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# Quality and Quantity in Work–Home Conflict: The Nature and Direction of Effects of Work on Employees' Personal Relationships and Partners

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## Abstract

*Modern working patterns can directly and adversely affect family lives and personal relationships. Using quasi-longitudinal survey data from Queensland, this study confirms qualitative evidence that long hours of work, weekend work, irregular starting times, and high-pressure, long-hours cultures contribute to deteriorating home relationships and to dissatisfaction among partners. This study uniquely contrasts the quality impacts of work with the consequences of work quantity, indicating that the former is much more influential in modulating work-life conflict and satisfaction variables. Claims that long and increased working hours reflect the use of work as a refuge from home are shown to be unfounded.*

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*The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not represent those of their employing organisations.*

## Introduction

The Industrial Revolution gave rise to a parallel revolution in the home. Heavy infrastructure investment in the textile mills in the 18th and 19th centuries and the invention of the electric light began pushing factory working hours into the night and, simultaneously, financial pressure on the worker to take the 'day job' home started to spread across Europe. Labour reform in the 1890s may have resulted in prohibitions on overtime and night labour for women and children. But in Germany, for example, factory owners and factory workers alike subverted the laws. One Düsseldorf garment factory famously saw its staff through the gates to their home, under the full view of inspectors, at 8 p.m. and then secretly had the workers re-enter the factory gates at 9 p.m. to begin a second full shift. For their part, in order to circumvent laws that disallowed factory workers from taking work home, some workers undertook home work from neighbouring factories (Weitz 1997). Australia meanwhile was leading the vanguard on reforms to challenge lengthening work days, with stonemasons being the first to secure what was then a revolutionary concept—the eight-hour day (Love 2006).

Australia's revolution has not lasted, with working hours increasing to levels exceeding those of its OECD comparators (Townsend *et al.* 2011). The problem is particularly pronounced for Australian wage earners working on the margin of the minimum wage. National Institute of Labour Studies analysis of Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey data suggests that employees working on the margins or below the federal minimum wage are more likely to experience long working hours (generally benchmarked at 45 hours) (Healy and Richardson 2006).

A considerable amount of rhetoric from government, unions, employer associations, and some employers on the promotion of policies to balance work and family life better emerged in the 1990s, when a Work and Family Unit was established within the Commonwealth Department of Industrial Relations (similar units were later established in some state government departments). However, rhetoric did not sit easily with evidence of increasing work intensity (Reeder 1988; Allan 1997; Morehead *et al.* 1997; Wright and Lund 1998; Allan, O'Donnell and Peetz, 1999) and increasing working hours (Campbell 2002; Pocock 2003; Watson *et al.* 2003). Data from the mid 1990s suggested increasing dissatisfaction with the balance between work and family life (Morehead *et al.* 1997, p.583; DIR 1995, p.227), with dissatisfaction being higher among employees whose weekly hours had

increased. McDowell (2004) and Pocock (2008) spoke of an 'ethic of care' that needs to develop parallel to the ethic of work, and there is mounting evidence—to which this paper adds—to suggest that there is likely to be substantial danger for legislators if they ignore the warning signs.

Much of the debate about working-time reform has centred on the contention that new working arrangements are necessary in order to overcome the rigidities of the past that made it difficult to balance work and family responsibilities. But how much is this new flexible world helping people to balance their work and personal lives? One study suggests that opportunities to 'purchase' flexibility through shorter weeks lead only to women experiencing the consequent loss in income (Lewis and Humbert 2010), but this may be only one blemish on the picture of the flexible workplace. What are the factors that influence people's satisfaction with the balance in their work and personal lives? How are interpersonal relationships affected? How does work affect home life? And in particular, how does it affect employees' partners? Or is causality in the other direction: are people who work long hours doing so to avoid unhappy home lives? Prominent writer Arlie Hochschild (1997) argued that for many people work is a refuge from home, as home increasingly resembles a factory while the workplace increasingly resembles a family. Maume and Bellas (2001) tested Hochschild's claims in a survey of over one thousand Ohio families and found little support for the claim. They observed instead that work-related factors, such as supervisor demands, better predicted long hours. In psychology, the question has been addressed by attempting to measure, independently, the impact of work and family stressors on overall well-being (Burke and Greenglass 1987; Voydanoff 1988). In sociology, to complicate matters further, the possibility has been raised that the unhappy home lives from which workers may hypothetically be escaping are a function of the way work is now constructed. Pocock (2003) suggested—based on her extensive qualitative mapping of the Australian work landscape—that as the 20th century evolved, workplaces took on some functions of community while home became the dormitory, subsidiary to work.

There is a growing body of detailed qualitative evidence on the adverse impact of increasing working hours on personal lives, backed by aggregated statistics (for example Pocock 2003; Lingard *et al.* 2007; Lingard *et al.* 2008). This paper tackles the same issues, but from a more quantitative angle, and explores the perceptions of Australian employees and their matched partners in a wide variety of work contexts.

## Research Design

Data were extracted from a survey undertaken in 2002 of employees from 15 organisations in Queensland. Table 1 contains a list of the organisations, their industry and size band, as well as the number of surveys returned and the response rates. The organisations comprised all but two of those that participated in a major qualitative and quantitative study of working-time arrangements in Queensland. They included two manufacturers, a mine, a construction company, a government department, a law-enforcement agency, a public utility, a bank, a theme park, a retailer, a law firm, a large vehicle-repair company, a trade union, a hospital, and an educational institution. The resultant participant matrix subsequently included a mixture of small, medium, and large organisations, skewed towards larger participants. There was a balance of strongly, weakly, and non-unionised workplaces and a blend of female-dominated, male-dominated, and mixed-gender workplaces. The parts of the organisations that were studied usually corresponded to either a whole workplace or to the entire organisation. In some cases it concerned a division of the organisation that encompassed more than one workplace, or particular occupational groups. In organisations where the study site included less than 200 employees, the entire workforce (excluding senior management) was exhaustively surveyed. In larger workplaces a sample of 200 employees was selected, using systematic random sampling; in all but one case, the sample was selected from a payroll list. Response rates varied substantially between organisations and were from 21 to 60 per cent. The median was 44 per cent, while the total average response rate was 42 per cent. Overall, 963 usable questionnaires were returned. The data are unweighted.

A separate partners' questionnaire was administered to canvas the effect of work-time changes upon employees' spouses and other family members. Data were obtained from 489 partners (husbands, wives, and *de facto* spouses) and were matched to the spouses in the employee survey. The employees in the survey who were 'matched' to participants in the partners' survey may have had slightly different characteristics to those who were not matched; however, generally speaking, this had no significant impact on the results. The partners' survey was much shorter and contained questions that, to varying degrees, pursued a number of salient issues and concepts that were also examined in the employee survey.

**Table 1: Summary of Organisations Included in the Survey**

Organisation	Industry	Employees in the surveyed part of the organisation	Number of surveys returned	Response rate (per cent)
A	Banking	>500	108	54
B	Tourism and hospitality	>500	93	47
C	Construction	100-199	67	35
D	Labour services	50-99	44	59
E	Public administration	>500	109	55
F	Health	200-499	56	28
G	Manufacturing	200-499	57	30
H	Printing	20-49	14	44
I	Utilities	200-499	119	60
J	Retail	100-199	41	32
K	Legal services	10-19	7	54
L	Essential services	100-199	65	38
M	Equipment maintenance	100-199	37	21
N	Education	>500	101	51
O	Mining	100-199	28	23

## Work and Personal Lives and Tensions

What impact do working-time arrangements and other aspects of work have on the work-home balance? As shown in the left-hand data column of Table 2, employees who worked 45 hours or more per week were two and a half times more likely to be dissatisfied with the balance between their work and family lives than were those who worked less than 45 hours per week. Dissatisfaction with the balance was twice as high among those who reported increased hours compared to 12 months ago, and compared to those reporting the same or fewer hours (rows 1 and 2 of Table 2).

Women were less dissatisfied than men, but only among part-time employees—there were no gender differences in satisfaction among full-time employees (row 3). Increases over the past 12 months in reported job stress, how tired respondents felt at work, and how long it took for them to recover from work were associated with greater dissatisfaction with the work-life balance (rows 4 to 6).

We were interested in people's perceptions of whether their work-related level of fatigue had increased over the past year. We therefore combined the first three items to create an index of '*fatiguing*', which had very good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.83$ )<sup>1</sup>. We used this index to assess employees' pressure-related responses to increases in work duration and (or) intensity to which we refer later. Some 49 per cent of our full-time sample showed an increase in fatiguing, with 24 per cent showing what we term a 'high increase', indicated by a 'gone up' response to all three items (Anderson, 1994).

**Table 2: Influences on Dissatisfaction with Work and Family Balance and Deteriorating Home Relationships**

	<b>Proportion of employees dissatisfied with the balance between work and their personal lives (per cent)</b>	<b>Proportion of employees reporting deterioration in how well they get on with people at home (per cent)</b>
<b>1. Normal working hours</b>		
45 or more per week	43**	17*
Under 45 per week	18	9
<b>2. Gender and hours</b>		
Male full-time	27	12
Female full-time	24	10
Male part-time	28	7
Female part-time	13	10
<b>3. Change in weekly working hours (full-time employees)</b>		
Gone up	40**	20**
Same	19	7
Gone down	22	8
<b>4. Change in job stress over the last 12 months</b>		
Gone up	36**	16**
Same	16	6
Gone down	11	3
<b>5. Change in how tired you feel at work over the last 12 months</b>		
Gone up	40*	18**
Same	13	6
Gone down	15	3
<b>6. Change in how long you take to recover from work over the last 12 months</b>		
Gone up	45**	21**
Same	13	6
Gone down	19	3
<b>7. Work-pressure index</b>		
Relatively high	44**	20**
Medium	21	6
Relatively low	11	4
<b>8. Works on weekends (full-time employees)</b>		
Yes	37**	16*
No	22	9



9. Works at night (starts work between 5 p.m. and 4.59 a.m.)		
Yes	38**	13
No	22	10
10. Start work at same time each day (full-time employees)		
Yes	23*	14
No	30	9
11. Starting or finishing times often changed at short notice, making it difficult to arrange things in personal life		
Yes	40**	18#
No	22	10
12. Long hours are taken for granted in this organisation		
Agree	34**	15**
Disagree	13	6
13. Change in how much pressure from co-workers to work harder		
Gone up	40**	22**
Same	22	9
Gone down	20	5
14. Change in how closely watched by supervisor		
Gone up	38**	22**
Same	21	9
Gone down	22	7

Source: Employee survey

Population: All respondents in employee survey

N = 840 (column 1); 953 (column 2)

\*\* = difference significant at 1 per cent level

\* = difference significant at 5 per cent level

# = difference weakly significant at 10 per cent level

Numbers in cells indicate the proportion of respondents in the rows having the characteristics in the relevant columns.

We calculated an index of 'work pressure', as we sought information on how the pressure employees experienced at work—rather than just the number of hours—affected their home lives. This is a five-item index ( $\alpha = 0.70$ ) that captures the pressures arising from high-intensity work. Whereas our 'fatiguing' index measured respondents' perceptions of *change*, our index of work pressure was more concerned with the *level* of pressure. The items in the work-pressure index comprised responses (each on a five-point scale) to the following statements:

1. If you take time off or become sick, your work just builds up while you're away;
2. I have enough time to rest during meal breaks (inverted);
3. There should be more employees here to do the work that we do;
4. I leave on time most days (inverted); and
5. I often take work home.

For the purposes of this analysis, employees were split into three similarly sized groups according to their responses on the work-pressure index. The full-time sample had 32 per cent in the 'high pressure' category and 29 per cent are categorised as relatively 'low pressure'.

Dissatisfaction with the balance between work and personal lives was twice as high among those with high scores on the work-pressure index (row 7 of Table 2). We also observed that full-time employees who scored high on our work-pressure index were more likely to be dissatisfied with how hard they had to work than were those with medium scores on the index. They were less likely to be satisfied with how fairly they were treated at work, and more likely to disagree that all employees are treated with fairness. They were more likely to say they were dissatisfied with their job, more likely to say that they became sick more often than a year ago, and more likely to report that they felt like taking a day off more often.

It is also worth noting that—in comparison even with those with medium scores—those with high scores on the work-pressure index were also twice as likely to say that their satisfaction with their work and family balance had decreased in the past year. They were more likely to report a reduction in time spent on community activities, hobbies, gardening, sports, or domestic activities, and were less satisfied with their ability to take time off to attend to personal issues, such as school concerts, on work days. More precisely, the high-pressure group were also much more likely to agree that, 'My work responsibilities interfere with my

social life more than they should'; similarly, they were twice as likely to agree that 'I am often too tired to enjoy my time away from work properly'. They were twice as likely to say that time spent with 'people at home', or 'opportunities to have a social life' had diminished. This differential rose—when respondents were asked to estimate their ability to separate their work and non-work life—with the high-pressure group scoring three times as high on this item. Disturbingly, three times as many in this high-pressure group also reported that relationships at home had deteriorated.

A novel feature of this study was the degree to which it enabled a comparison of the impact of long and increasing working hours with that of the high-pressure and 'fatiguing' aspects of work in explaining satisfaction with the work and family balance. To enable this comparison, an ordinary least squares regression was conducted using these four variables as explanatory variables, along with a number of other controls. The control variables included whether the respondent had another job, their gender, the degree to which starting and finishing times were changed at short notice, night shifts (defined as starting work between 5 p.m. and 4.59 a.m.), the use of 'flexi-time', travelling time to work, and the presence of children. For the full equation, the Adjusted  $R^2$  was 0.30.

The predictive power of the two 'fatiguing' and 'pressure' variables proved to be much greater than the predictive power of the 'hours' variables. Removing the level and change variables on hours reduced the explained variance by 6 per cent, whereas removing the level (pressure) and change (fatiguing) variables reduced the explained variance by 42 per cent.

The times when people worked and the irregularity of their starting times were other elements that proved influential. Employees who worked on weekends and at night were significantly less satisfied with their work-family balance (rows 8 and 9 of Table 2). Full-time employees who started work at the same time each day were more satisfied than were those who did not, with the greatest dissatisfaction being felt by those who said that their starting or finishing times were often changed at short notice, making it difficult for them to shape their personal lives consistently (rows 10 and 11).

Significant relationships emerged between workplace culture and the work-family balance (rows 12 to 14 of Table 2). Workers who agreed that long hours were taken for granted in their organisation were over two and a half times more likely to be dissatisfied with their work-personal life balance than those who disagreed. The closeness of workplace supervision also increased work-personal life balance

problems. These data showed that increases in pressure from co-workers or supervisors were linked to greater dissatisfaction with the work-life balance. Some 38 per cent of those reporting an increase in how closely they were watched by their supervisor claimed deterioration in their work-life balance, as did 40 per cent of those reporting an increase in the pressure they felt from their co-workers to work harder. For workers who did not report any increase in supervision intensity, work-life dissatisfaction was much less common (21 per cent).

### **Deteriorating Home Relationships**

We analysed data on perceptions of personal and family relationships. Not surprisingly, 27 per cent of employees who reported dissatisfaction with their work-personal life balance also reported deterioration in how well they get on with people at home—compared to 4 per cent of those who were satisfied with their work-personal life balance. The results of links to other variables, shown in the right-hand data column of Table 2, follow broadly the pattern set by the data on satisfaction with the work-personal life balance.

‘Long-hours employees’—those working 45 or more hours per week—were nearly twice as likely as other employees to report deteriorating relationships. Full-time employees who reported increased hours were nearly three times more likely than the full-time workers who reported no change in hours were to report deterioration in their home relationships (rows 1 and 2 of Table 2).

Employees reporting increases in stress, tiredness, and in time spent recovering from work were around three times more likely to report deteriorating home relationships than were those who did not report increases in these indicators of fatiguing (rows 4 to 6). For full-time workers, weekend work and irregular starting times also appeared to be linked to deteriorating home relationships (rows 8 and 11).

Employees experiencing high pressure at work were three times more likely to report deterioration in their relationships at home than were those under medium pressure, and five times more likely than those under relatively low pressure. Pressure and fatiguing again proved more important in explaining poor home relationships than did the actual number of working hours (row 7 of Table 2).

Co-worker and supervisory aspects of work likewise flowed through to home relationships. Of those workers who agreed that long hours were taken for granted in their organisation, deterioration in how well they got on with people

at home was reported two and a half times more frequently than by those who disagreed. Deterioration was reported by those who were watched more closely by their supervisors three times as often as by those who were watched less closely. Those under more pressure from co-workers to work harder reported deterioration at home four times more often than did those who were under less scrutiny from co-workers.

## Partners' Perspectives

While the study included employees' perceptions of changes in their relationships with people at home, it sourced other more direct data on the impact of the employees on their partners. In many respects, the data from the partners' survey tended to mimic the data in the employee survey. For example, 25 per cent of employees in the employee survey agreed that, 'If it were possible I would like to get a job with another organisation'; and 25 per cent of the partners agreed that, 'If it were possible, I would like my [spouse] to get a job elsewhere'. Just as 22 per cent of respondents in the employee survey reported a decline in their involvement in community activities over the previous year, so too did 23 per cent of partners report a decline in their involvement in community activities. As might be expected, while 31 per cent of respondents in the employee sample agreed with the statement that, 'My work responsibilities interfere with my social life more than they should', a smaller (though still substantial) proportion of respondents in the partners' survey (26 per cent) agreed that, 'My [spouse's] work responsibilities affect my social life more than they should'.

Greater differences were apparent for other variables. While 17 per cent of employee respondents were less satisfied with *their own* working hours than they were 12 months ago, 26 per cent of the partner respondents reported reduced satisfaction with *their spouses'* working hours. Similarly, while 30 per cent of employee respondents said they were spending less time with people at home than 12 months ago, 41 per cent of the partner respondents said that they were spending less time with their spouses. Thus, it can be seen that partners are, if anything, more concerned about work-life imbalances than are the employees. Interestingly, partners, for their part, were also experiencing increasing hours: among the partners who were full-time employees, some 44 per cent reported an increase in working hours, with only 8 per cent reporting a decrease.

This study examined two indicators of the impact of working-time changes on partners more closely. The first was a proxy for the impact of an employee's

working arrangements on their partner's time use. This indicator sought a partner's responses to a statement indicating that their spouse's work responsibilities affect the partner's social life more than they should. This proved to be an important predictor of household stress. The second indicator was a summary measure of dissatisfaction with an employee's working arrangements. It sought the partners' responses to the proposition that if it were possible, they would like their spouse to move to another workplace.

As Table 3 shows, respondents to the partners' survey had negative views of their spouses' jobs on one or more of these measures. That is, when their spouses either (a) scored high on the 'work pressure' index or the 'fatiguing' indexes, or (b) worked 45 hours or more a week, or (c) worked on weekends (rows 1 to 4 of Table 3). Partners' responses also showed the same pattern (with respect to the impact on their own social life) in cases where they had children, where their spouse never received overtime or time off in lieu, or had little discretion over leisure time; with respect to a preference for a spousal job change where the spouse had little say about their workload; and where their spouse did not start work at a consistent time each day (especially when start or finish times were changed at short notice) (rows 6 to 10 of Table 3).

Partners were asked a number of questions in a quasi-longitudinal analysis that enable us to assess changes that occurred over the preceding 12 months. We asked the respondents to both surveys about how they *perceived* changes over a 12-month period. Results largely followed intuitive patterns. Where full-time respondents in the employee survey indicated that their working hours had increased over the past year, 44 per cent of the partners were less satisfied than they were previously with their spouses' working hours; only 14 per cent were more satisfied. When spouses' working hours had decreased, only 20 per cent of the partners were less satisfied with their spouses' hours and 40 per cent were more satisfied.

**Table 3: Employee Characteristics and Relationship with Partners' Dissatisfaction**

<b>Employee characteristics</b>	<b>Proportion of partners agreeing that their spouse's work responsibilities affect their own social life more than they should (%)</b>	<b>Proportion of partners agreeing that if it were possible, they would like their spouse to get a job elsewhere (%)</b>
<b>1. Work-pressure index</b>		
Relatively high	49**	39*
Medium	21	25
Relatively low	14	17
<b>2. Change in 'fatiguing' index</b>		
High increase	43**	37*
Other	23	23
<b>3. Normal working hours</b>		
45 or more per week	45**	37#
Under 45 per week	21	22
<b>4. Works on weekends</b>		
Yes	42**	34*
No	23	24
<b>5. Has children</b>		
Yes	32*	ns
No	24	
<b>6. Receipt of overtime or time off in lieu when working extra hours</b>		
Never	39*	ns
Other	24	
<b>7. Start work at the same time each day</b>		
Yes	23#	21**
No	36	36
<b>8. Starting or finishing times are often changed on short notice, making it difficult to arrange things in personal life</b>		
Yes	64**	45**
No	23	24

## 9. How much say over your workload

None or some	ns	29*
Quite a lot or a great deal		16

## 10. How much say over when you take time off (for example, holidays, dentist appointments)

None or some	38*	ns
Quite a lot or a great deal	21	

Source: Matched partners' survey and main employee survey

Population: Partners of matched full-time employees in the main employee survey

N = 470 (column 1); 467 (column 2)

\*\* = difference significant at 1 per cent level; \* = difference significant at 5 per cent level

# = difference weakly significant at 10 per cent level

ns = difference not significant

Numbers in cells indicate the proportions of respondents in the rows having the characteristics in the relevant columns. For example, the top left-hand cell indicates that 49 per cent of partners of 'high pressure' employees agreed that their partner's work affects their own social life more than it should.



Of respondents to the partners' survey, 36 per cent indicated that the stress they that felt at home had increased over the previous 12 months, with only 13 per cent reporting a reduction in stress. Home-related stress as perceived by partners was influenced by many factors, only some of which were related to their own or their spouses' working arrangements. Nonetheless, factors identified in the partners' survey which were correlated with stress at home (Table 4) were examined further.

Those who now spent less time with their spouses than 12 months ago were over two and a half times more likely to report increased stress than were those who spent more time with their spouses than 12 months ago (row 1 of Table 4). Highlighting the relevance of the 'social life' indicator reported in Table 3, a similar very strong relationship emerged between home stress and reductions in partners' opportunities to have a social life (row 2 of Table 4).<sup>2</sup>

Partners reported increases in stress when they were themselves full-time employees working longer hours (row 3 of Table 4). This increase in stress was also apparent for partners who: (a) had children aged between five and 12 years, (b) reported declining satisfaction in their own or their spouses' working hours, and (c) reported decreases in their time spent on community activities or hobbies, gardening, or sports (rows 4 to 8).

In cross-tabulations, changes in involvement in *domestic* activities had ambiguous effects: increases in stress were reported when such involvement had increased and also when it had decreased (row 9 of Table 4). This probably reflects different causal directions. It is reasonable to postulate that partners working longer hours on domestic activities are doing so *because* their spouse is unable to assist due to their longer working hours, and that this can erode a partner's time for leisure activities and (or) increase their stress. On the other hand, if the partner's own working hours increase, they will have less time to devote to domestic activities but they will also be more stressed.

**Table 4: Home Stress: Partners' Perspectives**

<b>Respondent characteristics</b>	<b>Proportion of partner respondents reporting an increase in stress they felt at home over the previous 12 months (per cent)</b>
<b>1. How much time you spend with your partner</b>	
Gone up	22**
Same	24
Gone down	57
<b>2. Your opportunities to have a social life</b>	
Gone up	11**
Same	30
Gone down	59
<b>3. Hours worked by respondent (full-time employees)</b>	
Gone up	50**
Same	25
Gone down	20
<b>4. Any children§</b>	
Age 5 to 12	47*
Age under 5	39
No children	29*
<b>5. Satisfaction with own hours</b>	
Gone up	26**
Same	27
Gone down	55
<b>6. Satisfaction with partner's hours</b>	
Gone up	28**
Same	31
Gone down	54
<b>7. Time spent on community activities</b>	
Gone up	26**
Same	32
Gone down	59
<b>8. Involvement in hobbies, gardening, or sports</b>	
Gone up	31**
Same	30
Gone down	51

### 9. Own involvement in domestic activities (for example washing, cooking)

Gone up	50**
Same	26
Gone down	57

Source: Partners' survey

Population: All respondents in partners' survey (except row 1 which is full-time employees in the partners' survey). N = 264 (row 1); 489 (rows 2 onwards); ns not significant

§ The first two rows overlap (that is you can have both a child aged less than 5 years, and a child aged over 5). Significance tests reported relate to the first and third categories versus their respective counterfactuals (that is having versus not having 5 to 12 year old children; having versus not having any children).

Numbers in cells indicate the proportions of respondents in the rows having the characteristics in the relevant columns. For example, the top left-hand cell indicates that 50 per cent of partners whose own hours had increased reported an increase in the stress they feel at home compared to 12 months earlier.

## Discussion

The Australian culture of over-work is destroying personal lives. This may seem a bold statement, but the data, when read in conjunction with Pocock's (2003) authoritative study, *The Work-Life Collision*, make it difficult to draw a contrary conclusion. Our data show that many aspects of modern working patterns are directly and adversely affecting family lives and personal relationships. It is also clear—as Pocock (2003) has pointed out—that work is taking more from life than life is taking from work; the interference is largely (if not exclusively) unidirectional.

This study is useful in distinguishing the impact of pressure in a work context from the issue of hours themselves; in other words, there is a quality as well as a quantity perspective. The study indicates that the adverse impact that long hours have on the balance between work and personal lives is not simply a result of the extra time that employees are away from their home environment. Rather, the adverse impact appears to stem from the work pressures that employees experience as a consequence of the long hours, a pressure which they then bring home with them as baggage. Work intensity has been identified in the literature as a variable used for independently predicting well-being outcomes for women (Floro 1995) and adolescents (Safron, Schulenberg and Bachman 2001). Our results suggest that the intensification of work may create even more problems than extensive working hours do.

Pressure and fatiguing were more important in explaining poor home relationships than were the actual number of working hours. This finding is important, because it again counters the suggestion that unhappiness at home is causing people to work longer hours. If this life-work conflict (as opposed to work-life conflict) were a common reality for participants, then one would anticipate stronger linkages between home relationships and working hours than between home relationships and pressure or fatiguing. Someone who is looking for respite would not choose a haven that increased their stress levels. And if it were the case that 'for many people long hours of work are not imposed on them by uncaring employers, but are actually the result of workers exercising their preferences' (Wooden 2007), we would not expect to see such a (relatively) high dissatisfaction with their work-family balance among the workers with the (relatively) long hours.

The quasi-longitudinal data presented earlier militate against the argument that workers are happy to endure long hours to avoid dissatisfaction at home. If this were the case, and if those respondents in the current study working long hours were happy to do so because it meant that they had to spend less time at home with their spouse, we would expect them to be as satisfied with their balance between work and personal lives as are those working shorter hours. Instead, our data suggest that those who experienced an increase in working hours—compared with their self-reported working hours one year previously—experienced twice the dissatisfaction with their work-life balance as did their peer comparators. This result cannot be accepted unquestioningly, since respondent recall is never entirely accurate. It is possible that those who experienced unacceptable work-life friction merely *perceived* that their working hours had increased in the last year, but this does not appear plausible, considering the clear picture that has emerged from the data.

The quasi-longitudinal aspect of the data allows other interesting questions to be addressed at least tentatively. In relation to the quality of the work environment, over a third of those reporting an increase in how closely they were monitored by their supervisor claimed deterioration in their work-life balance, as did 40 per cent of those reporting an increase in peer pressure to amplify work output. The difference was highly statistically significant. For workers not reporting peer pressure to increase their output, this deterioration in work-life balance was much less common. Again, these links with workplace culture suggest that it is workplace factors, and not home factors, that are driving the increases in working hours and work pressure.

In addition, if in this study one was seeing reverse causality—that is, employees voluntarily increasing their working hours because they are unhappy at home—then one would expect not to see a link between home relationships and workplace cultures. Yet long-hours cultures were clearly seen by our respondents as having an impact. Deteriorating home relationships were more common among employees who reported that long hours were taken for granted, or who had trouble avoiding overtime or getting their workload reduced. Increased pressure from fellow employees and tighter monitoring by supervisors were both associated with deteriorating relationships.

Other workplace-climate variables also proved significant in determining satisfaction. In workplaces with tight managerial control and little employee discretion, responsibility for supervision often rests with a worker's immediate supervisor; in workplaces with loose managerial control and greater employee control, supervision is often provided by peers (Barker 1993). Our results indicate that increases in either type of external control damaged worker satisfaction with their work-life balance. Over a third of those reporting an increase in how closely they were watched by their supervisor claimed deterioration in their work-life balance, as did 40 per cent of those reporting an increase in the pressure they felt from their co-workers. In comparison, for the balance of workers, work-life dissatisfaction was a little above half of those levels.

Once again turning to the issue of the direction of causality, if these findings were due to reverse causality, then people with deteriorating home relationships would be, if anything, less likely to say that they were working more hours than they wanted. That is, those who had the chance to escape home and seek respite at work would report that things were better at home. In fact, among those with deteriorating relationships, 57 per cent were working more hours than they wanted, compared to just 22 per cent of those with improving home relationships. While 36 per cent of those with deteriorating relationships said their current hours did not suit them, this was the case for only 10 per cent of those with improving relationships.

All of the indicators thus point to workplace factors driving deteriorating home relationships through their impact on hours and work pressure, and not to deteriorating home relationships encouraging people to work longer hours. These findings support research conducted by psychologists, with one oft-cited study indicating that work-family conflict was three times more likely to be experienced than family-work conflict (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992b).

It is clear that high pressure at work, increased stress and tiredness at work, and the increased time it takes to recover from work, all contributed to a worsening of workers' relationships at home. Deteriorating relationships were linked to long hours of work, weekend work for full-time workers, irregular starting times, and to indicators of long-hours cultures including long hours being taken for granted, the inability to decline to work overtime without it causing problems, an inability to get a heavy workload easily reduced by talking to a supervisor, and increased peer pressure and tighter monitoring by supervisors. Similarly, when employees worked long hours, under high pressure, without access to overtime pay or time off in lieu, on weekends, or with changing starting times (especially where that occurred at short notice), partners were more likely to see their social lives as inappropriately limited by their spouse's work responsibilities, and more likely to wish that their spouse had another job. Reduced opportunities for a social life or for time to spend on community activities, reduced time spent with their spouse, and increased spousal working hours were all associated with increased home stress for partners.

There are both market and policy implications that are worth considering as a result of these findings. To some extent, the recent plateau reached in hours worked by full-time workers may signal that a market response is already under way; perhaps, in a tight labour market, employers are finding it difficult to retain or employ workers productively on long-hours regimes. Alternatively, the shift perhaps reflects the growing casualisation of full-time work, and the shorter hours that casual full-time workers undertake. On the market front, failure to address work-life conflict at the organisational level can reliably be expected to have adverse implications for variables such as labour turnover and performance (Kossek and Ozeki 1998; Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness, 1999), which come with real ex post costs.

On the policy front, the times when people worked and the irregularity of their starting times were two elements that proved influential in this study. Employees who worked on weekends and at night were significantly less satisfied with the balance between work and home. These are areas which have at various times been subject to regulation through penalty rates, in awards and enterprise agreements, and which are influenced by statutory regulation. There has been mixed evidence relating to the health aspects of control over working hours (Sparks *et al.* 1997; Spurgeon, Harrington and Cooper, 1997), and a large well-designed cohort study recently indicated that long domestic and total working hours are indeed associated with significantly higher rates of illness for both men

and women and, significantly, a *lack of control* over working hours—regardless of their length—was a predictor of medically certified sickness absences for both genders (Ala-Mursula *et al.* 2006). Control and choice in working lives allow workers to attempt to achieve some degree of fit between work and family life, a likely key mediating variable in work-life conflict (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992a).

The concept of ‘unreasonable’ additional hours has recently entered Australian labour law through the National Employment Standards of the *Fair Work Act 2009*. The limited case law to date has given precedence to the operational requirements of the workplace over the employee’s personal circumstances (including family responsibilities) (Peetz and Murray 2011). The Fair Work Act requires the court, in deciding disputes over unreasonable hours, to take account of the usual patterns of work in the industry concerned, something which favours the beneficiaries of existing power relations, who have already shaped hours arrangements at the workplace. Thus, when work is making employees tired, cranky, sick, or dysfunctional at home, that may matter little if the situation that leads to it has become ‘usual’. This aspect of the Act requires reconsideration.

In summary, dissatisfaction with the balance between work and personal lives is not just an abstract concept about how employees feel. It is closely related to how families and household members interact, and how well they relate to one another. If the tensions arising from working-time restructuring are translated into increased difficulties in interpersonal relationships at home, and possibly increased divorce and violence, then part of the costs of workplace reform are being transferred to the domestic sector, and possibly to the public sector too. The study does not allow observation of trends in divorce and domestic violence, but the data reported undoubtedly imply a disturbing deterioration in personal relationships at home as a result of long, pressured working hours. For policy makers, the presumed economic benefits of longer working hours need to be balanced against what is an emerging pattern of social and health impacts from work pressure.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Cronbach's alpha is a measure of the reliability (internal consistency) of a scale, ranging in value from 0 (no correlation between items in a scale) to 1 (the items are all identical).

<sup>2</sup> In further regression analyses not reported in this paper, the two most significant predictors of home stress among partners were changes in time spent with their spouse and changes in their opportunities for a social life. Other variables in the equation that helped to predict home stress included changes in time spent on community activities (statistically significant at the 5 per cent level) and in weekly pay (statistically significant at the 10 per cent level).

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