements.
When homeworkers are called upon to work at the workplace they are covered by
regulations governing employment and have the right to make complaints under
different regulations. In this way, homeworkers are subject to the same regulatory
framework as employees. However, in the context of "off-site" homeworking arrange-
mements, the relationship is often characterized by a lack of control over the
workplace. This results in a situation where homeworkers do not have the same
rights and obligations as employees.

The question of homeworkers' rights and obligations is a complex one. It is not
only a matter of whether homeworkers are employees, but also of the extent to
which homeworkers are protected by regulations governing employment. This is
especially important in the context of "off-site" homeworking arrangements where
homeworkers do not have the same rights and obligations as employees.

The regulation of homeworking raises a number of important issues. First, the
diversity in the type and extent of regulations is a matter of concern. It is important
to ensure that homeworkers are subject to the same regulatory framework as
employees. Second, the ambiguity of the location can lead to homework operating
outside of the regulations governing employment. This raises the question of
whether homeworkers should be subject to the same regulations as employees. Finally,
the relationship between homeworkers and employers is characterized by a lack
of control over the workplace. This raises the question of whether homeworkers
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reveals a serious failure of the system of industrial regulation to protect one of the most vulnerable and insecure sections of the community (AIRC 1987: 6).

The result was an award that covered outworkers in the industry. The current Federal Clothing Trades Award specifies that all outworkers are entitled to all the wages, terms and conditions of those working in factories and contains special provisions relating to record keeping by the employer. There must be a written agreement with the outworker regarding hours of work. Regulations for outworkers only appear in the Clothing Trades Award, with an abbreviated version in the Felt Hatting Industry Award (AIRC F0010 1999) and Dry Cleaning Industry Award (D1330 2000).

Home-based work is the term used in awards and agreements which seek to introduce or regulate homework, especially in the clerical and information technology areas. Most of these agreements are in the public sector or organizations which are partially government-funded such as universities. Less than one per cent of awards and agreements deal with home-based work. The standard agreement relates to an employee who has received formal approval to perform all or part of their working hours from their private residence. Their status is regarded as the same as an employee who works in the office and all relevant agreements, legislation and policies apply to them. Strict approval requirements are contained in the award or agreement. The work environment has to comply, "as far as is reasonably practicable" with occupational health and safety laws and the employer provides and maintains the equipment needed for the performance of duties (AIRC H0390 1995). Some agreements recognize implicitly that an employee may wish to work from home because of childcare and acknowledge that suitable arrangements have to exist: "a home-based work arrangement is not a substitute for dependent care. The employer has the responsibility to ensure the home-based work arrangement is appropriate to the employee's domestic circumstances" (AIRC A3756 1999).

A final area of work at home "which has some degree of regulation" involves information systems employees who can perform systems maintenance work from home via modem and computer. It is labelled in one agreement "call out worked at home" and in some cases the employee will be paid at overtime rates for this work (AIRC W0045 1999).

However, beyond the "traditional" form of homeworking there has been very little collective or regulatory activity associated with employment rights and conditions. In general production regulation (safety, environment and planning codes) is more strictly enforced than labour codes given the resources for enforcement available through state environmental regulatory authorities, occupational health and safety regulators and local councils enforcing health, environmental and planning regulations.

Potentially homeworking is the ultimate form of labor flexibility. Hours, conditions, over-heads, regulations and all employment conditions are not issues that restrict homeworking employment. On this characteristic, homeworking offers employers considerable scope for introducing a range of flexibilities into the employment contract and for reinforcing the managerial prerogative. There is the possibility that homework could be used to circumvent collective agreements and a range of regulations from hours of employment through to workers compensation. In addition, due to the problems associated with regulation and enforcement of regulations, homeworking is associated with illegal and clandestine activities.

TRENDS IN HOMEWORKING IN AUSTRALIA

There is very little in the way of extensive and ongoing data on homeworking in Australia. In comparison with official workplace-based employment, the information on homework is extremely limited. There have been occasional private surveys and case studies (Allan, Brosnan and Walsh 1999; Brosnan and Thornewaite 1998) looking at particular aspects of homework. In the monthly Labour Force Survey, the classification of "unpaid, contributing family business worker" is a residual, derived from the difference between the total workforce and all other forms of employment arrangements. Since the mid-1980s, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has conducted an irregular supplementary homeworking survey with the monthly labour force survey.

Homeworking surveys were conducted by the ABS (Catalogue 6275.0) for 1989, 1992 and 1995. In 1995 around one quarter of the workforce were engaged in some form of homeworking. For the three years of the supplementary survey, homeworking growth has largely tracked employment growth. In 1995 only 16 per cent of homeworkers exclusively worked from home, 74 per cent worked fewer hours at home than elsewhere and 10 per cent worked more hours at home than elsewhere. Overall, less than 5 per cent of the workforce exclusively work at home. In general, the extent of homeworking is underestimated for four reasons. First, in many small businesses, often run by own-account workers, there is often home support for the business from clerical support to receptionist support (especially with the spread of mobile phones). Unrecorded spouse and family labor from the one often support account workers (Burgess 1991). Second, the survey excludes
children. Again there is the expectation that family business and own-account operations receive some home support from child labor. Third, farmers and people who work less than one hour per week at home and people who work from home but spend most of their working time away from home are not included in the home work count. Fourth, second jobs for multiple jobholders are not included in the count of the location of primary jobs.

The ABS published a survey for 2000. This is now entitled Locations of Work and differs from earlier surveys in that it includes farmers, multiple job holders and those who worked at another person's home (not their own). This later survey is not comparable to the earlier survey. Previous surveys defined homeworkers as those who performed most of their work from home. The more recent survey defines homeworkers as those who worked all or most hours at home plus those who had an arrangement with their employer to work at home. The broad results of the 2000 survey are summarized in table 1.

Table 1
Locations of Work, Australia, 2000 ('000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of workforce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worked at home</td>
<td>1794</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked less hours at home than elsewhere</td>
<td>1102</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked all or most hours at home</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second jobs at home</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>32.3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had arrangements with employer to work at home</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>3.8**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed at home—worked all or most hours plus had arrangements with employer to work at home</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* as percentage of second jobs.
** as percentage of employees.
ABS, Catalogue 6275.0. Locations of Work.

Around one fifth of all workers perform some work at home (table 1). Of these workers around two thirds worked fewer hours at home than elsewhere. Those classified as homeworkers make up slightly more than 10 per cent of the workforce. In the case of second jobs, nearly one third of second jobs are home-based.

Homeworkers are concentrated in a few industries with agriculture and property and business services dominating (see table 2). They have a high non-employee status. For employees working at home, they are more likely to be non-unionized and employed under casual conditions than employees located in an official workplace. In Australia, casual employment is associated with those employed for short periods of engagement that result in them not qualifying for standard entitlements (e.g., holidays) or protection (e.g., unfair dismissal) (see Burgess and Campbell 1998).
While the gender mix is approximately equal, women are more likely to be part-time and to have a different occupational mix (especially high clerical representation) and a slightly different industry mix (see Table 2). One anomaly is the high female representation in construction, a male-dominated industry. The explanation is that construction also has a high concentration of small businesses that are supported by family-based homeworkers, largely women, who perform clerical duties. Home-based work is dominated by micro-business activity. The dominant status of own-account arrangements means that much homeworking is outside of trade unions and collective agreements together with regulations governing employees. Those who are employees also have relatively low union density and high casual intensity. Overall, the status of homeworkers and the fluidity of their status contribute to the problems of enforcing labour regulations and to their generally poor employment conditions.

REASONS FOR WORKING AT HOME

In terms of why people work at home there are two related considerations: first, the degree of choice and discretion associated with homeworking arrangements; second, whether the homework is being driven by the worker or by external agents, including contractors and employers. While homeworking possesses a number of attractions surrounding the flexibility of working arrangements, the reality may be that homework is imposed due to the lack of alternative employment arrangements or as a matter of necessity in supporting a home-based business. For women in particular, homework may be a necessity imposed by childcare needs or the requirements of supporting a family or spouse-run business from the home. Likewise, homework may be the preferred employment arrangement of employers as a result of its cost and regulatory advantages.

For home workers there are several potential advantages associated with homework:

a. more flexibility with respect to work hours
b. less stressful and more relaxing work environment
c. lower overheads and costs in the case of home-based businesses
d. an increased ability to combine work with domestic and caring duties
e. time and monetary savings associated with no travel to work
f. more independence over work arrangements and time arrangements

What are the potential disadvantages for the homeworker?

- working outside of a regulated workplace – OH&S, trade union representation
- loss of social contact through work
- being on call for long and unsociable hours
- loss of leisure hours
- low earnings
- lack of control or discretion over work

Family business, flexible working arrangements and catch-up on work from elsewhere are the main reasons for homework (Table 3). Childcare and family reasons are much more important for women, but this is not overall an important reason for working at home.

Table 3
Main Reasons for Working at Home 2000 ('000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Reason</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To operate own business</td>
<td>230.2</td>
<td>243.9</td>
<td>474.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted home office/no rent</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>69.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare/family</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible working arrangements</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>107.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To catch up on work</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>150.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition of employment</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>93.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>503.3</td>
<td>476.9</td>
<td>980.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS FOR EMPLOYEES WORKING AT HOME

Standing (1999: 109) comments that homeworkers are “highly exploitable, are paid low wages, have no union protection or coverage by protective regulations and are easily pushed into economic inactivity.” This is reinforced by the analysis of Felstead and Jewson (1999: ch. 6) who document a consistent picture of low pay, little protection and considerable insecurity in employment. Home-based outwork
in the clothing and textile industry is the most publicized form of exploitative
homework (Weller 1998). However, it represents only a small overall component of
homework.

In terms of standard conditions of employment such as superannuation (pen-
sion) coverage, workers compensation coverage and leave entitlements,
homeworking employees are much less likely to receive these benefits than
employees located at a regular workplace (ABS, Catalogues 6275.0; 6310.0). This
reflects the previously mentioned prevalence of casual employment conditions for
homeworking employees. Compared with employees at a regular workplace,
homeworking employees are less likely to be covered by trade union membership
and to have non-wage conditions as a result of their casual employment status.
They are more likely to receive a part-time income for which they are paid an
hourly wage rate. The picture is consistent with the overview provided by Felstead
and Jewson (1999: ch. 6) of a cycle of low levels of protection and collectivization,
low pay and poor conditions. While in theory employees are subject to minimum
entitlements and conditions, the reality is that for homeworkers it is difficult to
enforce regulations. There is also the possibility that some of the own-account
workers are surrogate employees who are located outside of the regulatory
framework governing employee conditions.

Telework and Homework

As with homework, telework is very ambiguous and diverse. Not all telework
takes place in the home. It can be conducted at organized work places. It can take
place across a number of workplaces or between workplaces. Telework relies on the
existence of an electronic communications network to link workplaces, to link the
worker and the workplace and to link the home and the workplace. As with
homework, telework is diverse and takes place in a range of contextual situations
(Diamond and Lafferty 2000: 119). As a generalization, we know that the capacity
to undertake telework is increasing with the developments in and applications of
IT, and we know that there is also a growing potential to link the home and the
workplace.

In the context of the home, telework is another form of homework. However,
it is more likely to involve the combining of home-based and external workplace-
based work. Telework allows the employee to substitute home-based for external
workplace-based work, to substitute paid work for unpaid work, or to extend the
hours of paid and unpaid work. The available evidence suggests that telework fits

into the employment arrangements of those home-based workers who do not
exclusively work at home. Once again there is limited official data on telework
provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics through its survey of Use of the
Internet by Households (Catalogue 8147.0). There have been very few surveys of
telework in Australia with the latest indicating that its take-up is very limited
(Lafferty and Whitehouse 2000).

For November 2000, 7 per cent of adults had an agreement with their employer
to work at home on an ongoing basis. The major technology that enabled the
employee to work from home was a mobile phone (see Table 4). This is interesting,
given that 8.9 per cent of adults in 1998 indicated that they had a telework agree-
ment with their employer. In terms of Internet access, the survey suggests that there
is a strong association between access and occupation and income. Those on higher
incomes are more likely to have access and professionals, clerks and para-
professionals are the three main occupational groups with access.

Table 4

Adults Working from Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage (% of total adults)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have an agreement with employer to work from home on an ongoing basis</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of these adults, technologies used to allow employment from home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to employer’s computer system via modem</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of portable PC</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of floppy disks/CD roms containing work information</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phone</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The above data is problematic since it is confined to employees. In addition, we
do not know the extent of exclusive homeworking associated with telecommuting
as opposed to performing work across workplaces.

Brewer and Hensher (1999) reported on an Australian travel survey of
commuters with respect to alternative work arrangements. Their findings were:

a. over 60 per cent of respondents had no flexible work arrangements
b. the most prevalent forms of flexible arrangements were flexi-time and a
compressed work week
c. telecommuting opportunities were present in less than 2 per cent of companies

The method of transport selected and the timing of the survey limits the validity of this survey. Nevertheless the evidence is consistent with the survey by Lafferty and Whitehouse (2000).

However, the 1995 Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (Moorehead et al. 1998) reported that there was next to nothing on homework and telecommuting in any of the surveyed employment conditions across all industries. The 1999 Federal agreements database indicates that for the 1997-1999 period between 1 and 2 per cent of registered agreements contained provisions for home-based work (Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB) 2000). The clear implication is that in formal agreements there is a lack of reference to teleworking and homeworking arrangements. It is surprising that while working-time flexibility is at the top of the list of agreement content, this does not extend to work beyond the workplace (Burgess 1998). What all this implies is that telework probably takes the form of individual and unwritten agreements between employer and employee. It may be a means of completing projects and work assignments. How much choice there is present in such arrangements is not clear, nor is it clear as to whether they involve the substitution of home-based work for workplace-based work or whether it involves an extension of working hours. What is clear, as with homework, is that it escapes regulatory scrutiny.

The expectation is that most of these external working arrangements are not formalized. They are associated with sub-contracting, with independent businesses and with informal working arrangements that do not enter into formal awards. Also, telecommuting would be an important element of home-based employment in the small business sector. Telecommuting is also developing through contracting out and the use of sub-contractors and small businesses. The formal survey and agreements data will miss these developments since they are employee- and formal arrangements-based. However, there is the expectation that employers are facilitating external work by employees since additional forms of flexibility are generated:

a. the work period can be extended
b. employees can be on call
c. overhead costs can be reduced
d. commuting time can be reduced
e. regulations can be circumvented
f. penalty rates can be avoided

THE BREAKDOWN OF TIME AND SPACE CONSTRANTS IN EMPLOYMENT

At the social level, work can be decentralized and commuting times and costs reduced. This will lead to energy savings and less pollution and congestion in major cities. More workers in more industries and occupations can have greater choice over their working arrangements. Such choice will no longer be the domain of a privileged minority. The social savings through external working arrangements could be very large. In addition, work can be better dovetailed into family commitments and working-time flexibility can improve the options for expanded life-style choices. Homework, and telecommuting in particular, offers the potential for new and more humane work arrangements that are simultaneously socially responsible (Perin 1998).

Software and hardware developments together with improving communications networks now mean that:

a. more work tasks can be performed outside the workplace
b. more home-based businesses can be established
c. the nature and configuration of the workplace can be restructured
d. workers can be easily monitored away from the workplace

These new possibilities mean that it is possible to work anywhere and at any time. The business can operate continuously through space and across time. The location of the workforce can be more fragmented and geographically diverse, while work can be performed continuously 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. External work offers extensive flexibility possibilities, the means to substantially reduce overhead costs associated with traditional employment arrangements and the opportunity to evade employment regulations. The dark side to the potential benefits of telecommuting and the extension of home-based work is the loss of choice, the loss of entitlement and the extension of working hours.

In Australia, the pace of employment restructuring is extensive. There has been a breakdown in standard employment arrangements (ACIRRT 1999). This has been manifested through the growing share of part-time and casual employment (Burgess and Campbell 1998), the polarization of working hours between short hours and very long hours (the under-employed and the over-employed) (Burgess 1998) and between those with standard employment benefits and those with few or nil employment benefits (Burgess and Campbell 1998). Time and space are now becoming more diverse and fragmented in describing employment. Many workers
are now working long and unpredictable hours, are working without over-time payments (Campbell 1997) and are working outside of the central workplace.

A growing bi-modal distribution of working hours in Australia has been highlighted in the literature (ACIRRT 1999; Campbell 1997). In particular the growth in part-time employment has meant that average working hours per week have declined but, against this average, weekly hours for full-time and part-time workers have increased (ABS, Catalogue 6203.0). In particular there are the "over-worked" full-timers, the ABS suggesting that around 40 per cent of males and 30 per cent of all workers are working 45 hours plus per week – this turns out to be about 60 per cent of all full-time workers. The trend is towards a growing proportion of both males and females working very long hours. In addition, there are certain occupational groups prone to extremely long working-hours, for example 33 per cent of managers and administrators, 16 per cent of professionals and 15 per cent of tradesworkers worked more than 60 hours per week in 1998. Between 1989 and 1995 average hours worked per week declined from 34.7 to 34.6, yet the average hours for full-time workers increased by one hour per week and for part-time workers by 30 minutes per week (ABS, Catalogue 6203.0).

The standard or norm of hours is giving way to divergence in working hours. Over 1988-1998 the proportions of workers working part-time and very long (45+) hours both increased. The divergence is away from the standard working week towards part-time hours and very long full-time hours.

Homework should be put in the context of the breakdown in the time and place framework governing standard employment. Traditional forms of homework and traditional reasons for homework are still present. However, the growth in partial homeworking and the developments in telecommuting suggest that more workers are now locating work across two or more workplaces. Telecommuting possesses many positive attributes for transforming work and working life. However, within the context of an environment in which standard employment arrangements have been systematically eroded, the potential is there for telework to contribute towards the erosion of employment conditions. This means not only extending the time span of work but also spreading the space of work. To date the evidence from formal agreements suggests these possibilities are being slowly taken up. However the indirect evidence implies the extension of work through time and space via informal agreements.

CONCLUSIONS

Homeworking is an ambiguous and emerging form of employment in Australia. Around 20 percent of the workforce work from home. Just over half of these workers combine homework with work at another workplace. The number of households linked to the Internet is increasing and we suspect that telework from the home is expanding, though the evidence is not conclusive. Telework arrangements facilitate an extension of working hours and do not figure in formal enterprise agreements.

For those who are homeworking employees there are low rates of unionization, low protection and relatively poor employment conditions. Regulatory action on teleworking has largely concentrated on clothing outwork with its potential for "sweatshop" employment arrangements. Beyond this there has been little in the way of regulating homework. Indeed, one of the features of homework is the lack of regulations or the difficulty of enforcing regulations if they do exist.

Homework offers potential to improve lifestyle and to enhance labor flexibility. Much home-based employment is connected to the operation of small businesses. For employees the home is being used to "catch up" or do additional work beyond that performed in an official workplace. The extent of home-based work that is part of employment at a regular workplace is much greater than indicated by the homeworking provisions contained in collective agreements. This suggests that much homeworking involves informal and unregulated arrangements between employer and employee. To date, the deregulation of place in employment arrangements has not matched the deregulation of time in Australian employment arrangements. However, the use of IT to facilitate this process is in its infancy.

REFERENCES


Australian Bureau of Statistics. Use of the Internet by Householders, Catalogue 8147.0.


La présente étude procède à l'analyse du travail à domicile en Australie. Tel que défini officiellement, le travail à domicile est l'exercice d'un emploi à partir de la résidence. Toutefois, il est une des modalités d'emploi les plus ambiguës qui soient, puisqu'il se situe au confluent indistinct du secteur du marché de l'emploi et celui de son absence. En effet, au plan du fonctionnement, on ne peut distinguer l'activité domestique du marché du travail. Le domicile peut accueillir différents types d'activité économique : être simplement l'emplacement d'une entreprise jusqu'à devenir un lieu de travail. L'intérêt pour le travail à domicile va grandissant et s'inscrit dans les progrès des TI et de la capacité de ces dernières à restructurer le rapport traditionnel entre le travail et un lieu d'emploi officiel. En Australie, le nombre de travailleurs et de travailleuses à domicile croît et cette croissance semble en partie associée à l'expansion du télétravail, mais le travail à domicile demeure encore très ambigu pour ce qui est de son statut juridique, sa réglementation et son lien avec des conditions de travail explicites. Environ 20 p. 100 de la population active australienne travaille à domicile, dont plus de la moitié conjugué travail à domicile et emplois dans un autre lieu.

Dans cette étude, avant de passer à l'organisation, aux systèmes de rémunération et aux règlements entourant le travail à domicile, ce mode de travail est d'abord défini et conceptualisé, en soulignant son ambiguïté et sa sous-répresentation dans les sondages officiels sur l'emploi. Les tendances et l'évolution du travail à domicile en Australie sont ensuite examinées. L'analyse porte en particulier sur les caractéristiques des travailleurs et travailleuses à domicile, sur les caractéristiques de leur travail et sur certaines raisons générales qui les motivent à s'engager dans les conditions associées à ce travail. Vient ensuite une analyse du télétravail, de l'incidence des TI sur les modalités du travail à domicile et de la place de celui-ci dans la restructuration spatiale et temporelle dont le travail fait actuellement l'objet. L'étude se termine par l'examen des implications de l'évolution du travail à domicile en Australie.