

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Additional Estimates

13 – 14 February 2013

Question: AET 38-42

Topic: Work, Life and Family Survey Program

Written: Received from Committee – 19 February 2013

Senator RHIANNON asked:

38. Regarding the ABS' Work, Life and Family Survey program:
- a. Can the ABS confirm that the following ABS publications are informed by the Survey Program:
 - i. Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation, Australia (ABS ca.t 6361.0)
 - ii. How Australians Use Their Time (ABS cat. 4153.0); and
 - iii. Unpaid Work and the Australian Economy (ABS cat. 5240.0)
 - b. What sort of policy areas are informed by these publications?
 - c. How current should such data be to be considered accurate – what is a recognised life-span of such types of data to be considered current and valid?
 - d. Is this survey program the main or only source of national data about unpaid work carried out across Australia?
 - e. Are women the main providers of unpaid work? What is that work's estimated value to the Australian economy?
 - f. Has this program informed government support for more flexible working arrangements for employees with care responsibilities?
39. When were these publications last produced and made available via the ABS website?
40. When was the last Work, Life and Family Survey carried out?
41. When was the next Work, Life and Family Survey originally scheduled?
- a. When is it currently due?
 - i. If delayed, what were the reasons given for the delay?
 - b. Has it been cut?
42. if yes, when was this decision made and what were the justifications used to cut it?

Answer:

- 38.
- a. The ABS' Work, Life and Family Survey program was designed to collect information previously produced from two separate surveys - the Survey of Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation and the Time Use Survey. The survey program informs two key statistical publications:
 - I. *How Australians Use their Time, 2006* (ABS cat. no. 4153.0)
 - II. *Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation, Australia, 2007* (ABS cat. no. 6361.0)

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While the publication *Unpaid Work and the Australian Economy, 1997* (ABS cat. no. 5240.0) was informed by Time Use Survey data, it is not a regular publication.

b. The information released in these publications is of interest to a number of different policy departments, including:

- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)
- Department of Families, Housing, Communities Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)
- The Treasury
- Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Areas of interest include:

- labour force participation (especially for older Australians, women, carers and people with a disability) and employment arrangements in Australia
- the reasons why people retire and why some people return to the workforce after retiring
- superannuation contributions, assets and income
- how people spend their time (work, commuting, family, caring, unpaid work and variety of other important time commitments)
- gender analysis related to labour force participation, working arrangements, and a range of time use activities
- the value, composition and growth of unpaid work and understanding its changing relationship over time with measured production in the economy

c. Australian and International experience is that the information collected within the survey is robust and generally reflects social phenomena that change slowly, particularly in relation to patterns of time use. Other aspects of people's financial and social wellbeing may change more rapidly, and the ABS had scheduled the WoLFS program to be conducted every six years considering respondent burden, cost and the timeliness of the program's statistical topics. Change for key topics between survey cycles is kept to essential changes so comparisons over time can be made, regardless of the interval between cycles. Where aspects of the information does change rapidly it is possible to track changes in key populations and data items in the interim years through other ABS surveys. For example, the information on employment arrangements is available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) as well as some key supplementary surveys including:

- Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership Survey (EEBTUM) (annual, results published in cat. no. 6310.0)
- Forms of Employment Survey (FOES) (annual, results published in cat. no. 6359.0)
- Working Time Arrangements Survey (WTA) (3 yearly, results published in cat. no. 6342.0)

d. The WoLFS program is the most comprehensive source of information on unpaid work undertaken in Australia. However, information of key forms of unpaid work (eg volunteer

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work and caring for people with a disability or long term health condition) are collected elsewhere. Information on unpaid domestic work, unpaid assistance to a person with a disability and voluntary work for an organisation or groups was also collected in the 2011 and 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

- e. Women are the main providers of unpaid work within Australia. Experimental estimates valued unpaid work at around \$261 billion in 1997 (equivalent to about 48 per cent of Australia's gross domestic product (GDP)).
 - f. While the survey has the capacity to inform governments about the support for more flexible working arrangements for employees with care responsibilities, this question should be directed to the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and/or the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations.
39. Publications informed by the program were previously released (free of charge) on the ABS website at the following times:
- I. How Australians Use their Time, 2006 - February 2008*
 - II. Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation, Australia, 2007 - November 2008*
 - III. Unpaid Work and the Australian Economy, 1997 - October 2000*
40. The planned 2013 Work, Life and Family Survey would have been the first collection in this form. The last Survey of Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation (SEARS) was conducted in 2007. The last Time Use Survey was conducted in 2006.
41. The combined Work, Life and Family Survey was scheduled to be conducted from February to November 2013. The 2013 cycle has been cancelled. The next scheduled six-yearly cycle is in 2019.
42. In December 2012, the ABS made the decision to cancel the 2013 cycle of the Work, Life and Family Survey to meet savings targets required in response to the announced MYEFO savings. The cancellation of the 2013 cycle will be a significant contributor to these savings in this financial year and in 2013–14.