

# Negotiating the Life Course



**THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED INVOLVEMENT IN A PIONEERING STUDY OF AUSTRALIAN'S LIVES**



**THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA**

You are receiving this newsletter because you are a participant in one of Australia's most exciting social survey projects. The project surveys people over time to see how life in Australia is changing. In 2006/2007 we interviewed 3,138 people: 2,000 were new participants, the rest have participated since 1997.

This newsletter provides participants with some information on how the project is progressing. Further information is available at the Negotiating the Life Course participant website: <http://nlc.anu.edu.au> and the Negotiating the Life Course research website: <http://lifecourse.anu.edu.au>.

We have enclosed a magnet with our contact details to keep on your fridge in case you move house or change your phone number.

## WHO IS CONDUCTING THE PROJECT?

This project is conducted by a group of Australian researchers from The Australian National University, the University of Queensland and the Australian Institute of Family Studies. See the back of this newsletter for the project leaders contact information. The project has been funded by the Australian Research Council since 2000 and it was recently announced that the Australian Research Council will fund the next collection in 2009/2010 (project number DP0987834).



**Australian Government  
Australian Research Council**

Users of the survey information are from a range of universities and government research units. Results from this survey are never used for market research.

**We plan to begin interviewing in August 2009 for the Wave 5 data collection**

## A DECADE OF THE LIFE COURSE

In late September 2008 we held a two day conference that highlighted and celebrated ten years of the Negotiating the Life Course project. To be able to examine the way that your lives have changed over the course of ten years is a valuable resource to researchers. The data were used to describe, inform and encourage discussion about how ordinary Australians lead their lives. The conference was centred around three themes: globalisation, family and work over the life course.

Three keynote speakers were invited to present papers discussing the themes from an international perspective. Each topic was also explored by leading researchers from across Australia, using data gathered from the project. The conference was attended by policy makers from federal and state/territory governments, as well as other researchers and university students who are interested in the way Australians manage their busy lives.

The feedback we received over the two days was very positive. The team of researchers who have been working on this project received feedback on the usefulness of the research to inform and enhance policy making, especially in the areas of working families, separated parents and those close to retiring.

The papers from the conferences are being revised and will be published in a book entitled 'A Decade of the Life Course'.

Information about the conference can be found on the research website (<http://lifecourse.anu.edu.au>).

# SOME PROJECT FINDINGS

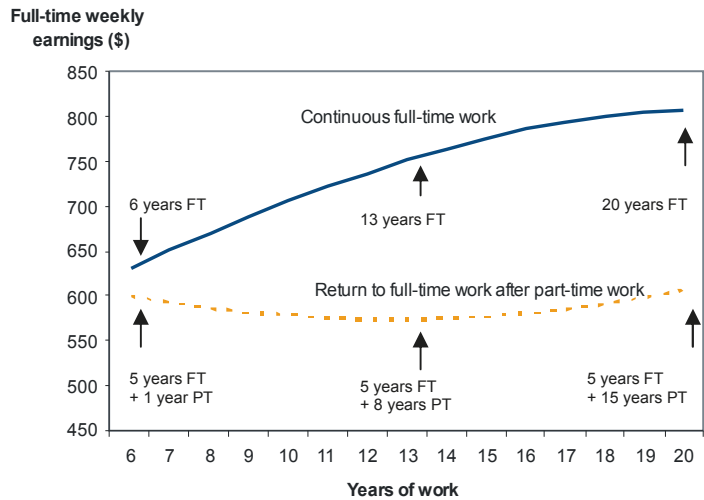
## Does part-time work contribute to women's careers?

In Australia today the most common approach to balancing paid work with parenting is for mothers to take primary responsibility for children, while also working part-time.

The NLC data shows that part-time work has an effect on future earnings. This figure shows alternative earnings trajectories for a hypothetical woman who commenced working full-time with a weekly salary of \$500. After five years of continuous full-time work, this woman would earn \$610 per week. The solid line, labelled "continuous full-time work", illustrates the earnings profile of the woman if she continues to work full-time. The line labelled "return to full-time work after part-time work" illustrates the earnings profile with varying amounts of full-time and part-time work.

For example, after one year of part-time work the weekly wage on a woman's return to full-time work would be \$601.

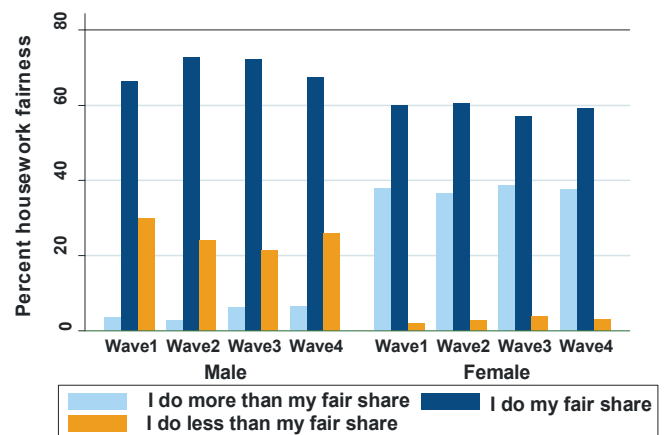
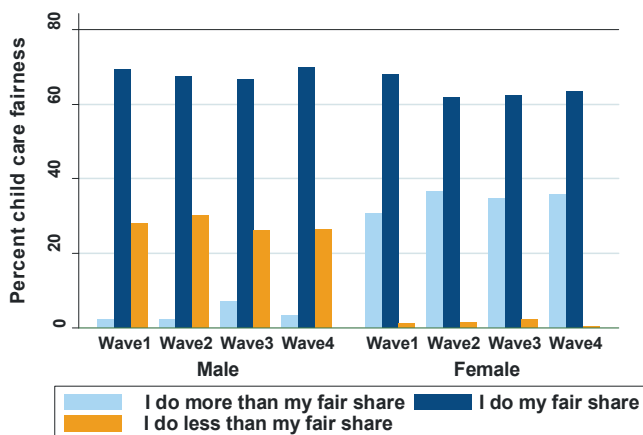
Future earnings for women who have worked at least 5 years full-time



If she had stayed in full-time work she would have earned \$631 per week. If the woman worked for two years part-time her weekly salary on returning to full-time work would be \$593. By staying in full-time work her weekly wage would have advanced to \$651. The area between the lines in the graph can be thought of as representing the career advancement a woman forgoes by working part-time rather than remaining in full-time work.

## Perceptions of work at home

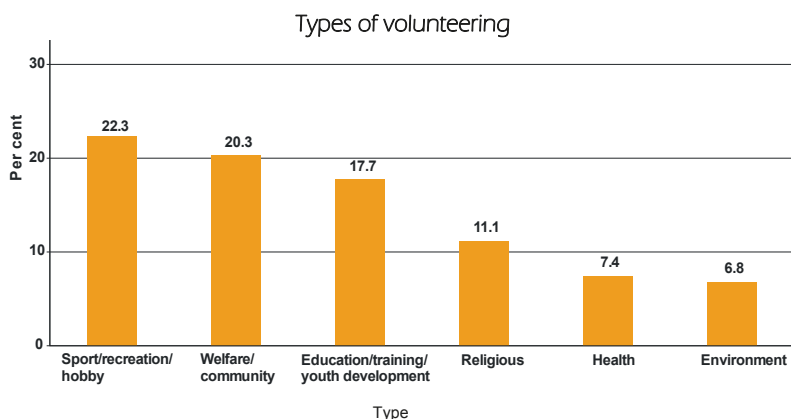
Previous research using the NLC data has shown that women's time on housework increases after marriage and the birth of children, whereas men's time on housework remains the same or decreases slightly with these life course transitions. While there is considerable evidence that women do more of the work in the home than men, there is less evidence that men and women feel these arrangements are unfair. On the contrary, the majority of men and women report that childcare and housework arrangements are fair, as shown in the graphs below. But women are much more likely than men to report doing more than their fair share of housework and childcare, while men are much more likely to report doing less than their fair share.



Some households deal with domestic labour chores by employing others to do this work. We find that only around 19% of individuals in the NLC sample report regularly paying someone to do housework or gardening. But interestingly money is not the only factor that is taken into consideration when deciding whether to employ outside help. Attitudes to using paid help are also very important. If men and women feel that it is inappropriate to employ someone to do this work they tend not to, even if they have high levels of income and high levels of need (in terms of household size and time spent in paid work). Thus unlike other countries where using domestic help is relatively common, the vast majority of Australians carry out their own cleaning, washing, cooking and gardening.

## Volunteering

Volunteering provides an important contribution to Australian society, and in 2006 over half of NLC respondents participated in volunteering. Men and women were both as likely to participate in volunteering, but the types of volunteering that they did were often different.



### *Types of volunteering*

The most common type of organization that people volunteer for are organizations that manage sport, recreation or hobbies. Over a quarter of men and one in five women said that they participated in this type of volunteering. The next most common type of volunteering was for welfare and community organizations. Around one in five people said that they gave time to these organizations. Almost 18% volunteered in an area related to education, training, or youth development, while 11% volunteered for a religious organization. A smaller group of people volunteered in the areas of health and environment.

Although not shown on the chart, people also volunteered in the areas of business, arts, emergency services, law and justice, foreign affairs or other causes.

### *Age of volunteers*

The type of volunteering that people do is related to their age. People aged between 30 and 49 were most likely to participate in volunteering that related to sport, recreation and hobbies. In comparison, people aged 50+ were most likely to volunteer for welfare and community organizations. For people aged less than 30, volunteering was often in the area of education, training and youth development. Participation in volunteering for religious organizations did not vary much by age, with around 10 per cent of people in all age groups volunteering their time.

### *Sex of volunteers*

As for age, the pattern of volunteering varied between men and women. Compared with women, men were more likely to volunteer for activities such as sport, recreation and hobbies, emergency services, business or law and justice, while women were more likely to volunteer for health, and education, training and youth development.

**Please visit our new website—designed for our valued participants**  
<http://nlc.anu.edu.au>

## Working from home

Working from home, or using home as a base, is often referred to as teleworking. There are many debates about the benefits and pitfalls of teleworking. Some people find it a very flexible way to work, while others can find it an isolating experience. We asked how many NLC respondents are involved in teleworking on a regular basis, and also asked whether people ever did work from home.

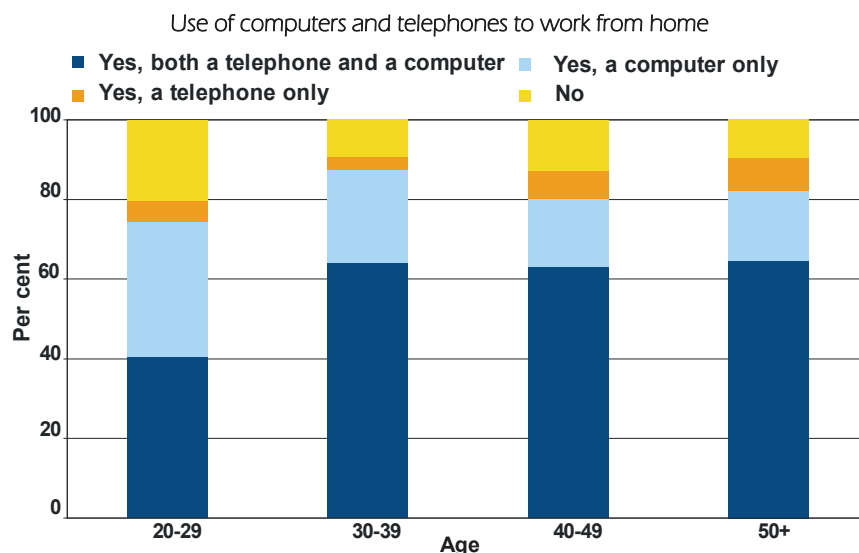
### *Who works at home?*

Only around 15% of workers stated that they worked from home on a regular basis. Men were more likely to use home as a base rather than work from home and women were more likely to actually work from home. There were considerable differences by age, with only around 5% of people aged 20 to 29 regularly working from home, compared with close to 20% of people aged 30 to 39.

Many more people irregularly worked from home (over 40%). Men were slightly more likely to sometimes work from home (almost 50%) than women (almost 40%). Those aged 20 to 29 were the least likely to do work from home.

### *Are computers essential to working from home?*

Four out of five people who worked from home said that they used a computer for the work that they did from home. Many also said that they needed a telephone (often in combination with a computer), and only around 10% said they worked from home without either a computer or telephone. This varied by age. Respondents aged 20 to 29 were most likely to say that they needed a computer only, but they were also most likely to say that they didn't need a computer or a telephone to work from home. People aged 30 to 39 were the most likely to use a computer when they worked from home. Only 12% of 30 to 39 year olds did not use a computer.



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# PROJECT INFORMATION

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## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT?

The Negotiating the Life Course project has been running for twelve years. Over this time, the project has collected valuable information about how Australians balance their work, family, health and education. The project explores the changes that take place in each of these areas throughout life.

Without surveys such as this one, it is difficult to observe how life in Australia is changing and where resources should be allocated to improve quality of life. That is why your continued involvement in the survey is so important.

## IS THE INFORMATION I PROVIDE CONFIDENTIAL AND PROTECTED?

Any identifying information you provide is kept totally confidential from both academic and government users of the data. It is not possible for data users to identify you from the Negotiating the Life Course project data.

Any academic or government department that wishes to use the project data in their research needs to go through an application process. Applications for the data are reviewed by the Australian Social Science Data Archive and final approval is needed from the project leaders before the data can be provided. Market researchers do not have access to the project data.

Your involvement in the Negotiating the Life Course project is also protected by The Australian National University Ethics Committee. The project is routinely reviewed by the Ethics committee to ensure that your privacy and the information you provide is protected.

## HOW LONG WILL THE PROJECT RUN FOR?

The longer the Negotiating the Life Course project runs for the more information there will be on the varying and changing nature of Australian society. The project team will be collecting a further round of data in late 2009. We hope you will continue to participate in this valuable project.

## DID YOU MISS OUT ON PARTICIPATING IN THE FOURTH WAVE OF INTERVIEWS? HAVE YOU CHANGED PHONE NUMBERS SINCE WE LAST INTERVIEWED YOU?

If you have any questions, or need to update your contact details,  
please contact the Data Manager:

Sue Trevenar 02 6125 1549

or email [nlc@anu.edu.au](mailto:nlc@anu.edu.au)

or visit <http://nlc.anu.edu.au/> or <http://lifecourse.anu.edu.au/>

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## PROJECT LEADER CONTACT INFORMATION

Information on the project leaders is available at their websites.

Professor Peter McDonald

The Australian National University

<http://adsri.anu.edu.au/people/peterm.php>

or phone: 02 6125 2129

Professor Janeen Baxter

The University of Queensland

<http://www.socialscience.uq.edu.au/index.html?page=13828>

or phone: 07 3365 2871

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