

Working Women's Centre

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CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN PART-TIME WORK.

Discussion Paper No. 8 on Alternative Working Hours raised many of the problems relating to the introduction of part-time work, flexitime and tandem employment. This paper discusses the current position of part-time work both here and overseas.

WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION:

Part-time workers are increasing in numbers and significance in the Australian workforce. ⁽¹⁾ Between 1970 - 1976, the number of people working part-time has increased by 63.5% and between 1964 - 1976 the ratio of part-time workers to full-time workers doubled.

Table 1.

Average Annual Percentage Growth Rate of Full-time & Part-time Employment. ⁽²⁾

	P/T % p.a.	F/T % p.a.	Ratio of P/T to F/T Employment Growth.
1964-70	6.4	2.5	2.6
1970-74	5.6	1.2	4.7
1974-76	6.8	0.5	13.6*

It therefore appears that the rate of growth of part-time employment has been relatively unaffected by the current recession. It has also been stated that by 1980 the part-time proportion of the workforce could reach 20%.

A.B.S. figures for February 1978 show that 15% of the workforce worked part-time ie. approximately one in seven workers. Of these almost 80% are women, 62% of them married. Of those working part-time, 86% actually prefer this type of employment.

Table 11.

Part-time Workers by Reason ('000) Feb. 1978.

Reason.	Males.	Married Women.	All Women.	Persons.
Preferred <u>not</u> to work more hours.	149.9	491.2	610.0	759.9
Preferred to work more hours.	37.9	55.5	80.8	118.6
Had actively looked for full-time work.	17.9	9.2	19.9	37.8

Source: A.B.S. The Labour Force. February, 1978.

UNEMPLOYMENT AMONGST PART-TIMERS:

In February, 1978, it was estimated that 8.5% of the part-time workforce was unemployed (ie. 81,300 persons.) Fortyseven per cent of those looking for part-time work were women over 25 years of age and 35% were young people aged 15-19 years. Earlier A.B.S. studies showed a further 28,000 women would like a job if suitable childcare facilities were available. ⁽³⁾

"Part-time employment then is an increasingly significant factor in understanding the present labour market. Part-time employment is on the increase but in many ways this increase is occurring by stealth, without sufficient union or community awareness of the magnitude of the change and in many instances without adequate safeguards for employees such as the extension of many of the conditions of employment which have been fought for and established for full-time members of the work force." ⁽⁴⁾

The trend towards an increasing number of part-time employees in some industries and the reduction of people employed in full-time jobs is illustrated by the following table comparing married women's participation in 1973 and 1978.

Table 111.Employed Married Women - by Industry and Hours Worked.

May 1973 - February 1978 ('000) (5)

Industry.	Part-time Workers.		Full-time Workers.	
	May 1973.	Feb. 1978.	May 1973.	Feb. 1978.
Agriculture	29.2	36.6	25.3	32.4
Manufacturing	45.0	46.6	206.9	178.5
Wholesale & Retail Trade	139.2	132.5	181.6	170.5
Community Services	95.1	147.0	144.7	195.6
Entertainment & Personal Service	76.7	84.2	62.7	53.1

In the past the concept of part-time work was directed to low skilled, marginal employment largely to overcome labour shortages in periods of full employment, particularly in industries which reinforce female sex stereotypes. The concept of full-time work, as the standard amount of time that men work, has meant that part-time work, mainly done by women, "contributes to preserving the traditional division of labour within the family and to keeping alive a job market system which fails to take into consideration that people are obliged to spend time doing other things besides working." (6)

Permanent part-time work is a valuable consideration for a number of reasons -

- i. to fit in with family responsibilities,
- ii. to help phase-in retirement,
- iii. to allow for recurrent education,
- iv. to improve work opportunities for physically or mentally handicapped persons.

Groups benefitting from part-time work include migrants who could work as well as gain language and job skills, social welfare recipients to reduce their dependence on welfare, and those living in isolated rural areas. It could assist aborigines in the transition from rural to city life, unemployment to employment, and assist young unemployed who could work and study part-time. (7)

The Coombs Report on Australian Government Administration found that 61.7% of 3rd Division officers and 55.2% of 4th Division officers agreed there should be opportunities for people to work part-time and 41.6% of 3rd Division officers and 43.1% of 4th Division officers stated they would like the opportunity for permanent part-time work at some stage in their careers.

Another survey by the Public Service Association of S.A. found 36.9% of respondents desired permanent part-time work immediately while 68.9% wanted this option in the future. 82.7% of women wanted part-time work because of domestic responsibilities as did 21.3% of men. (8)

OVERSEAS EXPERIENCE.

1. Several states in the U.S. are introducing quotas for part-time jobs in state government employment. Massachusetts, for example, was the first state in the U.S. to require that within 5 years 10% of all state jobs would be part-time. Similar provisions are being considered for Federal employees. In Wisconsin, the Civil Service has introduced a job sharing scheme where 84 persons are currently sharing 42 jobs. (9)
2. In Sweden, an Advisory Council to the Prime Minister - on Equality between Men and Women has recommended that everyone should be offered full-time employment but that during certain periods, both men and women need leave of absence or reduced working hours eg. for study purposes, to care for children or just before retirement. (10) And prior to retirement (between 60-70 years) workers can choose to work between 17 and 30 hours and claim a partial pension which amounts to 65% of the loss of earnings.

However, the Advisory Council states that: "An increase in the number of part-time job openings on higher salary levels - both in the public and private sectors - would not help those who now have part-time jobs to improve their situation. The vast majority of these are women."

3. In France, public servants can, in certain circumstances, work half-time up to a maximum of 9 years to raise families; look after a child with a chronic illness or be with one's spouse or immediate relatives following an accident or serious illness.

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE.

The Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Public Service of South Australia recommended that government departments and the Public Service Board examine existing working arrangements to find as many opportunities as possible for employing part-time workers. After a detailed study the Public Service Board recommended that permanent part-time positions be created throughout the Service, with pro-rata benefits and has recently amended its legislation to cater for part-time employees. Similar provisions have been recommended by the Report into NSW Government Administration.

Part-time work is defined as:

"Persons engaged for less than 37½/40 hours per week, working 15 hours or more per week for a continuous period of one month or longer where the hours of work are fixed and constant." (12)

"Opportunities for appointment to a part-time position will be open to men and women (although it is expected that women in particular will be interested), as existing full-time workers or new recruits. Employees will now have the chance to vary their working life according to their individual needs and preferences. There may be some special consideration given by the Board to particular groups when filling part-time positions. Handicapped persons, persons who have been forced to resign to take leave of absence because of domestic responsibilities who cannot return on a full-time basis, and full-time employees unable through illness to continue working in that capacity are likely to receive priority." (13)

In its submission to the Public Service Board, the Public Service Association of South Australia raised the importance of part-time work towards contributing to equal opportunities for women.

"Part-time employment based on flexible work patterns provides the opportunity for married women ... to contribute to family income, gain some financial independence for themselves, broaden their social experience and contacts, and maintain their work skills. Without part-time work equal employment opportunity for women cannot be said to exist." (14)

UNION ACTION.

The A.C.T.U. Charter on Working Women recognises the need for "broadly defined flexible working hours" including part-time work and tandem employment "with appropriate loadings."

Unions have traditionally been opposed to the introduction of part-time work because of its casual nature; because part-time workers have found it hard to participate in union affairs; and mainly because of union's commitments to protect full-time jobs and conditions.

The Interim Report on Permanent Part-Time Work by Future Lobby and the N.S.W. Association for Mental Health, states that permanent part-time work could:

- " * overcome the traditional disadvantages of temporary/casual disposable work,
 - * increase the potential membership of unions, especially by helping to cover many existing non-union workers,
 - * meet the needs of a growing proportion of the workforce, particularly women. "
- (15)

Some unions, for example, the Australian Insurance Employees Union, have

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Important

My research -