

Senate Select Committee on Job Security

Questions on Notice

WACOSS did not formally take any questions on notice during the public hearing, but did offer to provide some additional information in response to two questions posed by Senator Canavan.

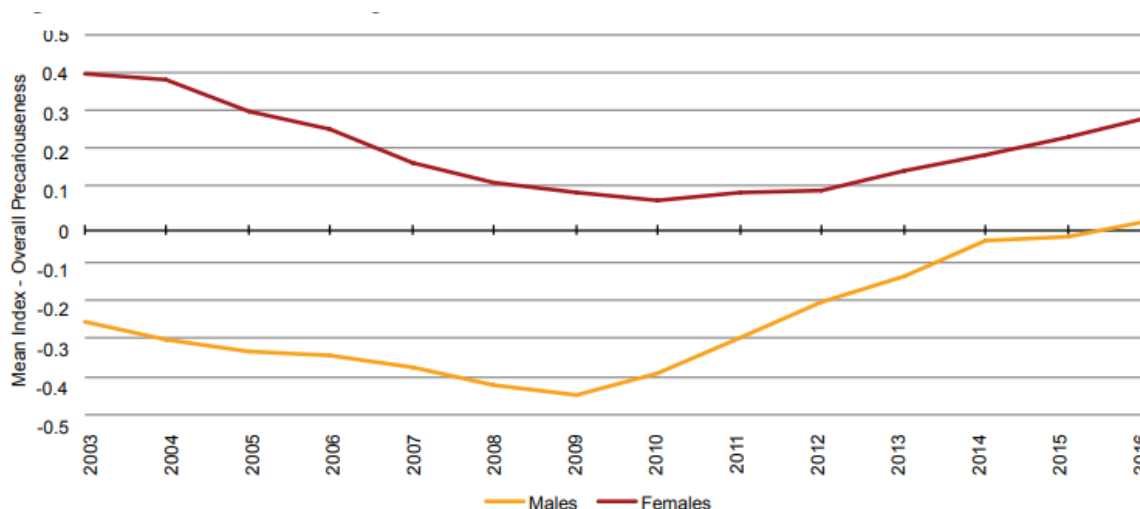
Senator CANAVAN: In your submission you quote the percentage of Australians in casual work at around a quarter. The evidence before this committee is that that hasn't changed, basically, in 20 years. But elsewhere in your submission you talk about the growth in insecure work. What are you relying on to say that insecure work is growing when casual employment levels seemingly aren't, at least in the last 20-odd years.

WACOSS response:

In response to Senator Canavan's question about data to corroborate our claim that levels of insecure work are increasing, despite the rate of casual employment remaining relatively the same over the last 20 years, we would like to reference Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (BCEC) report *Future of Work in Australia: Preparing for tomorrow's world*.¹ Using data from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia, BCEC constructed a unique index of precarious employment in Australia.

Their findings indicate that from 2003 to 2008-09, during the mining boom, precarious employment for both genders had a decreasing trend. Since 2009, however, precarious employment has increased for both genders, more rapidly for men than women. As of 2016, females' employment precariousness is almost equivalent to 2005 values, whereas for males, precarious employment has increased drastically. Overall, compared to men, women have consistently higher levels of precarious employment.

Precarious employment across genders, 2003-2016

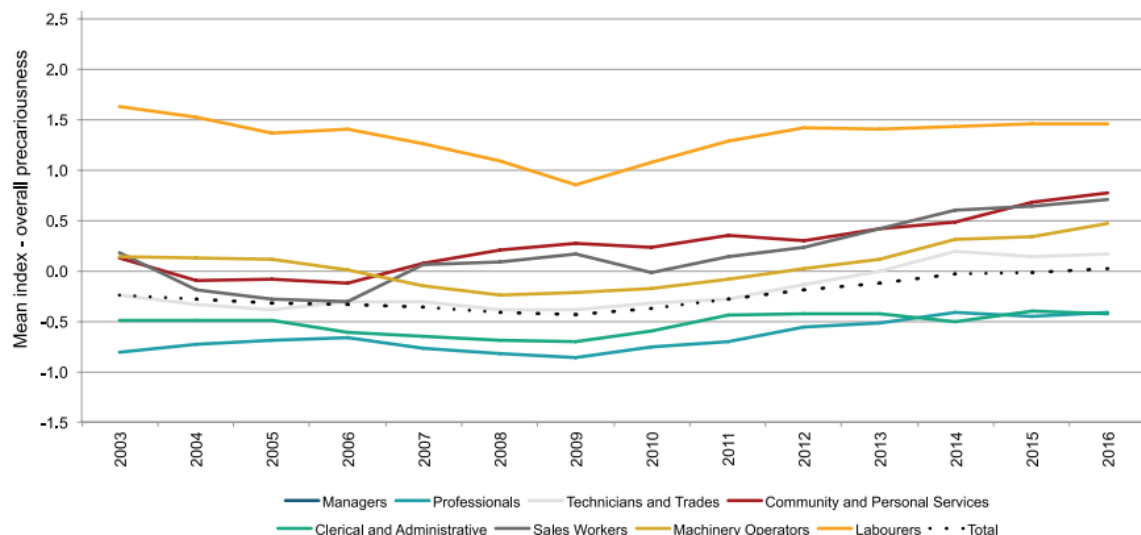


Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre | Author calculation based on HILDA.

¹ Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (2018) [Future of Work in Australia: Preparing for tomorrow's world](#). Focus on the States Series, No. 6/18, Curtin University.

Across all major occupational groupings among male workers, with the exception of labourers, precariousness has been rising in the post-GFC period. For some occupations, such as sales workers, community and personal service workers and machinery operators and drivers, precariousness has increased at a much faster rate than for other occupations.

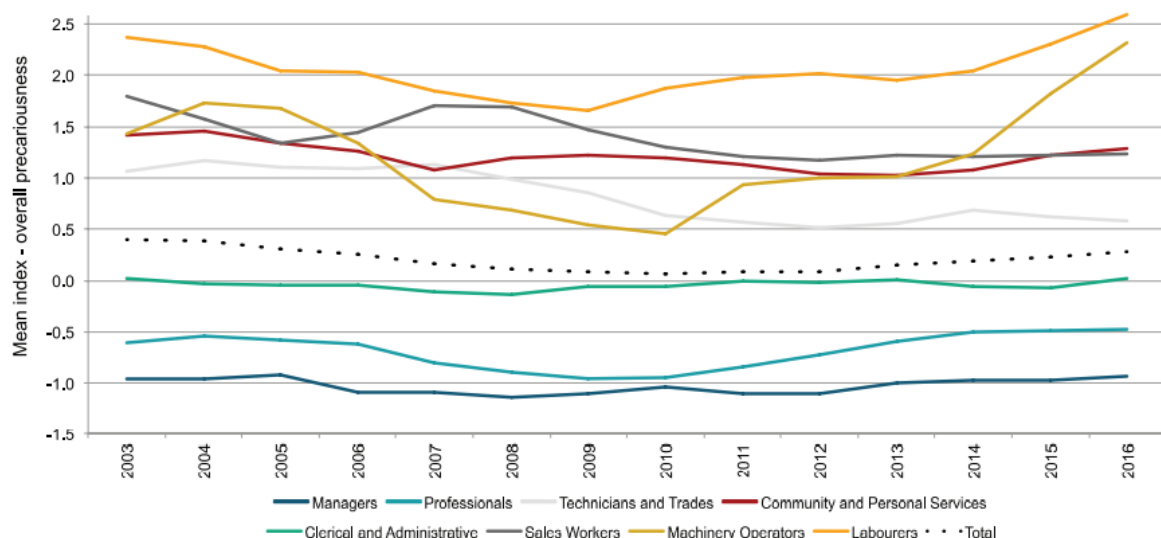
Precarious employment among male workers, by occupation, from 2003-2016



Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre | Author calculation based on HILDA

Among women, female labourers face the greatest degree of precarious employment, followed by machinery operators and drivers. Both occupations have seen a drastic increase in their level of precariousness over the post-GFC period. While precariousness for female sales, community and personal services workers has had a relatively stable trend over recent years, they have higher levels of precariousness than their male counterparts.

Precarious employment among female workers, by occupation, from 2003-2016



Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre | Author calculation based on HILDA

We maintain that casual employment statistics do not adequately capture the multidimensional nature of precarious employment, and that current labour force statistics are failing to capture the employment changes and new models of work in Australia.

Senator CANAVAN: My final question to you: in your submission you talk about the impact of COVID on young people, and I don't disagree with the figures you raise here given many young people are obviously in casual work. Do you have a view on the setting of policy preferences for state governments to increasingly go into lockdowns? Aren't these lockdowns even going to have more negative impacts on young people and shouldn't that be factored into decisions about these policy decisions?

WACOSS response:

We agree with Senator Canavan in that the negative impacts on young people should be factored into COVID-19 related policy decisions. Far too many young people in insecure and casualised jobs were locked out of the Australian government's JobKeeper wage subsidy due to its design, which excludes casual employees with less than 12 months' service for their current employer as well as temporary visa holders.

It is therefore vital that the policies and approaches that State and Commonwealth Governments shape as Australia moves toward recovery recognise the unique set of challenges young people face. Targeted investment in youth employment, education and training programs, social protection for young people, as well as mental health services tailored to young people, have been identified as key strategies to prevent enduring negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.²

According to the Commonwealth Government's National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID-19 Response, lockdowns will continue to be a necessary policy decision until more than 80 percent of the population have received their second vaccination dose.³ Even with above 80 per cent vaccine coverage, there may still be an occasional need for highly targeted lockdown measures.

Casual employment, insecure work conditions and uncertain income impact more widely on the financial resilience and personal wellbeing of Australian workers, making it harder for them to secure loans to own their own home, to predict and balance their income, and to respond to crises and unexpected events – including pandemics, disasters such as cyclones, fires and floods, and to shocks within our economy. While casualisation can provide benefits to enterprises during uncertain growth phases or when the demand for particular types of services can fluctuate unpredictably, from a wider economic management policy perspective higher rates of casualisation increase volatility and undermine resilience.

² International Labour Organization (2020) [Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Wellbeing](#). Survey Report 2020.

³ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2021) [National Plan to Transition Australia's National COVID Response](#). Australian Government.