

Challenges of work, family and care.



**Who
Cares?**
A FAIR SHARE OF WORK AND CARE

FOR AUSTRALIA'S RETAIL,
ONLINE RETAIL, WAREHOUSING
AND FAST FOOD WORKERS

Acknowledgements

The research team extends our warmest appreciation to the SDA for supporting the research.

We thank SDA members for so generously sharing their experiences and perspectives via the survey, and branches for assisting with survey distribution.

Julia Fox and Katie Biddlestone provided expert guidance throughout the project and helped shape survey design.

We are also grateful for advice on survey content and interpretation from Dr Jen Skattebol.



UNSW
SYDNEY

SPRC
Social Policy Research Centre

For further information:

A/Prof Natasha Cortis
n.cortis@unsw.edu.au

Social Policy Research Centre
UNSW Sydney NSW 2052 Australia
T +61 2 9385 7800
F +61 2 9385 7838
E sprc@unsw.edu.au
W arts.unsw.edu.au/sprc

© UNSW Sydney 2021

The Social Policy Research Centre is based in the Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture at UNSW Sydney. This report was commissioned by the SDA.

Cortis, N., Blaxland, M., and Charlesworth, S. (2021). *Challenges of work, family and care for Australia's retail, online retail, warehousing and fast food workers*. Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Sydney.

Research Team

- A/Prof Natasha Cortis
- Dr Megan Blaxland
- Prof Sara Charlesworth (RMIT University)

Contents

1	Executive Summary	2
	Key findings.....	3
2	Introduction	10
2.1	Aims of the study.....	11
2.2	About the survey.....	12
3	About survey participants	14
3.1	Role and hours.....	15
3.2	Contract type.....	16
3.3	Shift arrangements.....	17
3.4	Time with current employer.....	18
4	SDA members' care responsibilities	20
4.1	Provision of care to children.....	20
4.2	Complex caring relationships.....	22
4.3	Care for adults.....	22
4.4	Care across the lifecourse.....	23
4.5	Young carers.....	23
5	Childcare arrangements	26
5.1	Informal care.....	27
5.2	Care by a grandparent.....	28
5.3	Grandparents' experiences of work and care.....	29
5.4	Parents' reasons for using informal care.....	30
6	Formal ECEC services	34
6.1	Types of formal services used.....	34
6.2	Childcare difficulties.....	35
6.3	Comments on the Child Care Subsidy.....	37
6.4	Care responsibilities, childcare and labour supply.....	39
6.5	Comments on childcare difficulties.....	42
6.6	Comments on what works well.....	46
7	Parental leave and return to work	52
7.1	Reasons for mothers' non-use of paid parental leave.....	53
7.2	Time away from work.....	54
7.3	Comments on parental leave and returning to work.....	55
8	Working time and rostering practices	60
8.1	Regular working times.....	60
8.2	Setting rosters.....	61
8.3	Computerised rostering.....	63
8.4	Length and spread of hours.....	64
8.5	Variability of hours.....	67
8.6	Comments on rostering.....	69

Contents cont.

9	Impacts on workers and families	76
9.1	Mental health.....	76
9.2	Family stress.....	77
9.3	Children’s routines and activities.....	78
9.4	Childcare	79
10	Financial security	82
10.1	Perceptions of pay	82
10.2	Comments on pay	87
10.3	Perceptions of retirement savings.....	89
11	Conclusion: Improving work and care	92
	Appendix: Australia’s early education and care system	98
	Appendix: Supplementary tables.....	102

Tables

Table 3.1	Survey participants by SDA Branch.....	14
Table 3.2	Age and current student status.....	14
Table 3.3	Student status and contract type.....	16
Table 3.4	Time worked for current main employer by gender and parenting status	18
Table 4.1	Provides regular unpaid care, help or assistance to a child and/or adult	20
Table 4.2	Couple and sole parent status by age of youngest child.....	22
Table 6.1	Attendance at preschool, kindergarten or long day care in the year before school.....	34
Table 6.2	Types of early education and care services used so far in 2021 by families with a child under 5	34
Table 6.3	Types of services for school-aged children used so far in 2021 by families with a child aged 6 to 12.....	35
Table 6.4	What works well about child care, or work and family	46
Table 8.1	Who sets rosters, by gender and supervisory status.....	61
Table 8.2	Agreement with the statement “My shifts can change unexpectedly” by contract type.....	67
Table 9.1	Agreement with the statement “My shifts and work schedule causes stress for me and my family” by parenting status	77
Table 10.1	Whether participants agreed or disagreed with the statement “I expect to have enough superannuation when I retire”	89

Appendix Tables

Table A.1	Age profile of respondents	102
Table A.2	Fortnightly hours of work among men and women in supervisory and non-supervisory roles.....	103
Table A.3	Hours worked in the last fortnight by age.....	104
Table A.4	Responses to the question “Do you work the same shifts each week?” by contract type.....	104
Table A.5	Agreement with the statement “Because of my caring responsibilities, I have to turn down work activities or opportunities” by parenting status	105
Table A.6	Parents’ use of formal and informal care arrangements by age of youngest child and work hours.....	106
Table A.7	Agreement with the statement “The way I am rostered to work impacts on my mental health” by gender and parenting status	107
Table A.8	Agreement with the statement “I worry about what goes on with my children while I’m working” by age of youngest child.....	107
Table A.9	Agreement with the statement “My work hours make it hard for my children to go to extra activities, e.g. swimming, sport and music” by how often they work the same shifts each week.....	108
Table A.10	Household income (after tax) by parenting status.....	108
Table A.11	Agreement with the statement “I work enough hours to make a living” by parenting status	109
Table A.12	Agreement with the statement “I work enough hours to make a living” by gender	109
Table A.13	Agreement with the statement “I work enough hours to make a living” by fortnightly hours	110
Table A.14	Agreement with the statement “I work enough hours to make a living” by contract type.....	110
Table A.15	Agreement with the statement “I work enough hours to make a living” by age	111
Table A.16	Agreement with the statement “I rely on penalty rates to make a living” by parenting status	111
Table A.17	Agreement with the statement “I rely on penalty rates to make a living” by contract type.....	112
Table A.18	Agreement with the statement “I know each week what my earnings will be” by parenting status.....	112
Table A.19	Agreement with the statement “I know each week what my earnings will be” by contract type.....	113
Table A.20	Agreement with the statement “I am satisfied with my overall level of take-home pay” by parenting status	113
Table A.21	Agreement with the statement “I am satisfied with my overall level of take-home pay” by contract type.....	114
Table A.22	Agreement with the statement “I turn down extra shifts because I won’t earn much more after tax and childcare costs” parents with a child aged 12 or under by care use	114

Figures

Figure 3.1	Fortnightly hours of work, staff in supervisory and non-supervisory roles.....	15
Figure 3.2	Contract type by gender and parenting status.....	16
Figure 3.3	How often participants work the same shifts each week, by gender and parenting status.....	17
Figure 4.1	Proportion of men and women who regularly provide care to a child aged under 18 in or outside their household, by employee age.....	21
Figure 4.2	Proportion of participants who regularly provide care, by age and type of care provided.....	23
Figure 5.1	Use of formal and informal care whilst working, by age of youngest child.....	26
Figure 5.2	How often informal care from grandparent or other person is used, parents with a child aged 12 or under (%).....	27
Figure 5.3	How often care from a grandparent is used, by hours worked in the last fortnight (mothers with a child aged 12 or under).....	28
Figure 6.1	Proportion of participants who had experienced particular childcare difficulties so far in 2021 by age of youngest child.....	35
Figure 6.2	Experiences with formal ECEC services among participants with a child below school age.....	36
Figure 6.3	Experiences of before and after school care.....	36
Figure 6.4	Agreement with the statement: “Because of my caring responsibilities, I have to turn down work activities or opportunities”, by parenting status.....	40
Figure 6.5	Agreement with the statement “If I had suitable childcare, I would work more hours”, mothers and fathers by age of youngest child.....	41
Figure 7.1	Proportion of parents with children aged 5 or under who took parental leave for their most recent birth (%).....	52
Figure 7.2	Mothers’ use of paid parental leave for most recent birth.....	53
Figure 7.3	Fathers’ use of paid parental leave for most recent birth.....	53
Figure 7.4	Time away from work for most recent birth, mothers with a child 0 to 5 (%; n=523).....	54
Figure 7.5	Time away from work for most recent birth, fathers with a child 0 to 5 (%; n=175).....	54
Figure 7.6	Whether parents would have preferred more time away from work when their youngest child was born, if they could afford it.....	55
Figure 8.1	Proportion of participants who had no regular work day by age.....	60
Figure 8.2	Experiences of rostering and organising family life, parents with a child aged 12 or under.....	62
Figure 8.3	Agreement with statement about the length and spread of hours.....	65
Figure 8.4	Agreement with the statement “I would like to work more hours” by hours worked over last two weeks.....	65
Figure 8.5	Agreement with the statement “I would like to work more hours” by age.....	66
Figure 8.6	Agreement with the statement “If my hours were more predictable, I would be able to work more”.....	67
Figure 8.7	Agreement with statements about changing working times.....	68
Figure 9.1	Agreement with the statement: “I worry about what goes on with my children while I’m working”, mothers with a child 5 or under, by use of formal and informal care.....	78
Figure 9.2	Agreement with statements about children’s activities and routines, parents with a child aged 12 or under (%).....	78
Figure 10.1	Proportion of who agreed with the statement “I work enough hours to make a living” by hours worked in the last fortnight.....	83
Figure 10.2	Proportion of who agreed with the statement “I work enough hours to make a living” by age.....	84
Figure 10.3	Proportion of who agreed with the statement “I am satisfied with my overall level of take-home pay” by age.....	86
Figure 10.4	Whether participants in each age group agreed or disagreed with the statement “I expect to have enough superannuation when I retire”.....	90

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

This report provides information about the work, family and care arrangements of employees in Australia's retail, fast food and warehousing industries. Through the pandemic, these workers have been recognised for their essential contributions in maintaining safe access to food and other necessities for the community. Yet this recognition is not reflected in their employment conditions and supports; they remain low paid and lack access to the flexibility arrangements which assist workers in other industries to provide care to children and adults, and to manage work and family commitments.

To explore the challenges of managing work and family experienced by these workers, including their care for children and others, and their employment needs, Australia's largest private sector union, the SDA, the union for workers in retail, fast food and warehousing, commissioned this research from the Social Policy Research Centre at UNSW. Information comes from a national survey of SDA members, conducted in early 2021, which explored:

- workers' responsibilities to care for children and vulnerable adults;
- how workers arrange their care responsibilities while they are working; and
- the challenges arising from employers' working time practices and Australia's system of childcare provision.

Findings show that as well as making important economic and social contributions through their paid work, SDA members make valuable contributions through the unpaid labour they provide as parents, and as carers to children and adults in their families and communities. Yet these social and economic contributions are poorly recognised and accommodated in their working lives.

The data shows that:

- SDA members lack genuine choice about their working times and childcare arrangements and require better support structures, including access to responsive childcare services that recognise their needs, to ensure they have meaningful opportunities to shape their working and caring lives.
- Industrial relations settings and employer practices are limiting the choices and opportunities available to SDA members. Rostering and pay are shaped too strongly around employers' agendas of profitability and cost minimisation.
- The ways work is organised exacerbates difficulties faced by workers needing to organise their work and family lives, and find time for care. This impacts on the children of retail workers, many of whom cannot access early education and have constrained opportunities to fully participate in other aspects of social and community life.

Changes are needed at the level of industrial relations policy, and within employing organisations and local workplaces. Policy and regulatory changes should be aimed at promoting decent pay, job security, predictability of shifts, employees' control over work times, access to reasonable shift lengths, genuine choices about work days and times, and to ensure workers can make schedule adjustments without fear of repercussions. Changes are also needed in Australia's childcare system, to improve the affordability, accessibility and suitability of care for low-income workers.





Key findings

Care responsibilities

SDA members contribute unpaid care work that is essential to their families and communities.

- 55% of all participants said they regularly provide some form of care to another person, such as care to a child, grandchild, or to an older person, or a person with a disability or long-term health condition.
- This includes 39% who provide care to a child or young person under 18 (either in or outside their household). The vast majority of those caring for a child were doing so as parents. Indeed, 30% of survey participants were parents with a child under 18.
- 17% provide regular care to an older person, 10% care for someone with a long-term illness or health condition, and 9% provide regular care to a person with a disability.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data indicates that 1 in 9 Australians (11%) provide unpaid care to people with disability and older Australians.¹ The equivalent figure among SDA survey respondents is 24%.

"I can't use childcare until I have more regular work to accommodate childcare."

Partnered mother, casual

Complex care responsibilities

Many SDA members work and care in challenging circumstances.

- 25% of participants who are parents with a child under 18 said they are sole parents. This is high: sole parent families comprise around 14% of families in Australia.²
- 16% of parents with a child under 18 said they have a child with a disability or additional needs. While measured differently, ABS data indicates that in 2018, 7.7% of children under 15 had a disability.³
- 13% of survey participants aged 25 or under were young carers; that is, they are young people who provide regular care to an older person or adult with a disability or long-term health condition. This is much higher than in the wider population: the 2016 Census found that among people aged 15 to 24, 5.6% were young carers.⁴

Managing work and care

The survey shows the needs of retail workers, including parents and carers, are being left unmet by employers and employment regulations, and by Australia's childcare system.

- Many SDA members have contributed years, even decades of service to their employers. Yet their working time arrangements continue to be characterised by short, fluctuating hours, and precarious shifts. This impacts on mental health, constrains opportunities to provide care, and limits opportunities for families to spend time together.

"I made sure [my hours] would work with my family by being completely transparent and upfront about my needs. It was perfect up until recent new management, I'm constantly having to dispute my roster and my hours are getting cut because they can no longer work with my schedule. I feel like a burden, and I come home stressed out and exhausted."

Partnered mother, casual

Informal care

- Most parents use informal arrangements to care for their children while they are working. Among parents of children aged 12 or under, 9% used formal care services only, half (49%) used informal care only, and 42% used a combination of both.
- Care by a grandparent is particularly important. It enables mothers in particular to extend their working hours and earnings, and to reduce or avoid the costs of formal care. Among mothers with a child aged 12 or under, 30% used grandparent care each week and a further 10% used it most weeks. However, access to grandparent care cannot be assumed: over a third of mothers with a child under 12 (36%) did not report using grandparent care.
- As well as drawing on grandparent care, many SDA members are themselves providing care as grandparents. Among those aged over 50, 17% were providing regular unpaid care to a grandchild.
- Young workers also provide care. Among those aged 20 or under, 14% provided regular unpaid care for a younger sibling.

"Having my eldest son (13 years) watch my younger son after school allows me to work just a little bit longer each shift so I can afford bills etc; My parents don't charge if I need them to watch or pick up an unwell child."

Sole father, permanent part-time

Formal care services

- Use of early education and care services (ECEC) or formal childcare is most common among families with a pre-school aged child, however, it is usually used in combination with informal arrangements.
- Comments from workers highlight the ways some families have to make extraordinary efforts to co-ordinate family schedules around work and care, in ways that avoid or reduce their use of formal paid childcare or use of non-parental care. This is largely due to the cost of childcare, including the charging of fees in blocks which do not correspond well with working hours, and because childcare hours do not accommodate the non-standard hours which are prevalent in retail.
- A commonly mentioned challenge is the need to pay for a full day of long day care, even if a child attends only for short hours.
- Difficulties accessing childcare are resulting in inequitable participation in early education among children of SDA members. This can have enduring consequences for children's learning. Nationally, 95% of children participate in a preschool program for 15 hours per week before they start school.⁵ Among surveyed parents with a child starting school in 2022, 72% said their child attended at least 15 hours of long day care, preschool, or kindergarten, where they might receive a preschool education. 10% said they attended but for less than 15 hours, 12% did not attend, and 5% were unsure about attendance or hours.

"It is very hard to find a childcare on the weekends, evening etc. For people like us who do shift work, it is stressful to get."

Partnered father, permanent full-time

Even where SDA members use ECEC services, they experience difficulties.

- For those with a child 5 or under, the most common childcare difficulties were affording childcare (reported by 63% of participants engaged with formal services); coordinating work times with childcare (reported by 46% of those using formal services); finding childcare that fits work schedules (35%); and finding childcare at short notice (35%).
- For those with a primary school-aged child, the most common childcare difficulties were coordinating worktime with childcare (38%), affording childcare (37%) and finding childcare during the holidays (36%).
- Where childcare arrangements were perceived to work well, success was attributed to informal care arrangements, ability to co-ordinate work times within the family, and the predictability of shifts.

Labour supply

Difficulties accessing suitable childcare are reducing labour supply, and particularly impacting on the participation of women in the workforce and their working hours. This impacts on family earnings.

- Among parents with a child aged 12 or under, 43% of mothers and 35% of fathers reported wanting to work more hours, but access to suitable childcare is a barrier: 35% of mothers and 27% of fathers agreed with the statement "If I had suitable childcare, I would work more hours".
- A third of parents with a child 12 or under (33%) said they turn down extra shifts because they won't earn much more after tax and childcare costs.

"I changed my work hours so that I can be home during the day and my husband is home at night with the children. It was too hard trying to work around childcare and school and then what to do when someone is sick"

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Parental leave

Paid parental leave helps support parents around the time of childbirth or adoption of a child, and when a child is very young. SDA members with a child aged 5 or under were asked about whether they had taken parental leave for their most recent birth, and the type of leave they used.

- The Australian Government's provision of Parental Leave Pay is the most important source of support for SDA members. Parental Leave Pay was the most common form of leave taken, reported by 72% of mothers and 34% of fathers with a child under 5. Although eligibility and the reasons for non-use are not clear from the data, the information nonetheless indicates that many SDA members have missed out.

Overall, 19% of parents of young children said they had not accessed any paid or unpaid leave for their last birth. This was higher for fathers (35%) than mothers (14%).

- Among parents with a child under 5, 19% of mothers and 47% of fathers had not received any paid leave to support their most recent birth.
- Comments on parental leave and transitioning back to work showed mothers faced challenges securing appropriate conditions when returning to work, and also felt they were missing important milestones in their children's lives.

"It was hard to jump straight back into full-time work [while] juggling a sick baby. No sick leave entitlements...was hard. I was made to feel like I had to get straight back into it full force or they would find someone to replace me."

Partnered mother of child with disability,
permanent part-time



Working time and rostering practices

SDA members described very poor working time security. Poor working time security affects all workers, and is very adverse for parents and others with caring responsibilities, impacting on their access to formal and informal care.

- Only two in five (40%) of participants work the same shifts each week 'all of the time'. This is higher for fathers (48%) and lower for mothers (37%).
- Although casual work is most unstable, many of those employed permanently report that their employment does not provide stable, predictable hours
- One in ten parents (10%) said they do not have regular work days.

Most workers report that rosters are set by a manager who they have regular contact with. Those who are satisfied with their working times frequently attribute this to 'luck' in having a good manager, rather than systemic practice. Workers described substantial challenges, including:

- working times which emphasise business priorities and do not accommodate personal needs and circumstances. These affect everyone but make life particularly difficult for workers with complex care responsibilities;
- low hours, short shifts and insecurity, contributing to underemployment and financial difficulties and stress.
- mismatch between working times and childcare availability;
- changing schedules, often at short notice and without adequate communication from employers;
- repercussions and being penalised, including loss of hours, when workers refuse shifts or seek to change them.

"We had to change our start and finish times on night fill so the company can save on penalty rates. We were not given a choice just told it was changing so all our contracts had to change too. There was no consideration for night fill members that have to pick their children up from school etc. Now we also get paid less because of this."

Sole mother, permanent part-time

Impacts on workers and families

Rostering practices contribute to financial difficulties in low-income families, make it difficult for families to access childcare, and make it difficult for families to spend time together. Rostering practices also prevent workers from working more hours. Employers' rostering practices add to parents' unpaid workload. Among those with a child aged 12 or under:

- 68% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "When I get my roster, I have to check it fits with the family's childcare arrangements".
- 69% agreed their work times affect when other family members can work.
- 62% said they find it stressful to organise childcare around work times.

Rostering also impacts on family stress and the mental health of the worker and members of their family:

- Of those with a child 12 or under, 37% of mothers and 42% of fathers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "The way I am rostered to work impacts on my mental health".
- 63% of parents with a child aged 12 or under agreed or strongly agreed that they worry about what's happening with their children whilst working (69% of mothers and 57% of fathers).
- Among mothers with a child below school age, those using formal childcare services were less likely to worry about their children compared with others, underlining the importance of formal childcare for alleviating maternal stress.

"I'm a single mother that gets no child support and live week to week on my wages."

Sole mother of child with disability,
permanent full-time



Financial security

Many workers find that low pay makes it difficult to meet the needs of their families.

- 55% of respondents live in households with post-tax income of less than \$1000 per week. 32% of couple parents and 80% of sole parents live in households with incomes under \$1000.
- A substantial proportion of parents caring for children find their wages are too low to meet their needs. 46% of parents in couple relationships and 56% of sole parents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are satisfied with their take home pay.
- Many find they work fewer hours than they need. Only 20% of casuals agreed (or strongly agreed) that they work enough hours to make a living, as was the case for 29% of those employed on a permanent part-time basis. Problematically, only 57% of permanent full-time employees said they work enough hours to make a living, reflecting the low hourly rates received.
- Half of participants agreed that they rely on penalty rates to make a living (50%). This was not restricted to casuals, 53% of permanent part-time workers and 50% of those with permanent full-time hours said this was the case.
- Around a third of parents agreed with the statement "I turn down extra shifts because I won't earn much more after tax and childcare costs".
- Parents commented on difficulties of living on low incomes. They described trying to work hours that enabled them to contain childcare costs. Pay was seen as low given the nature and complexity of the work.
- While a quarter of participants (26%) were unsure about the adequacy of their retirement savings, around half (51%) disagreed with the statement "I expect to have enough superannuation when I retire", and only 23% agreed.
- Mothers' expectations of retirement savings are particularly low: only 18% of mothers with a child under 18 agreed they would have enough superannuation when they retire.

"It shouldn't be about working extra hours, it's about the hourly rate. 42 hrs per week to struggle paying bills!"

Sole father and carer of adult with
disability, permanent full-time



Improving work and care

The research demonstrates that formal child care options and industrial relations regulations are not meeting the work and family needs of SDA members. In particular, rostering arrangements and low pay are impeding the ability of workers to organise the time needed to provide care for their children, extended families and communities. This is affecting children's access to early education and opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities.

Reform is needed to improve working time arrangements in retail, fast food and warehousing industries, so that SDA members have control over their working hours and have predictable shifts so they can organise care and other aspects of their lives. Better job security and pay are also needed, to support all workers to fulfill their care responsibilities, and to enable families to engage with formal care services.

Changes are also needed to ensure child care is available to SDA members in ways that are affordable and suitable for their working hours. Childcare reform should be oriented around principles of children's universal rights to early education and care, to enable access for every child regardless of parents' incomes or employment arrangements.

¹ ABS (2019) Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release#carers>

² ABS (2020) Labour Force Status of Families
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-status-families/jun-2020>

³ ABS (2019) Disability, Ageing and Carers Australia: Summary of Findings
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/2018#children-with-disability>

⁴ ABS (2018) 2071.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Reflecting Australia - Stories from the Census, 2016
<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features1432016>

⁵ Through the Council of Australian Governments', all jurisdictions have agreed to aim to provide 15 hours per week of early education for all children in the year before school. This reflects that 15 hours is considered the minimum amount of learning needed to develop the skills needed for a successful start at school.

Introduction

Introduction

This report shows the ways employees manage work and care in Australia's retail, fast food and warehousing industries, and the challenges they face. This group of employees is large in number, female-dominated, and low-paid. In February 2021, Australia's retail trade employed 1.3 million workers (10.2% of all employees)⁶, many in frontline positions in supermarkets and other stores, working as cashiers and customer service assistants. Trends to reduce local managerial autonomy, along with intensified pressures for profitability and cost minimisation and labour flexibility, have led employers to develop and rely on a short-hours, part-time workforce⁷. Opportunities for the types of employee-controlled flexibility which offer to help manage work and care, such as remote working or flexi-time, are typically unavailable to these workers, many of whom are working in contexts of precarity and underemployment. Further, parents working in retail often find that formal childcare services are structured in ways that are poorly suited to the short, irregular shift arrangements made available by employers, and to their low incomes.

By examining workers' experiences, this research shows that too often, the work and care needs of SDA members are left unmet, both by employers and the childcare system. Employers frequently demand work hours and flexibilities which fit poorly with the rhythms of contemporary families' and children's lives. Australia's childcare system assumes norms of regular, weekday work, and workers report that the highly variable hours employers are offering creates needs that the childcare system is unable to fulfill. Low pay, underemployment, and limited employee control over working time arrangements makes formal childcare options unaffordable and unsuitable. Flexible options for families are few, and childcare costs remain high, averaging \$10.50 per hour for centre-based care, not taking account of the Australian Government's Child Care Subsidy⁸. The hourly Award rate in retail in 2021 is \$21.78 before tax so this represents a cost of around half the hourly rate payable for most retail workers.

Poor affordability for low paid workers is further exacerbated by fluctuating hours of employment, which may place access to the Child Care Subsidy at risk, and make it difficult for workers to commit to paying for regular days in formal services. Childcare options, and the income and activity Child Care Subsidy, are outlined in Appendix: Australia's early education and care system.

The most common forms of formal care, long day care, preschool, for children in the year before school, and out of school hours care are often not open when shift workers require care. The capacity of family day care to offer non-standard hours depends on the willingness of individual educators to have children in their homes at these times⁹.

Occasional care, which provides flexible booking arrangements, is not widely available. Centre-based care typically requires payment from families for full (usually 10 to 12 hour) days, which can be substantially longer than, and mismatched with, paid work hours.

Families are typically required to book regular days, and to pay for their children's ECEC days, regardless of whether or not they use them. This can lead to higher costs for workers with unpredictable hours, who may pay for regular days 'just in case' they are called in to work, even if they don't end up requiring them¹⁰. Similarly when children need to stay home sick, something which is occurring more often during the COVID-19 pandemic, families still need to pay for their child care. For casual workers who stay home from work to care for their children, this imposes a double financial penalty: loss of wages and fees for childcare they cannot use. On this basis, despite the benefits of high quality ECEC services for children, including preparedness for school, workers with unstable schedules frequently avoid formal services, using informal arrangements, such as tag-team parenting and on-call support from families to buffer against unstable and unpredictable work schedules¹¹.



The informal care offered by grandparents is especially important, in 2018, more children aged 0-12 years (44%) were cared for by grandparents, mostly grandmothers, than by formal child care services¹². However, not all workers can access this support, and even where they receive support from grandparents or other family members, managing work and care remains a challenge, as arrangements must be regularly reorganised around changing work demands, contributing to high personal and family costs and stress.

The insecurity, precarity and unpredictability of employment in the retail and fast food industry for carers and parents who need to be able to access stable care arrangements deters people from working in the industry, reduces labour supply, can increase business costs, and impacts on the success of retail, fast food, and warehousing operations. It also provides a barrier to workers to choose a career in retail and fast food, impacts the ability for workers with caring responsibilities to progress their career within the industry and exacerbates gender inequality in the sector.

2.1 Aims of the study

The research was designed to understand the different types of work and care arrangements among SDA members to inform and understand the supports needed. A priority was to amplify members' voices to help ensure their diverse range of experiences are recognised in national policy advocacy and debate, and ultimately to shape working time regulation and early childhood education and care in ways that enable better outcomes for low paid workers in retail and other industries, and their families.

Specifically, the research sought to build understandings of:

- Nature of the caring responsibilities of SDA members and the impact this has on work;
- Level of control and access to working arrangements SDA members have to support their caring responsibilities;
- Barriers that exist in the regulation and structure of work in retail, fast food and warehousing that prevent or make it difficult for SDA members to manage their work and care;
- The impact that managing work and care has on the financial security and stress of SDA members;
- The impact that managing work and care has on SDA members mental and physical health;
- The childcare needs, use and preferences of SDA members, including:
 - » SDA members' current use of formal and informal childcare arrangements;
 - » the ways members make decisions about childcare, and the employment, financial, family and other factors that influence their decisions;
 - » members' preferences regarding their childcare and working time arrangements and the barriers they face to accessing their preferred arrangements; and
 - » what would help promote genuine choice among workers, and access to the arrangements SDA members would like for their children.

2.2 About the survey

The survey instrument was designed after scoping existing surveys of work and care, and in collaboration with the SDA. Conducted online, questions asked about workers' care responsibilities for children, both as parents of their own children, and as members of their extended family or community networks of carers.

Parents of young children were asked about the care arrangements they utilised whilst working, including their use of formal ECEC services and informal care, such as care from a family member or friend. The COVID-19 pandemic made an extraordinary impact on early education and care in 2020, so parents were asked questions about the childcare they had used so far in 2021 when the pandemic had less impact in Australia.

The survey also asked whether workers were involved in caring for an older person, person with disability or long-term health condition. While those with care responsibilities were asked about their experiences, some questions, including questions about working time arrangements, were asked of all participants. As such, the information offers insight into experiences of the wider group of workers, including those not currently performing an unpaid caring role, as well as those currently managing work and care.

In total, 6469 people completed the survey. Recognising a population of around 213,500 SDA members (as of December 2020), the sample size (3%) gives a low margin of error and high degree of confidence in survey results (95% confidence level, relative standard error =1.2). This indicates low likelihood that results would differ if the survey was repeated with a different sample of SDA members. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software. Rather than estimating prevalence, the main purpose of analysis was to explore the range of experiences among participants, and to show differences between groups of SDA members, including for those with and without caring responsibilities, with and without regular schedules, and among different groups of carers, such as those caring for people with complex needs. As key parameters such as parenting and caring status were not known for the whole population of SDA members, survey responses were not weighted. The content of qualitative comments were analysed thematically and differences across key groups explored.

Material presented in the report attests to the differences in experiences of work and care according to a range of factors. Often these were based on care responsibilities and gender, and as such, many responses are broken down to show responses among those with and without caring responsibilities. Circumstances such as employment contract and hours, employer, and sole parenthood also shaped experiences of work and care, and where these relationships were pertinent, they are also shown in the report.

Finally, in interpreting the data, it is important to recognise that as the information comes from union members, the survey likely depicts circumstances which are better than across the industry: workers are likely to be more experienced and established in their roles and less precariously employed, as they work in workplaces with union agreements and better conditions than across the industry.

⁶ ABS (2021) Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, 6291.0.55.001

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/latest-release#industry-occupation-and-sector>

⁷ Campbell, I., & Chalmers, J. (2008). Job quality and part-time work in the retail industry: An Australian case study. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(3), 487-500. Price, R. (2016) Controlling routine front line service workers: an Australian retail supermarket case, in *Work, Employment and Society* 30(6):915-931.

⁸ "Child Care in Australia Report, December quarter 2021"

<https://www.dese.gov.au/key-official-documents-about-early-childhood/early-childhood-and-child-care-reports/child-care-australia/child-care-australia-report-december-quarter-2020> The Child Care Subsidy pays up to 85% of the actual hourly fee, up to a cap of \$12.20. A family receiving the highest rate of CCS at an average service would receive 85% of \$10.50 or \$8.83 of CCS, and pay the remaining \$1.58 per hour.

⁹ Baxter, J. A., Hand, K., & Sweid, R. (2016). Flexible child care and Australian parents' work and care decision-making (Research Report No. 37). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

¹⁰ Baxter, J., Bray, J.R., Carroll, M., Hand, K., Gray, M., Katz, I., Budinski, M., Rogers, C., Smart, J., Skattebol J., & Blaxland, M. (2019). Child Care Package Evaluation: Early monitoring report. (Research Report). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

¹¹ Carrillo, D., Harknett, K., Locan, A., Luhr, S. and Schneider, D. (2017) Instability of Work and Care: How Work Schedules Shape Child-Care Arrangements for Parents Working in the Service Sector, *Social Service Review* 91(3): 422-455.

¹² Hamilton, M., & Suthersan, B. (2020). Gendered moral rationalities in later life: Grandparents balancing paid work and care of grandchildren in Australia. *Ageing and Society*, 1-22. doi:10.1017/S0144686X19001855

About survey participants

About survey participants

A diverse range of SDA members responded to the survey. As an opt-in survey on the topic of work and care, a slightly higher proportion of women and middle-aged people responded, compared with SDA membership. The 6469 survey participants resided across Australia. However, most were from SDA's Victorian Branch (35%) or from NSW or the ACT (25%) (Table 3.1). The vast majority said their main job was in retail (88%), while 4% were in warehousing and 2% had a main job in fast food. 85% of respondents worked just one job; and as such, were solely reliant on their retail, warehousing or fast food job.

Table 3.2 shows that among survey participants, 17% were currently studying. This was higher among younger people: 74% of those 20 or under were students, as were 48% of those aged 21 to 25, and 21% of those in their late twenties.

Table 3.1 Survey participants by SDA Branch

	n	%
NSW/ACT	1608	25
Newcastle and Northern	496	8
VIC	2243	35
QLD	974	15
SA/NT	363	6
WA	560	9
TAS	225	4
TOTAL	6469	100

Note: Results are based on postcode of residence. Percentages exceed 100 due to rounding.

Table 3.2 Age and current student status

	Not currently studying		Currently studying		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
20 or under	108	26%	312	74%	420	100%
21 to 25	330	52%	307	48%	637	100%
26 to 30	492	79%	129	21%	621	100%
31 to 35	549	86%	88	14%	637	100%
36 to 40	597	90%	68	10%	665	100%
41 to 45	650	92%	56	8%	706	100%
46 to 50	652	94%	40	6%	692	100%
51 to 55	680	94%	43	6%	723	100%
56 to 60	643	96%	27	4%	670	100%
61 to 65	440	97%	13	3%	453	100%
66 to 70	108	99%	1	1%	109	100%
71 or over	32	91%	3	9%	35	100%
I prefer not to say	36	97%	1	3%	37	100%
TOTAL	5317	83%	1088	17%	6405	100%

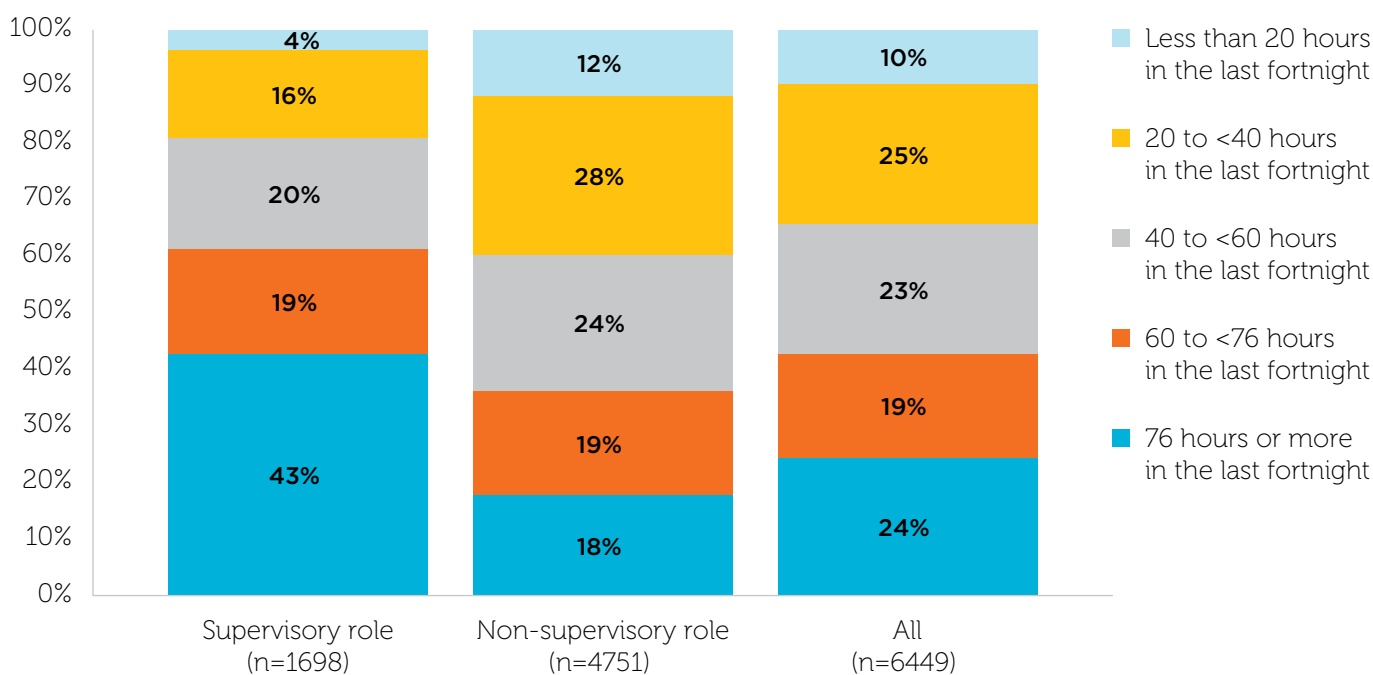
*Information about student status was missing for 64 participants.
An age profile for all 6469 participants is in Appendix Table A.1.*

3.1 Role and hours

The high prevalence of short working hours is important for understanding employees' care experiences. Many participants worked relatively short hours, as is typical of retail employment¹³. Figure 3.1 shows that in the last fortnight, 10% had worked less than 20 hours, and a further 25% had worked less than 40 hours over those two weeks, although short hours were relatively less common among those in supervisory roles. However, even among supervisors, only a minority (43%) reported working the equivalent of full-time hours across the previous fortnight. Fortnightly hours of 76 or more (defined as full-time) were very uncommon among those in non-supervisory roles: only 18% reported working the equivalent of full-time hours.

A gender breakdown (see Appendix Table A. 2) indicates that women were less likely than men to work full-time hours. Among those in supervisory roles, 39% of women compared with 55% of men had worked 76 hours or more in the previous fortnight. Women in non-supervisory roles were also less likely than men to work longer hours, and slightly more likely to report fewer hours. An age breakdown (Table A. 3) shows that those aged 36 to 40 were most likely to work full-time, yet even among this group, only 30% had worked full-time hours in the previous fortnight.

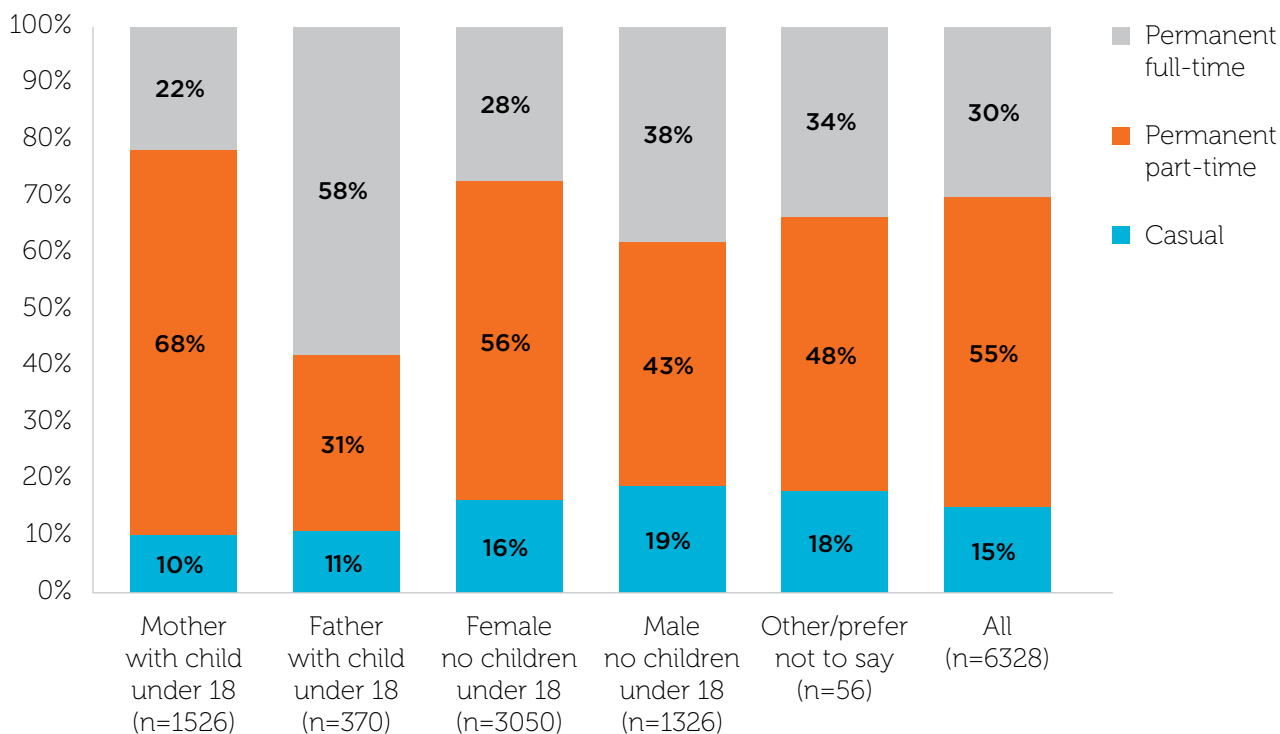
Figure 3.1 Fortnightly hours of work, staff in supervisory and non-supervisory roles



3.2 Contract type

Differences in contract types, such as those working on a casual and permanent part-time or full-time basis, also characterise these workers and their experiences. An important feature is the segregation by gender across contract types, especially among parents (Figure 3.2). Among all survey participants, most were employed on a permanent part-time basis (55%), 15% were casual, and 30% were employed on a permanent basis with full-time hours. Among fathers with a child aged under 18, permanent employment with full-time hours was most common (58%). Among mothers, permanent part-time employment was dominant (68% of mothers).

Figure 3.2 Contract type by gender and parenting status



While casual roles are often thought to be occupied mainly by students, in the sample over half of casuals were not currently studying (Table 3.3). Overall, around 17% of survey participants were studying. Students comprised 43% of casuals, and were a minority of those working a permanent part-time or full-time basis (15% and 8% respectively).

Table 3.3 Student status and contract type

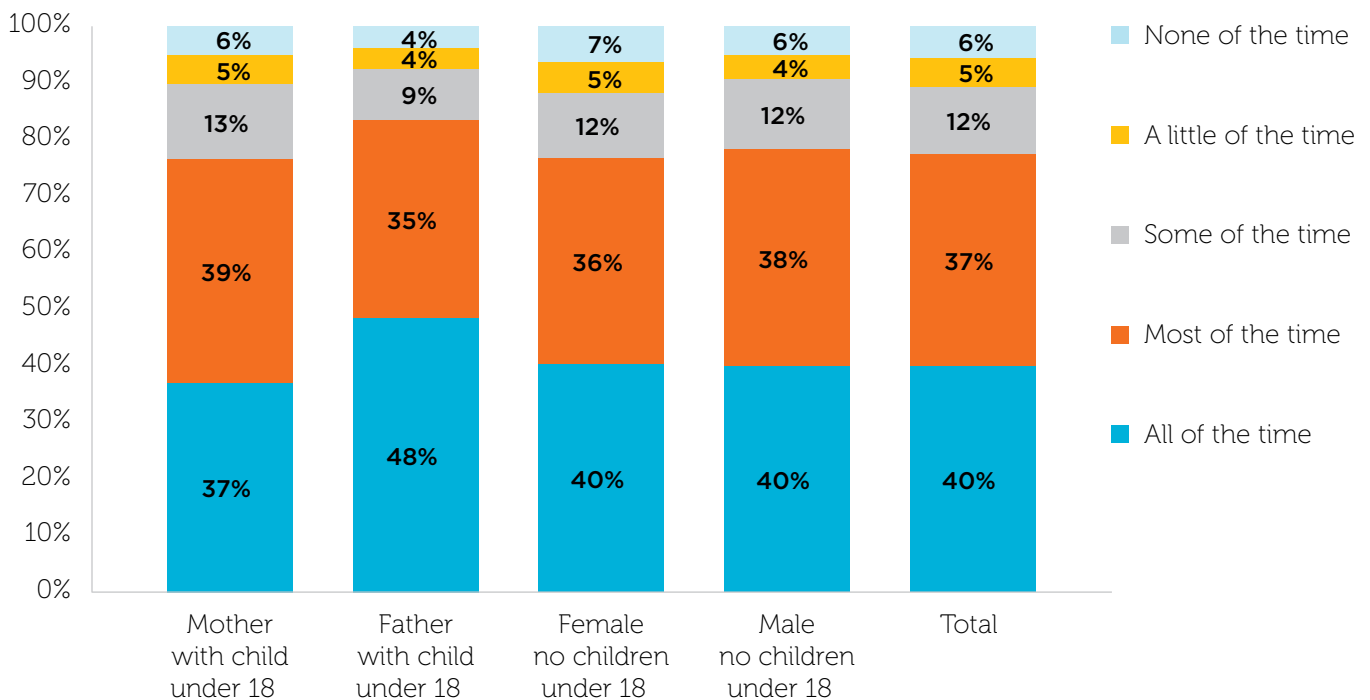
	Casual		Permanent part-time		Permanent full-time		All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Not a student	547	58%	2953	85%	1770	92%	5270	83%
Student	405	43%	512	15%	154	8%	1071	17%
All	952	100%	3465	100%	1924	100%	6341	100%

3.3 Shift arrangements

Fluctuating, unpredictable hours characterise working time arrangements in retail. Because access to stable working arrangements enables workers to organise stable care arrangements, the survey asked how often they worked the same shifts. While 40% said they work the same shifts each week 'all of the time', and a further 37% worked the same shifts each week 'most of the time', a substantial minority report that they do not have regular shifts; 17% worked the same shifts only some of the time or a little of the time (combined), and 6% did so 'none of the time' (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 shows that higher proportions of fathers than mothers had stable work patterns: Almost half of fathers (48%) worked the same shifts each week 'all of the time' compared with 37% of mothers. However, among workers who were not parenting a child under 18, there was little difference in responses.

Figure 3.3 How often participants work the same shifts each week by gender and parenting status



A breakdown by contract type, (Table A. 4) shows that while permanently employed workers were much more likely to work the same shifts each week compared with casuals, 18% of part-time workers only work the same shifts 'sometimes', 'a little of the time', or 'never', as did 13% of those with permanent full-time hours. As such, although casual work is most unstable, many of those employed permanently report that their employment does not provide stable, predictable hours.

In addition to instability in shift times, care challenges arise from non-standard work days and times, given the lack of options to access formal care services on weekends, early mornings and nights. Weekday work is most common among survey participants, reported by 84% of workers, although many also work weekends. Indeed, around half said they usually work Saturdays (49%) and 43% said they usually work Sundays. Daytime shifts were most common, worked by 72% of participants, followed by evenings (6.00pm to midnight) which were worked by 37%, early mornings (5am to 8am) which were worked by 35%, and nights (5%). Higher proportions of men than women reported working evenings (45% of men compared with 33% of women). Similarly, 10% of men worked nights compared with 3% of women. There were no significant differences in the proportions of men and women working early mornings, or Saturdays or Sundays.

3.4 Time with current employer

Finally, in interpreting the care challenges faced by SDA members, it is important to recognise that the difficulties workers described in the survey are being experienced despite the high proportion who are well-established in their jobs, having worked for their employers for many years, and in some cases decades. This is shown in Table 3.4, by gender and parenting status. Overall, 16% of participants had worked for their current employer for 20 years or more, and a further 26% had worked for them for 10 to 20 years. Men without children under 18 were most likely to have worked for their current employer for less than five years, and least likely to have 10 or 20 years of service (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 Time worked for current main employer by gender and parenting status

	Mother with a child currently under 18 (n=1548)	Father with a child currently under 18 (n=378)	Other women, no child under 18 (n=3096)	Other men, no child under 18 (n=1360)	All (n=6438)
Less than 1 year	6%	9%	9%	15%	9%
1 to 2 years	8%	8%	8%	12%	9%
2 to 5 years	20%	18%	18%	23%	19%
5 to 10 years	24%	24%	19%	20%	21%
10 to 20 years	28%	31%	27%	21%	26%
20 years or more	14%	11%	19%	10%	16%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

¹⁵ Price, R. (2016) Controlling routine front line service workers: an Australian retail supermarket case, in *Work, Employment and Society* 30(6):915-931.

SDA members' care responsibilities

SDA members' care responsibilities

As well as contributing to employers and the wider community through their paid work, SDA members perform essential unpaid care work in their families and communities.

Most provide regular unpaid care, help or assistance to a child or young person, or to an adult, person with disability, or person with long-term illness or health condition. Overall, 55% of survey participants were involved in providing some form of regular unpaid care, whether for a child or adult. However, as shown in Table 4.1, this was higher for women: 60% had care responsibilities compared with 43% of men.

Table 4.1 Provides regular unpaid care, help or assistance to a child and/or adult

	Men		Women		Non-binary or other gender identity		Prefer not to say		All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
No current care responsibilities	999	57%	1852	40%	18	56%	21	54%	2890	45%
Has care responsibilities	743	43%	2804	60%	14	44%	18	46%	3579	55%
All	1742	100%	4656	100%	32	100%	39	100%	6469	100%

4.1 Provision of care to children

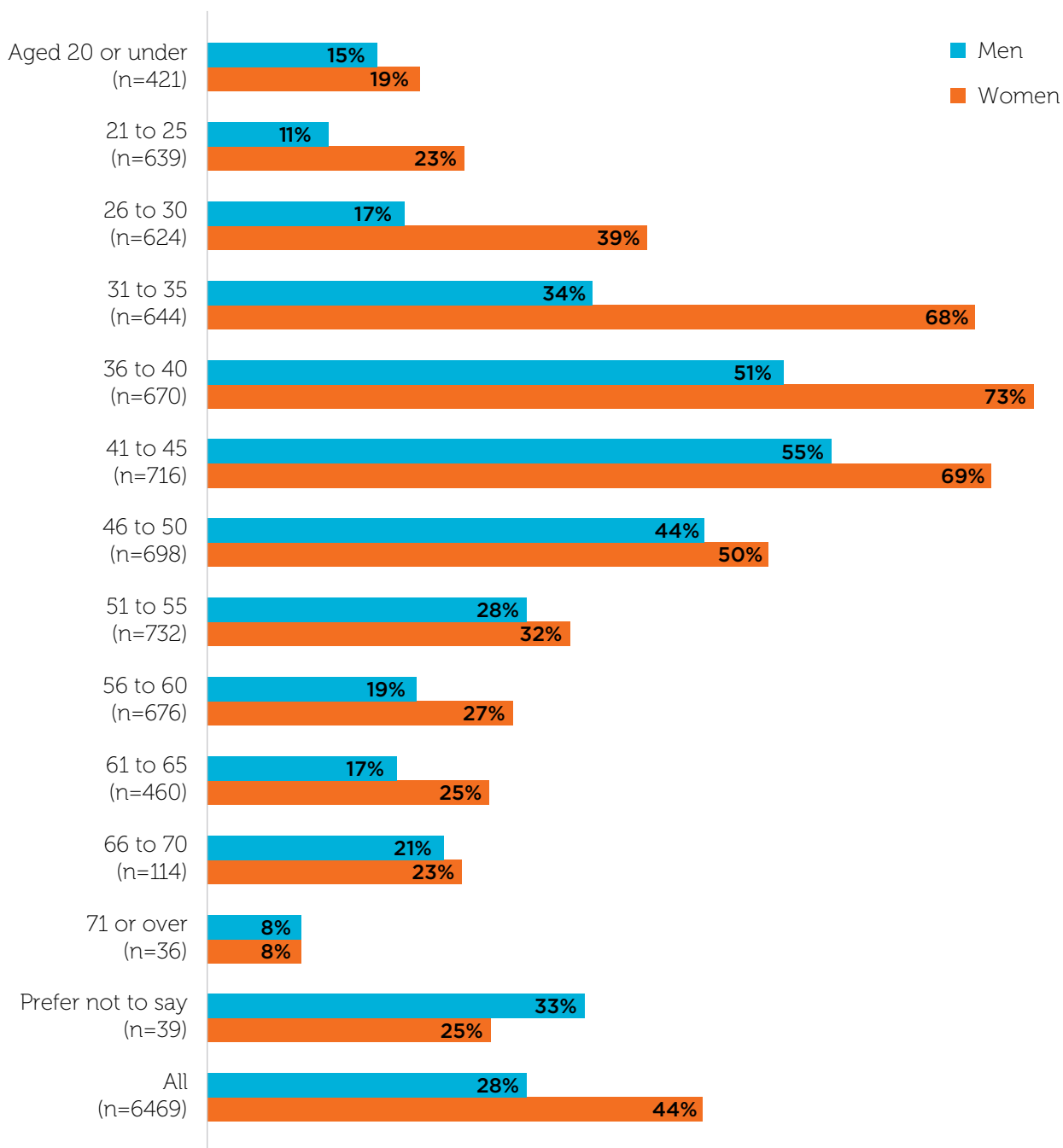
Most commonly, SDA members' responsibilities for providing care involved care for children. Two in five participants (39%) said they regularly provide unpaid care, help or assistance to a child or young person aged under 18.

- Most who were involved in caring for children were parents; indeed, 30% of all participants were a parent or guardian for a child under 18.
- Among those aged over 50, 17% provided regular unpaid care to a grandchild.
- Among those aged 20 or under, 14% provided regular unpaid care for a younger sibling.

Across the sample, 3% were providing regular care for a niece or nephew, and 1% had regular unpaid caring responsibilities for children of friends or neighbours. Others mentioned they were step-parents, foster parents or cousins, and some were caring for multiple children in different kinds of relationships, reflecting the rich and diverse networks of care relationships which SDA members are involved in.

In most cases, participants reported caring for a child living with them (31%). A further 3% reported providing care to a child who lived with them some of the time (e.g. shared care), and 8% provided care to a child living outside the household. Some provided both to children living with them and to those in other households. Among workers in every age range, higher proportions of women than men were involved in providing regular care to a child (either in or outside of their household) (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 Proportion of men and women who regularly provide care to a child aged under 18 in or outside their household by employee age



4.2 Complex caring relationships

SDA members have diverse family arrangements. Many care for children as sole parents, or provide care to children or other family members with complex needs. Among participants who were parents of a child under 18, the largest group were in couple relationships (76%), but the proportion who were sole parents appears high relative to the wider population (Table 4.2). While 25% of survey participants with a child under 18 were sole parents, sole parents comprised 14% of families in Australia, as of June 2020.¹⁴ Among SDA mothers who were sole parents, 68% had sole custody. Among men who were sole parents, 74% had shared custody.

Sole parenthood rises over time, and is higher among those with older children (Table 4.2). Among SDA members who were parents, 14% of those whose youngest child was aged 2 or under were sole parents, and this rose to 20% for those whose youngest child was 3 to 5 and 29% for those 6 or over.

16% of parents with a child under 18 said they have a child with a disability or additional needs. While measured slightly differently, ABS data indicates that in 2018 7.7% of children under 15 had a disability.¹⁵

Table 4.2 Couple and sole parent status by age of youngest child

	Youngest child aged 0 to 2		Youngest child aged 3 to 5		Youngest child aged 6 to 12		Youngest child aged 13 to 17		All parents of children aged 0 to 17	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Couple parent	320	86%	266	80%	504	72%	381	71%	1471	76%
Sole parent	52	14%	65	20%	201	29%	159	29%	477	25%
All parents	372	100%	331	100%	705	100%	540	100%	1948	100%

Note: Figures may not add exactly to 100 due to rounding.

4.3 Care for adults

High proportions of SDA members regularly provide unpaid care or assistance to an adult, such as an older person, person with disability or health condition. In the survey, 17% said they provided care to an older person, 10% provided care to someone with a long-term illness or health condition, and 9% provided care to a person with a disability. Most commonly, care was for an elderly, ill or disabled parent, or parent-in-law (18% of participants), but many also provided care for a partner or spouse (4%) or a grandparent (4%) a sibling (3%) or an adult child (2%). Often, parents providing care to children are also caring for older people: 16% of parents with a child aged 18 and under were also providing regular elder care. 12% of parents with a child aged 5 or under were also providing elder care.



4.4 Care across the lifecycle

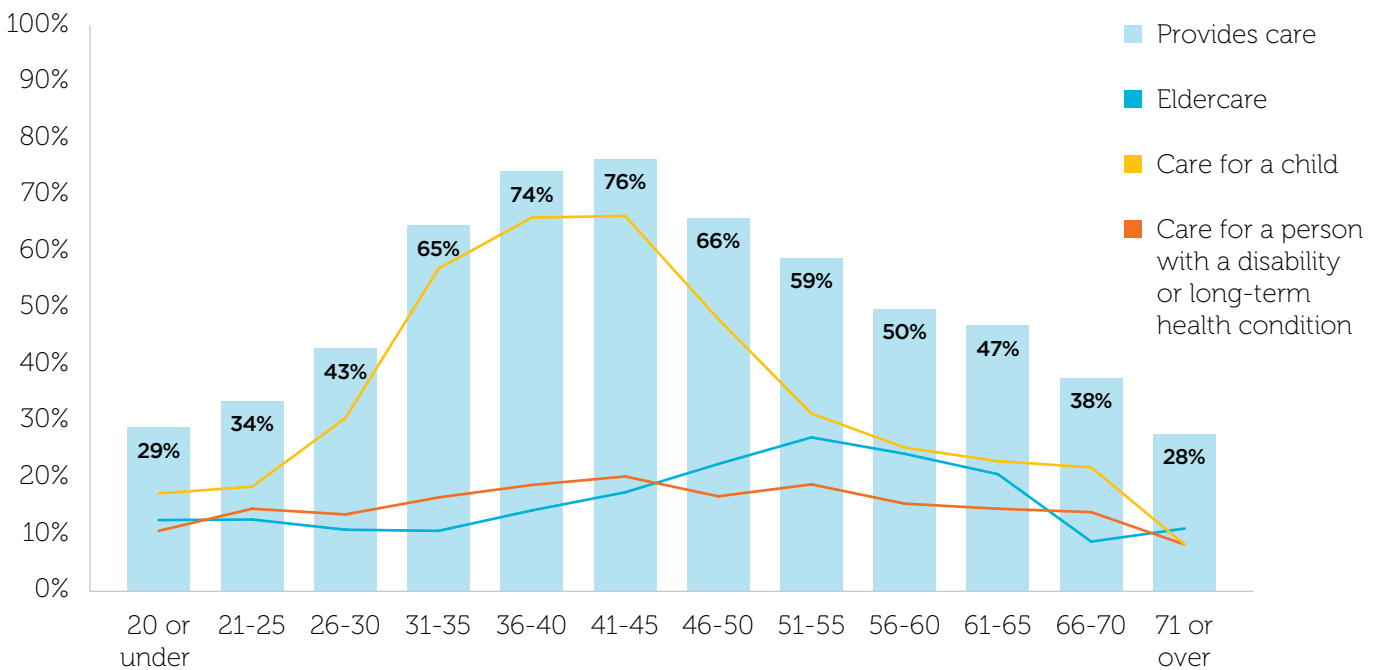
Provision of care by SDA members varies across the lifecycle. As shown in Figure 4.2, childcare is the most common form of care provided by SDA members, and is highest for people aged in their late 30s and early 40s, when two thirds provide care for a child. Provision of eldercare is highest among SDA members aged in their early 50s, when around 27% of SDA members are involved in providing care. Care for a person with a disability or long-term health condition varies less by age, affecting 15-20% of SDA members across most age groups.

4.5 Young carers

Notably, many young workers have regular unpaid care responsibilities. As noted earlier, among those aged 20 or under, 14% provided regular unpaid care for a younger sibling. Figure 4.2 also indicates that many young workers are also caring for vulnerable adults. Among those aged 20 or under, 13% were regularly providing care for an older person, and 11% were regularly providing care for a person with a disability or long-term health condition. These figures were similar to the proportions of workers in older age groups providing care.

The proportion of young people in the survey sample with care responsibilities is relatively high. The 2016 Census found that among people aged 15 to 24, 5.6% were young carers, providing care to an older person or adult with a disability or long-term health condition.¹⁶ While measured slightly differently, in the SDA survey, 13% of people aged up to 25 provided regular unpaid care to an older person, person with disability or person with a long term health condition. This was the case for 11% of those aged 20 or under, and 15% of those aged 21 to 25.

Figure 4.2 Proportion of participants who regularly provide care by age and type of care provided



¹⁴ ABS (2020) Labour Force Status of Families
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-status-families/jun-2020>

¹⁵ ABS (2019) Disability, Ageing and Carers Australia: Summary of Findings
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/2018#children-with-disability>

¹⁶ ABS (2018) 2071.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Reflecting Australia - Stories from the Census, 2016
<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features1432016>

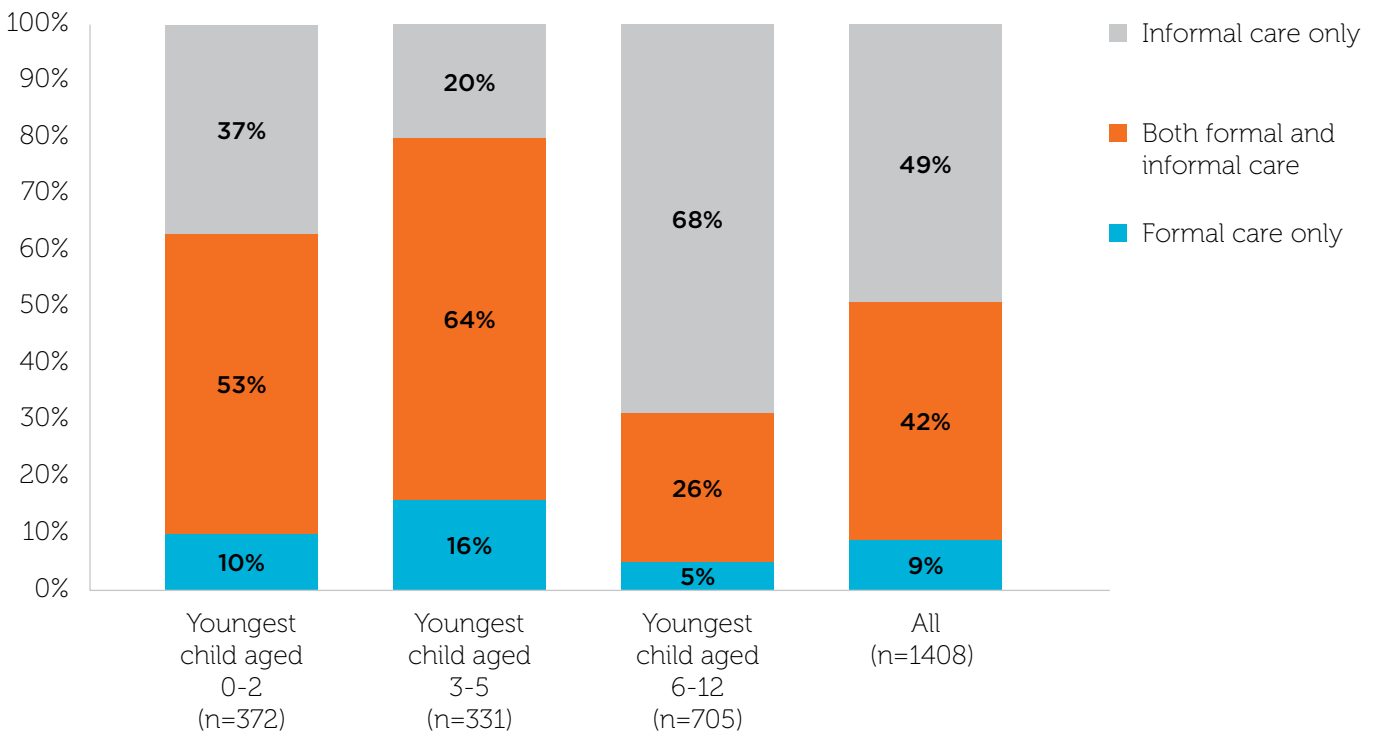
Childcare arrangements

Childcare arrangements

As indicated above, 39% of survey participants said they regularly provide unpaid care, help or assistance to a child or young person aged under 18, and 30% were parents. Parents with a child aged 12 or under were asked about the care their family accessed, while they were working. Overall, 9% said their family used formal care only, half (49%) used informal care only, and 42% used both.

Use of formal and informal arrangements differed according to the age of their youngest child (Figure 5.1).¹⁷ Formal care use was highest among those with a youngest child between 3 to 5. Most often, these parents used both formal and informal arrangements (64%), but 16% said that so far in 2021, their family had used formal care only. Those whose youngest child was school-aged (6 to 12) were most likely to use informal care only (68% did so), with less than a third (31%) using formal care, such as before or after school care or vacation care, either solely or in addition to informal arrangements.

Figure 5.1 Use of formal and informal care whilst working by age of youngest child



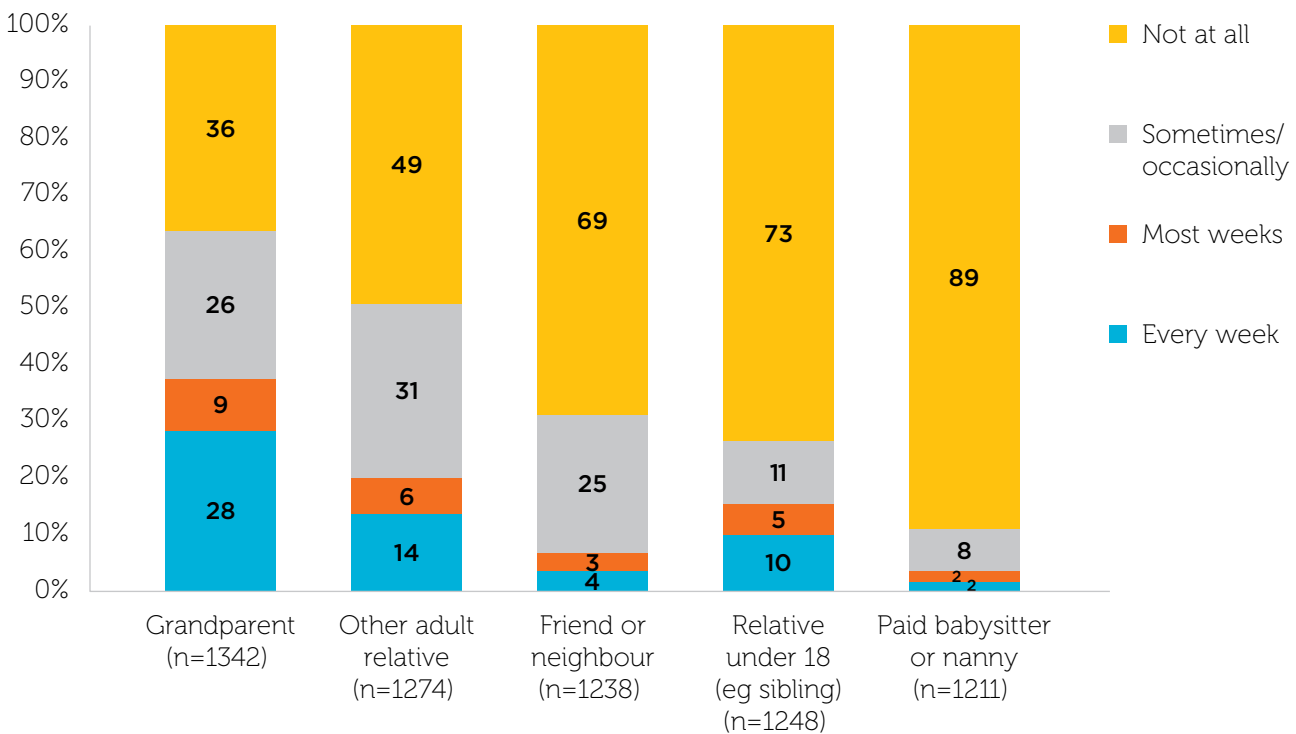
Appendix Table A.6 shows some differences by number of hours worked. As parents worked more hours, use of informal care only (with no formal service) is less common. This is particularly apparent among parents with very young children (aged 0 to 2) and 3 to 5, underlining the role of formal services in enabling parents to increase their labour supply (see Appendix Table A.6).

5.1 Informal care

Data in the previous section shows that informal care was used by the vast majority of parents while they were working. Informal care is important to parents of school aged children as well as parents of very young children. Among those whose youngest child was aged 0 to 2, 37% reported informal arrangements only, while half (53%) reported using a mix of formal and informal care arrangements. Most parents of school aged children reported no formal care use: 68% had used only informal arrangements so far in 2021, and a further 26% used a mix of formal and informal care. Among all parents with a child under 12, 38% of parents used some form of informal care on a weekly basis.

Grandparent care was the most common form of informal care. As shown in Figure 5.2, grandparent care was used by 28% of families with a child aged 12 or under 'every week', and by a further 9% 'most weeks'. However 36% of those with a child aged 12 or under did not use grandparent care at all. Comments from participants about informal care showed that some had no family nearby or in a position to help with the care of their children. Care from other adult relatives were used weekly by 14% of parents, and 10% used care by a family member aged under 18 on a weekly basis, usually a sibling. Friends and neighbours, and paid babysitters were less commonly used, and rarely on a regular basis.

Figure 5.2 How often informal care from grandparent or other person is used, parents with a child aged 12 or under (%)



Through the survey, workers left many comments highlighting the important contribution that informal care makes to their lives, and it was frequently mentioned as a factor that enabled them to manage their work and family responsibilities (discussed in section 6.4).

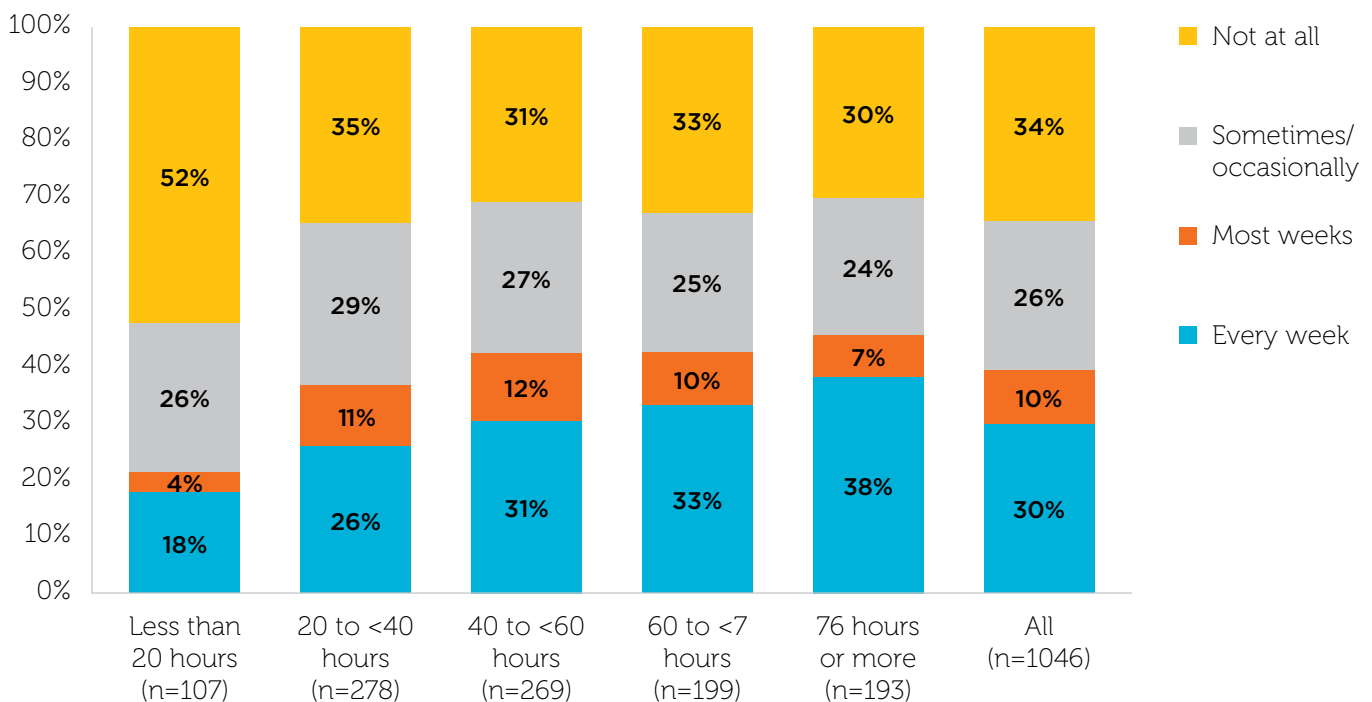
5.2 Care by a grandparent

Grandparents were the most common source of non-parental care. Regular use of care by a grandparent increased with parents' (especially mothers') work hours.

Figure 5.3 shows that among mothers who worked less than 20 hours in the last fortnight, 18% said they used grandparent care every week and a further 4% used it most weeks. Use of regular grandparent care was much higher among mothers who worked more hours. Among those with full-time hours (i.e. 76 or more in the last fortnight) 38% of mothers used grandparent care every week, and a further 7% used it most weeks.

This underlines the importance of grandparent care in enabling parents to work more hours. However, grandparent care is not available to all; across the sample, a substantial proportion of all mothers (a third, 34%) said they did not use grandparent care at all, while a further 26% used it only sometimes or occasionally.

Figure 5.3 How often care from a grandparent is used by hours worked in the last fortnight (mothers with a child aged 12 or under)



"My mother never knows my work hours because they change with no notice every week. That causes frustration because I have to explain this to my 73 yr old mother."

Partnered mother, carer for adult with disability, permanent full-time

"I am a Baker and start early, so grandparents help A LOT."

Female, aged 26 to 40

5.3 Grandparents' experiences of work and care

While grandparents were a key source of care for survey participants, many were themselves grandparents providing care to grandchildren. Across the sample, 6% of participants were grandparents providing regular care to a grandchild. Around half of these grandparents were caring for a primary school aged child (49% did so), while 45% cared for a child aged 3 to 5, and 43% cared for a child aged 0 to 2 (many cared for multiple children). 13% provided regular care to a teenage child.

Some grandparents commented on the implications of their roster for their connection with and care for their grandchildren.

I miss grandchildren' birthdays and family events because I work weekends.

Grandmother, carer for person with long term-illness, permanent full-time

My roster is the same every week so this makes caring for my grandchildren easier.

Grandmother, elder carer, permanent part-time

I am very blessed with the job role that I do. The hours Monday to Friday 5.00am to 1.00pm, which enable me to look after my grandchildren. I realise this can change at any time, for the needs of the business.

Grandmother, permanent full-time

Two grandmothers shared the ways they are especially stretched by multiple care responsibilities, a lack of understanding at work and limited resources.

Management need to have more understanding how hard it is for some people. I have no immediate family in the area to help me. My daughter is a paraplegic who I help in some form every day. I have her 5 year old daughter living with me. They can and often do make you feel bad if you can't attend work because something has happened.

Grandmother, carer of person with disability, permanent part-time

As a parent grandparent and care giver and full-time worker, and unfortunately divorced, I feel like I'm running on empty. But the bills have to be paid. I worry my super won't cover me enough in retirement, even though I pay extra into it. Stressful, and tiredness is never far away.

Grandmother, elder carer, permanent full-time

"Sometimes I would like to work longer but not being able to afford after school care or relying on a grandparent causes me not to work more."

Sole mother, elder carer,
permanent part-time



5.4 Parents' reasons for using informal care

For many parents, informal care from grandparents, siblings and other relatives, friends and neighbours, helped fill the gaps left by employment arrangements, and by childcare services which were unaffordable and mismatched to the needs of retail workers families.

Participants were asked for the main reasons they used informal care while they were working. Many comments reflected gratitude for family members and friends whose informal childcare support enabled their workforce participation:

My parents are a godsend when it comes to looking after my kids for me so I can work.

Partnered mother of children with disability, permanent full-time

My mother-in-law has stopped working to help watch the kids while I return to work.

Partnered mother, elder carer, permanent part-time

My dad drops off my child at day care and because I start work so early I finish early enough to pick her up from childcare.

Partnered mother, permanent full-time

My daughter can take my children to school before her school.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Most commonly, participants who used informal care cited the high cost of formal child care.

Shifts are generally not long enough to warrant paying for care.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

The cost of having two children in daycare.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Cost of vacation care is too high.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Some parents managed to care for their children by co-ordinating their working hours, which meant they did not require assistance from outside the family and were able to avoid the costs of childcare, albeit with great difficulty.

In this family, for example, one parent worked day shifts, the other night shifts, co-ordinating alternating work schedules which they termed working 'opposhifts'. While this enabled them to avoid or reduce care from outside the family, it meant that families had little time at home together.

For some, the informal care provided by family and friends made it possible for workers to just make ends meet. For example:

Having my eldest son (13 years) watch my younger son after school allows me to work just a little bit longer each shift so I can afford bills etc; My parents don't charge if I need them to watch or pick up an unwell child.

Sole father, permanent part-time

"Luckily my husband and I work at the same place and they are very flexible. But we work opposhifts each day so we barely see each other to try and save money not putting our son into daycare."

Couple mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

"It's afternoon work and the cost is free. It cost me, for 4 days a week for 2 kids, \$332.00 of child care. My wage for a week is \$333.00."

Partnered mother, elder carer, permanent part-time



Others noted that formal childcare services did not accommodate their work hours, and that they drew on family and friends when childcare was not available, or for short periods at the beginning or ends of shifts, for example:

Childcare not being open and my work hours being outside childcare times.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Due to working weekends no other childcare is available.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

Covering in between my partner coming home and me going to work.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Others appreciated the far greater flexibility on the part of their informal caregivers when compared to formal childcare options:

Easier than formal childcare.

Partnered mother, permanent full-time

More readily available at short notice [than out of school hours care].

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Often parents said that this informal care, especially when with grandparents, suited all involved. It helped to build the grandparent/grandchild relationship, was grounded in trust between parents and grandparents, and suited children to be cared for in a home environment, especially after hours.

Better relationship with child/ family bonding. Child is happier in familiar environment.

Partnered mother of child with disability, elder carer, permanent part-time

I did not want to send my child to daycare at such a young age.

Sole mother of child with disability, elder carer, permanent part-time

Having a disabled child that requires a lot of extra time, care and support is overwhelming and with the support of grandparents this helps us connect and raise our family. One day a week my daughter has with Nana, or goes to Nana's when she is unwell so I can go to work.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

It is a family member so it's safer and it doesn't cost me anything except a thank you.

Partnered mother, permanent full-time

"It gives my son and his grandfather a chance to bond and it doesn't cost me anything more than a hot dinner."

Female, aged 26 to 40





*"Childcare opens at 6am.
My wife and I start at 5am and 6am.
So I contact my relative to
look after the child.*

Male, aged 40 to 55

Finally, some said that informal care was the only way they could both fulfill their responsibilities to their children, while also meet their obligations to their employer. These SDA members explained their reasons for using informal arrangements:

To be able to fulfil my contracted rostered hours.

Sole parent, elder carer, permanent part-time

To secure future contract, by showing I'm willing to work even when I can't get paid childcare.

Sole parent, casual

Unable to call in sick as not enough people to run the department or be supervisor.

Partnered mother, permanent full-time

In these comments, survey participants show their strong dedication to their employers and to fulfilling their work commitments, being willing to ask others to provide unpaid care, often every week, in order to meet their obligations to work.

¹⁷ Information was collected about types of care used by the family; types of care were not separately captured for each child.

Formal ECEC Services

Formal ECEC services

Formal early education and care services, such as long day care, family day care, pre-school, kindergarten or occasional care, are an important support for SDA members and their families, although many lack access. A description of Australia's ECEC system and policy, including subsidies, is provided in Appendix: Australia's early education and care system.

6.1 Types of formal services used

Parents of children aged 0 to 5 were asked whether their family had used formal early education and care services, such as long day care, family day care, pre-school, kindergarten or occasional care, so far in 2021. Among the 703 parents with a child aged 5 or under, around two thirds (68%) said they had used a formal early years service so far in 2021, either on its own or in addition to using informal care (see Table 6.2). Most often, the formal care used was long day care, which was used by 45% of parents, followed by pre-school or kindergarten, used by 28%. One in ten used family day care (10%) and 4% had used occasional care.

Of parents with a child in the year before school, most (86%) said that their child who was able to commence school in 2022, was currently attending preschool, kindergarten or long day care where they could access a preschool program. However, not all were attending for the recommended 15 hours: only 72% of parents with a child starting next year said their children was accessing 15 hours or more each week. An additional 10% were attending, but for less than 15 hours, while 12% did not attend and 5% were not sure. This is far lower than the national rate of 95% of children who are enrolled in early education in the year before school. Research shows starting school without the skills that early education can provide, can leave children trailing further and further behind their peers throughout primary and high school¹⁸.

Table 6.1 Attendance at preschool, kindergarten or long day care in the year before school

	n	%
Doesn't attend	29	12%
Attends 1-14 hours	24	10%
Attends 15+ hours	168	72%
Don't know hours/not sure if attends	12	5%
All parents with a child eligible to start school in 2022	233	100%

Among the 1000 parents in the sample with a child aged 6 to 12, 24% said their family had used before or after school care so far in 2021, and 15% had used vacation care (Table 6.3). Many had used both; 27% had used either before or after school care, or vacation care.

Table 6.2 Types of early education and care services used so far in 2021 by families with a child under 5

	Youngest child aged 0 to 2 (n=372)	Youngest child aged 3 to 5 (n=331)	All with a child aged 5 or under (n=703)
Long day care	46%	44%	45%
Family day care	12%	9%	10%
Pre-school or kindergarten	17%	41%	28%
Occasional care	4%	5%	4%
Any early education and care service	62%	74%	68%

Note: Responses do not sum to 100% as participants may have used more than one type of care.

Table 6.3 Types of services for school-aged children used so far in 2021 by families with a child aged 6 to 12

	Youngest child aged 6 to 12 (n=1000)
Before and after school care	24%
Vacation care	15%
Any school-aged services	27%

"My son's school did not provide vacation care so I had to find care elsewhere."

Female, aged 26 to 40

6.2 Childcare difficulties

Figure 6.1 shows that for those with a child aged 0 to 5, the most common childcare difficulties reported were (in order of frequency): affording childcare (reported by 63% of participants); coordinating work times with childcare (46%); finding childcare that fits work schedules (35%); and finding childcare at short notice (such as for a sick child) (35%).

For those whose youngest child was school-aged, the most common childcare difficulties reported by participants were coordinating worktime with childcare, reported by 38%, affording childcare (37% and finding childcare during the holidays (36%).

Figure 6.1 Proportion of participants who had experienced particular childcare difficulties so far in 2021 by age of youngest child

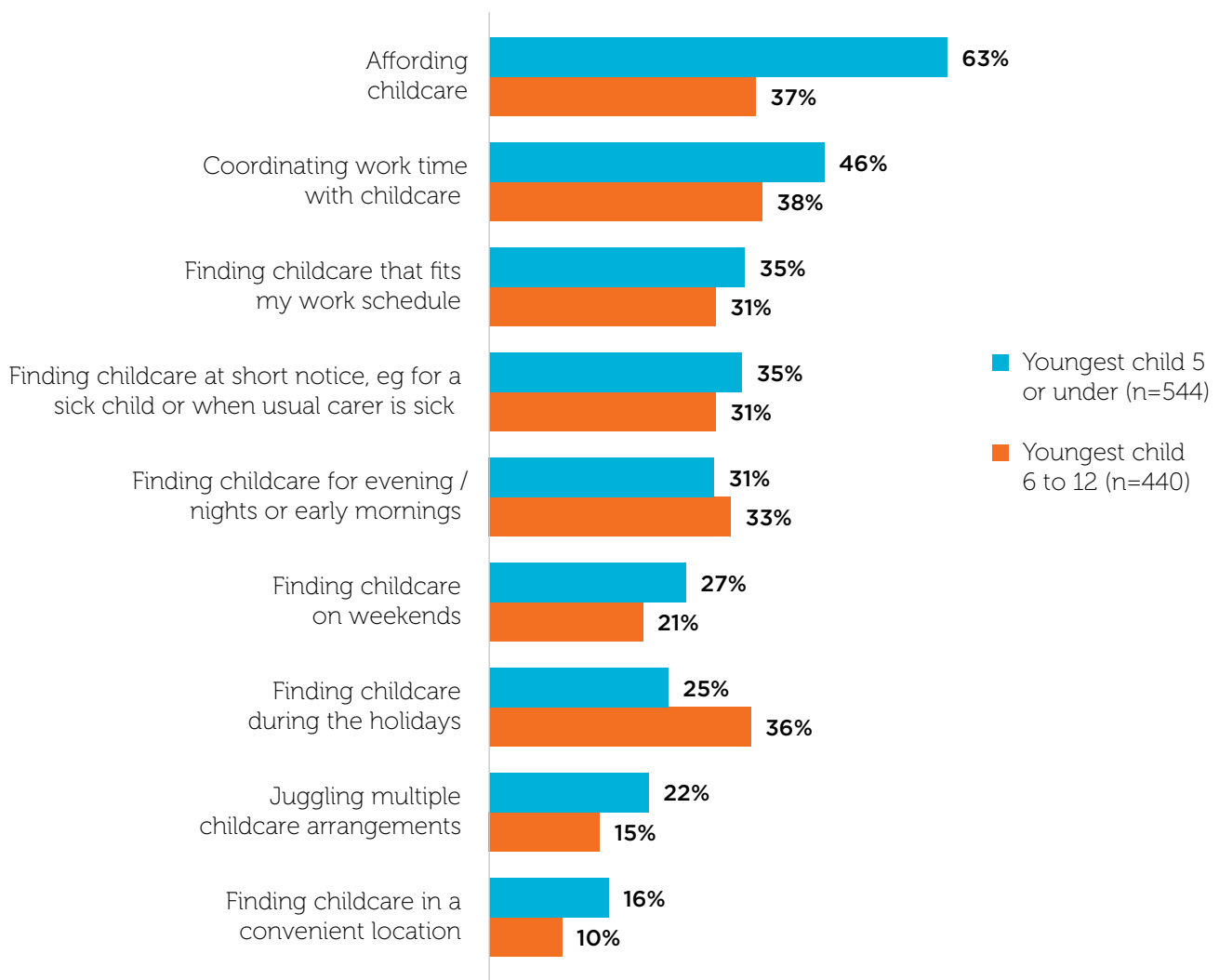


Figure 6.2 shows affordability issues are exacerbated by having to pay for care that is not used. More than half of parents using formal ECEC services (58%) agreed with the statement “We often have to pay for care we don’t use”. This was also common among parents of school-aged children, 48% of whom agreed with the statement (Figure 6.3). This issue is discussed in more detail in section 6.4 below.

Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3 compare the experiences of parents with children aged less than five, to those with school aged children. Both face difficulties managing care times and accessing suitable care times, particularly on weekends or outside of normal business hours. In both groups, substantial proportions face difficulties swapping days or access extra days when needed.

Figure 6.2 Experiences with formal ECEC services among participants with a child below school age

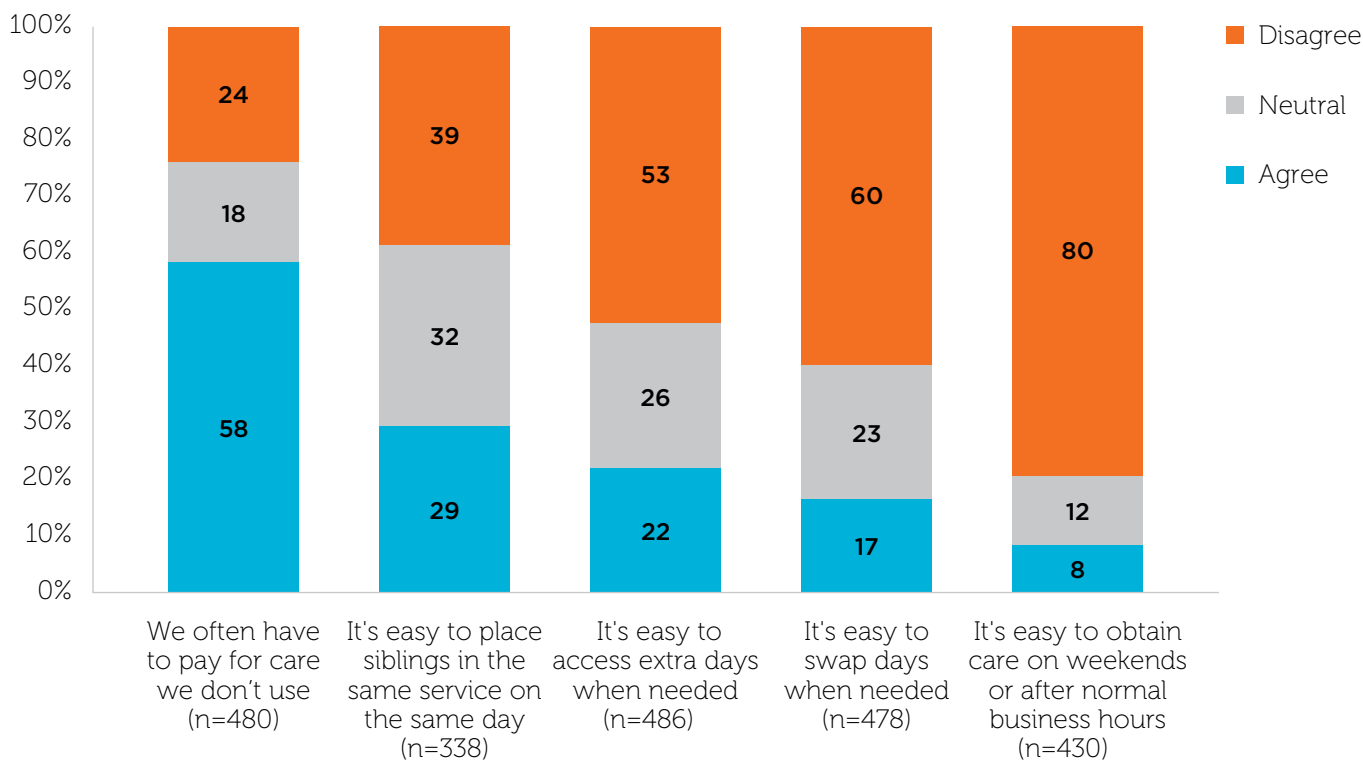
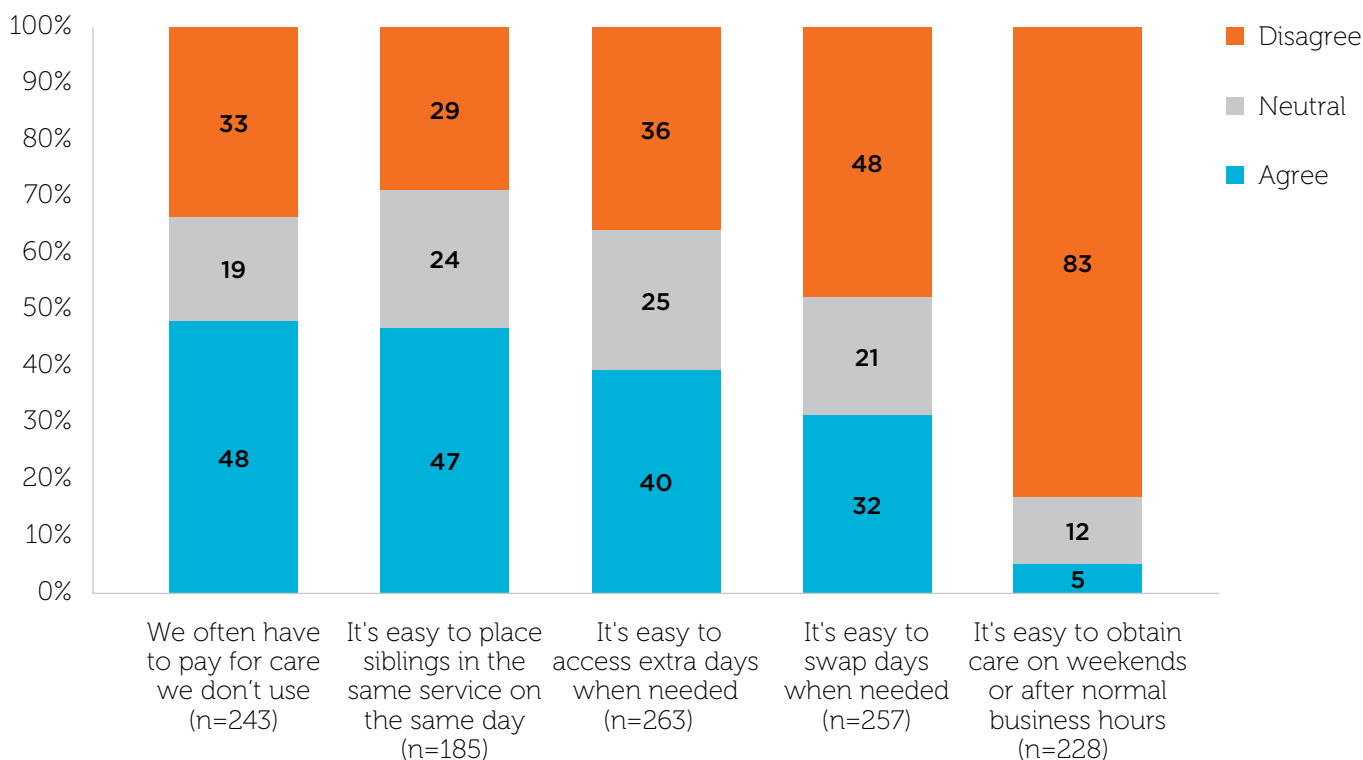


Figure 6.3 Experiences of before and after school care



6.3 Comments on the Child Care Subsidy

The Australian Government pays a subsidy to families to reduce the cost of formal childcare including long day care, family day care, occasional care, before and after school care and vacation care. Subsidy arrangements are outlined in Appendix: Australia's early education and care system. The Child Care Subsidy is means-tested, such that the highest rates are paid to those on the lowest incomes, tapering to zero for the highest incomes. On the other hand, families who use more care are usually eligible for more subsidised hours, depending on the number of hours of care children are enrolled for and the number of hours parents spend in employment, study or voluntary work.

Access to the Child Care Subsidy is particularly limited for families with very short work hours. For example, if at least one parent works between 8 and 16 hours per fortnight, they are eligible for 36 hours of Child Care Subsidy per fortnight. At some long day care services, this may provide 3 days, as families pay for a full day, regardless of how much they use, because fees for 10-12 hour days are common.

Participants using formal care were asked if they received the Child Care Subsidy and given an opportunity to make comments. 82% said they received it, 13% said they did not, and 5% were unsure. In the comments, participants explained that the Subsidy is insufficient to make child care affordable. Some explained they appreciate the Subsidy, but wish it covered more of their child care costs.

Does not cover half as much as we fork out.

Partnered mother, permanent full-time

The subsidy is not a lot when you're still paying 30-40% of the amount you're paid for working.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Partner having a higher pay bracket has given us a lower percentage, so I am still "working to pay for childcare"

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

"[The Child Care Subsidy] makes using daycare cheaper to use, but we still could not afford to use it every day."

Partnered mother,
permanent part-time

Some were quite specific about how much they were able to work before the Child Care Subsidy no longer helped with the cost of care.

It helps a lot but it isn't enough. I pretty much go to work for 10+ hrs to not get paid due to it going to child care each week. Even if my child only attends half a day we still have to pay for a full day.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

It does help for short care only. Anything over 3 days and you are paying a lot more for care. For 3 days we pay about \$100-\$110 for one child only. For 5 days it works out to be around \$250 per child. The majority of daycares all raised their fees when the childcare subsidy came in.

Partnered mother, permanent full-time

I can only work 3 weekdays before it means I am working for \$20 a day after costs. So I am forced to work weekends to get ahead.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Here, and elsewhere in the survey some parents bemoaned needing to pay for childcare when their child is sick. A difficulty even greater when they need to take time off work, and for some, this would mean not receiving pay.

It would help if it would cover more. Or if at least we could pay less when the child is not attending due to sickness! Due to toddler being sick we were paying for weeks but he was not attending nor was I able to work.

Partnered mother, elder carer, permanent part-time



"The fact that so many charge a minimum 11 hours per day regardless of if the child is only there for 6 is why no one can afford to return to work and get ahead."

Female, aged 26 to 40

A small minority of participants felt that the means-tested nature of the Child Care Subsidy was unfair, because the highest subsidy rate is paid to those with the lowest earnings and a lower subsidy rate paid to those with the highest earnings.

I feel it's a bit ridiculous that people who have to work and do work pay a larger amount than those who don't work, I know someone who does not work and sends their child 3 days a week when they are home anyway, and it cost less than my one day. I get it if you are in a high paying job and don't need the assistance, but we struggle... I don't end up earning much more working than if I just sat on parenting payments and didn't pay for care. It's no wonder people don't go back to work when their kids are young.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

They seem to punish people who want to get back to work. It is hard to work full-time... but then the Child Care Subsidy gets taken away the more you work, but the child care [fee] doesn't go down.

Partnered father, permanent full-time

Should be more subsidy for the parents who actually work. The ones who don't work get cheaper care. Unfair.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

SDA members have low earnings, and might feel they miss out on the higher subsidy rates paid to other families who have paid work at all. On the other hand, families with no earnings would likely fail to meet the Activity Test, and be eligible for just 24 hours of subsidised care each fortnight, while those in employment would be eligible for 72 or 100 hours of subsidised care. In part, these concerns arise due to the highly complex nature of the CCS, which decreases as earnings rise, but increases as activity level rises. A simpler system of free ECEC for all children, regardless of parents' circumstances, would alleviate such concerns.

Other participants argued that free child care would be better.

It should not exist. Childcare should be free for all parents so they can work more days, without having to stress about financially affording to pay the gap fees. The government should pay for the full costs.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Daycare should be free for working parents.

Sole parent of child with disability, permanent part-time

6.4 Care responsibilities, childcare and labour supply

Care responsibilities and poor access to suitable childcare constrains parents' availability to work, and restricts their earnings.

Among parents with a child aged 12 or under, 43% of mothers and 35% of fathers reported wanting to work more hours (see Section 8.4). Access to suitable childcare is a key barrier: among parents with a child aged 12 or under, 35% of mothers and 27% of fathers agreed with the statement "If I had suitable childcare, I would work more hours". This is shown in Figure 6.5. Agreement with the statement was more common among mothers and parents of younger children. In particular:

- Among parents with a child under 2, 40% of mothers and 33% of fathers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "If I had suitable childcare, I would work more hours".
- Among parents whose youngest child was aged between 3 and 5, 39% of mothers and 22% of fathers agreed or strongly agreed that with suitable childcare, they would work more hours.
- Among those whose youngest child was between 6 and 12, 31% of mothers and 26% of fathers agreed with the statement.

Parents were also asked if they had to turn down work activities or opportunities because of their caring responsibilities. Responses from sole and couple parents were similar (see Appendix Table A.5). However, those parents caring for a child with disability or additional needs were more likely to be prevented from taking up work opportunities, reflecting particular lack of suitable care and supports for these families. Figure 6.4 shows that among parents of children with a disability or additional needs, 64% agreed or strongly agreed that their caring responsibilities meant they had to turn down work activities and opportunities, compared with 47% of other parents and 18% of those not currently parenting a child aged under 18.

Parents of 0-12 year old children were given an opportunity to comment on the difficulties they have had with childcare. Their responses are discussed in detail below (Section 6.3), but here we report on their comments on their ability to work sufficient hours, or to take up career opportunities. This limited their earnings and career progression.

I live in a small community and there is only 1 option for vacation care. This runs for only 25 hours a week during holidays, which means I have to lose out on work.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

I currently work school hours but am unable to apply and take an offered management promotion because finding childcare for early morning starts or late finishes is hard.

Sole mother, carer of adult with disability, permanent part-time

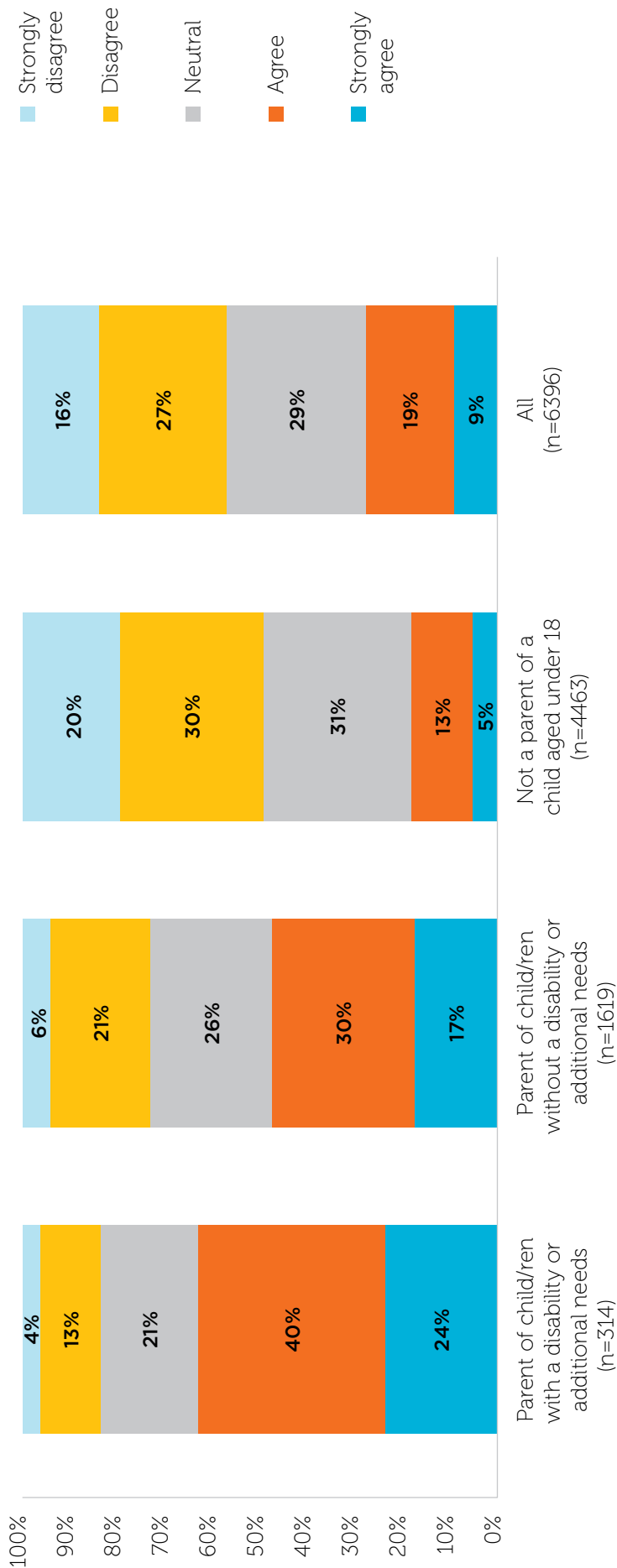
It's hard to be career oriented when you have children to take to school and to look after a disabled elderly person.

Partnered father of child with disability, permanent part-time

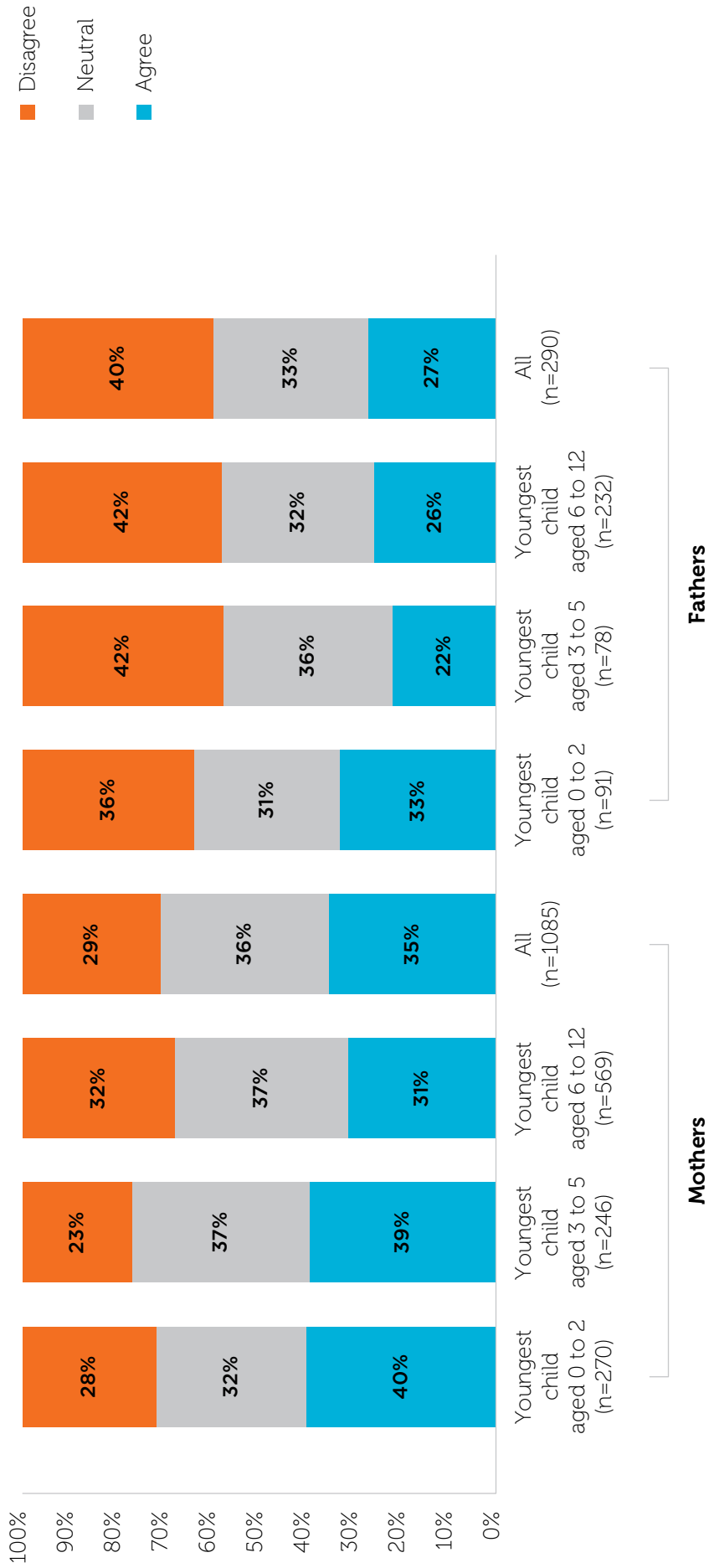
"Due to children being over 12, being a single parent and working in retail, I find there is no childcare regardless of area. I have missed so many work opportunities due to this."

Sole mother, casual

Figure 6.4 Agreement with the statement: “Because of my caring responsibilities, I have to turn down work activities or opportunities” by parenting status



**Figure 6.5 Agreement with the statement “If I had suitable childcare, I would work more hours”
mothers and fathers by age of youngest child**



6.5 Comments on childcare difficulties

Parents with a child aged 12 or under were asked if they would like to make any comments on the difficulties they had with childcare. Their comments were many and wide-ranging. The key issues they identified were:

- availability and finding care that suits their work schedules;
- rules and regulations that affect the suitability of formal care
- the affordability of formal child care; and
- managing child care and work when their children are sick.

"I would love for our work to fit our CHILDCARE instead of my childcare fitting my WORK!"

Partnered mother,
permanent part-time

These mothers summed up the challenges experienced by many:

I only have one person who can look after my children. I can't afford day care as it is too expensive which means I'd be working for nothing. But I am also wanting to work more hours - but find this hard with only having one person to help us out. If I had a childcare that could cater to my work hours, and was better priced, it would make it a lot easier.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Childcare caters to the parents working 9-5. Not the single parent or the parents that work in retail till 10.00pm or overnight.

Partnered mother, permanent full-time

Availability: Finding care, especially care that accommodates retail work schedules

Sometimes, childcare services had long waiting lists making it difficult to access:

Our before and after school care has limited numbers (due to most of the time 1 caretaker) and is generally full all the time. I have 3 kids and trying to get a spot for all 3 is difficult.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

From January 2020 to January 2021, We couldn't find a preschool in a convenient location. Finally got off the waiting list this year.

Partnered mother, carer for person with long-term illness, permanent part-time

Unable to find childcare as they have no available spots.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

And it was especially difficult to find care that was available for early starts, late finishes, night shifts, weekends and public holidays:

It is very hard to find a childcare in the weekends, evening etc. For people like us who do shift work, it is stressful to get.

Partnered father, permanent full-time

I struggle to get back to pick my kids up on time as I finish work at 5.30pm and work 40 minutes away. The after school care closes at 6.00pm. It's also hard to find vacation care that suits early morning and evenings.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

Vacation care trading times are less than on normal school days and therefore will require an adjustment in my roster so that I can collect my children earlier than normal to avoid additional fees.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Some explained that their irregular work hours make childcare impossible or very difficult to use.

"I can't use childcare until I have more regular work to accommodate childcare."

Partnered mother, casual

This [before and after school care] service takes a good 3 days to get any sort of reply, so trying to book my kids in for an extra day to help work out is impossible.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

With no confirmed or regular shifts or hours in a week/fortnight, I have been finding it difficult to find a carer.

Partnered father, casual

Childcare rules and regulations which create difficulties

Rules and regulations in childcare services limit their usefulness for survey participants. A detailed description of the Australian ECEC system is contained in Appendix: Australia's early education and care system. However, as noted in Section 6.2 above, many families pay for formal childcare that they do not use. Comments from families show that this happens for several reasons. Families sometimes book more care than they need because their child care service requires regular bookings, but their employers do not offer regular hours. So families may, for example, book regular care from Monday to Thursday because they do not know from week to week which days they will need to use. When their roster becomes available, they may discover they only need two or three of those days, but still need to pay for the days their child doesn't attend. Other times, families pay for child care that their child doesn't use because the service will not accept a sick child, or because the parent's roster has changed with short notice, and they do not require the care.

The most commonly mentioned challenge was the need to pay for a full day of long day care, even if a child attends for short hours. This happens, especially in long day care, where families are typically required to pay for a full day of 10 or 12 hours, regardless of how long a child attends. Child care becomes affordable for SDA members as a result.

I would utilise childcare except I have to pay for a whole day when my shifts are only for 3 hours it's not worthwhile.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

We thankfully have a great daycare but we also pay for full 12 hr days even if we done use that but it's something I'm willing to do to give us flexibility around work.

Partnered mother, permanent full-time

Other childcare rules create difficulties, too. For example, this parent only requires care during school holidays, but their children's service will only accept children for vacation care if they also attend before and after school care. So to have access to vacation care, they enrol their children in care during term time they don't need.

I have avoided out of school hours care as we do not require care during the school term but I'm required to send my children throughout the term in order to utilise the vacation care.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

A number of families commented on the difficulty of finding appropriate care for teenage children. Formal childcare and the Child Care Subsidy are not available for children aged over 13 years. But teenagers may require supervision, especially if an only child or having additional needs, and retail workers may need to be away from home for extended periods if their shifts do not coincide with school.

There isn't any out of school hours care for young teenagers in high school, who cannot be left home alone, or, who do not want to be home alone.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

Whilst I have teenage kids, you would still like to be there before and after school, but that's impossible when doing 9 or 10hr days, no choice because the pay rates are so low, needs to change.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

Childcare affordability

Affordability was a key issue for participants. Typically, participants said that, in their experience, the cost of childcare made work seem potentially, or actually, untenable financially.

It's so expensive, feels like work covers childcare costs.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

We don't use childcare. My wife left full-time employment for casual work to look after our children - because it works out financially the same, and she gets to watch our children grow.

Partnered father, permanent full-time

The cost of childcare makes it very difficult to continue to work. 3 days per week for 2 children takes half my take home pay.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

For many, as for the mother cited above, the cost of child care was more difficult when a family needed to pay for multiple children.

[The Child Care Subsidy] helps greatly but when more than one child attends, it's still costly.

Sole mother, elder carer, permanent part-time

The Child Care Subsidy gets eaten up pretty quickly with 2 kids in care.

Partnered mother, elder carer, permanent full-time

One mother compared her earnings to those of the teenage babysitter she often employs to allow her to work nights. She pays more than her wages for night care, but notes that a more highly trained educator would cost twice her earnings:

"Those people charge \$40 an hour some charge \$50 after 6.00pm - I earn \$22 an hour"

However, she took the shifts and employed the babysitter, in order to keep her employment.

As she explained:

"I mainly get offered night shifts, yet I have 4 kids that need care. My 17 year old babysitter earns more than I do. Most shifts I'm working at a loss, just so I can go to my shift. Shifts during the day when my kids are at school or daycare and finishing those shifts by the time daycare finishes would be ideal. Please [give us] a better [Subsidy] for daycare when you have multiple children."

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Child care and work don't allow families to care for sick children

Parents pointed to inflexibilities on the part of both their employers, and available childcare services, which made caring for sick children difficult. ECEC services require that sick children stay home, and, as some parents noted, this is even more strict at present due to the threat of COVID-19. So when children are sick, many parents stay home from work. This led to difficulties at work, and days when they receive no pay but child care fees still owing.

As can be seen in the section on informal child care, some participants ask grandparents or other relatives to help look after their sick children (See section 5.1). But, as this participant explained, not everyone has family available to support them when their children are sick.

Both my parents work full-time, so when my children become sick I have no one to help me out. So therefore, I have to call in sick. In the month of February 2021, my daughter who attends kinder has caught croup, gastro and a virus, which led to me having a lot of time off - to the point where I had been flagged at work and was on warning for dismissal.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

With no option but to take leave, this SDA member found herself warned that her job was at risk.

Others found themselves exhausting their paid leave because they needed to use it to care for sick children.

You can't drop them off [at child care] when they are sick, so I need to use all my personal leave to care for my child. When that runs out, I have to suffer the consequences of not being paid, but I still have to pay for childcare.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

With COVID restrictions you need to take much more time off work when your children are unwell, and I am running out of paid leave options.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

When children cannot attend child care, parents are still required to pay the fees, even if the service has told the family the child is not able to attend because of illness. In such a situation, a casual worker or someone taking unpaid leave, like the participant above, would have to pay for child care, but not receive pay. Taking unpaid leave to care for children, which makes it harder to pay for the childcare that the sick child was unable to use. For those on casual contracts, all leave is unpaid.

Sole parents

Importantly, the difficulties with childcare outlined above were particularly acute for sole parents, who often found themselves with little family support to help manage the incompatibility of their work and childcare arrangements.

I am a sole parent without family. It's always a juggle.

Sole mother elder carer, working two jobs

Sickness within childcare also affects how often I can attend my shifts.

Sole mother, carer for adult with long-term illness, permanent full-time

Daycare is expensive but I have no option. I asked to start work earlier and finish earlier so I could get to daycare on time. I was told no option for that and I would need to reduce my hours which I can't afford to do.

Sole mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

No child care on weekend or public holidays.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

6.6 Comments on what works well

Participants were asked an open-ended question:
'What works well about your childcare arrangements, or helps you co-ordinate work and family arrangements?'

For some, there was no positive answer to this question and no way to imagine their arrangements working better.

"Nothing works well to be honest. It's a constant juggling act trying to coordinate work, family arrangements and childcare, but there's no other choice in this day and age."

Sole mother, permanent part-time

Nothing works well about it. It's a daily juggle. Often we have to use our eldest child to watch younger children, or my partner takes them to work as there's no other alternative.

Partnered mother of child with disability, elder carer, permanent part-time

I haven't used a child care provider that really works for my situation.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Nothing. It is chaos.

Partnered mother, permanent full-time

Some did share thoughts on successful arrangements. 452 participants answered this question with specific examples of the kinds of arrangements that do or could work well for their families. The most common responses, constituting close to half of answers, described making arrangements within the family that could accommodate work schedules and childcare inflexibility. These were relying on informal care from family and friends (26%) and coordinating work schedules to ensure a family member, usually a parent, was always at home for the children (22%). While a smaller proportion relied on work arrangements, for example having predictability about they would be working (20%), being able to make choices about their shifts and start/finish times (14%), or having work and care arrangements that match well (2%). Relatively few said that formal care services helped in their work and family arrangements, usually by being conveniently located, or open at convenient hours (4%). Some said having an understanding employer, manager or child care service helped (4%).

Table 6.4 What works well about child care, or work and family

	n	%
Relying on informal care	117	26
Coordinating shifts and other arrangements within the family	97	22
Predictable shifts	89	20
Choice about which shifts to accept	65	14
Convenient formal care arrangements	29	6
Understanding on the part of employer or child care service	16	4
Having work and care hours that match	12	3
Flexibility	9	2
Other	18	4
Total	452	100

Private arrangements within the family that work well

A quarter of participants (26%) said it was their informal care arrangements that made it possible to manage child care, work and family. Typically this meant relying on grandparents, and sometimes needing very high levels of flexibility from grandparents, older siblings, friends and neighbours.

We are very lucky as my parents regularly put their life on hold to make sure we are able to work and have our children looked after.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

My 19 year old daughter looks after my 7 year old son. Easier if I have last minute shifts to cover. Although it does impact her life a lot.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Our friends and I work well together they look after my kids and when I can I return the favour.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

However, as indicated above, this sometimes impacted on their own employment, other care responsibilities or personal plans and interests. This was most notably the case for grandmothers.

I'm very lucky to have my mother-in-law look after them on early mornings, but she is also a full-time carer for her elderly mum. Makes it hard for appointments and if one of them is sick.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

The only thing that helps me is my mother currently doesn't work, so she is able to help with care. However, it puts her life on hold most days.

Sole mother, carer of adult with disability, permanent part-time

A fifth of families (22%) made arrangements within their family, usually within the immediate family, to ensure a family member was always available to care for the children. Most commonly, two parents tag-teamed, working "opposhifts", with one working days, the other nights, or with one working mornings, the other afternoons. Sometimes one parent would work during the week and the other on the weekend. Fifty-three parents (12% of those who answered this question), reported these kinds of arrangements. Given this was an unprompted response, it is reasonable to assume the proportion of families who make these arrangements may be even higher if they were asked directly about it.

As the following quotes indicate, while these were arrangements participants said work well, often they come at a cost to their relationships, sleep and work opportunities.

Both my wife and I are on different time schedules and only occasionally clash. My wife then has to make adjustments to her rosters to make herself available for our children, which she is happy to do, but it does put limitations on any work events she can attend. It also means we are rarely together as a whole family.

Partnered father, elder carer, permanent full-time

My partner starts work half an hour after I finish. Over holidays when vacation care is closed he can care for them while I work. But we struggle to get enough sleep as he works nights and I work days.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

"My employer has allowed my partner and I to have alternating shifts. This minimises the financial cost of childcare but my partner and I do not see each other until the weekend."

Partnered mother, permanent part-time



"I rarely see my husband, he works early morning until 5.00pm and I walk out the door to work until late. We struggle greatly."

Partnered mother of child with disability,
permanent part-time

Sometimes these kinds of shift management involved other family members, like older siblings and grandmothers. But, as the following quotes indicate, maintaining such arrangements involves a high degree of coordination.

Having my mother having the flexibility to work around my roster to coordinate her own roster to be able to watch my kids while I'm at work.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

My partner works full-time Monday to Friday 5.00am to 1.30pm. I work part-time Wednesday to Sunday in the afternoons. I do school drop off and my partner does pickups. My mother-in-law does school holidays and anything we can't make due to appointments. This limits my availability for work and can cause issue during the holidays.

Partnered mother of child with disability, elder carer, permanent part-time

It works smoothly with me on mornings and husband on afternoons and my mother-in-law watching our daughter in the middle.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Some families said that having a full-time parent at home made their arrangements worked well.

The only time childcare works is when my husband is home and we don't have to use it [childcare].

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

My partner doesn't work at the moment which makes things easier to juggle but he is looking for work so we will have to re-evaluate our schedules when he finds work.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

My wife not working makes it easier for us.

Partnered father of child with disability, permanent full-time

My partner has taken a year off of work so it's not an issue at the moment.

Partnered father, carer for adult with disability,
permanent full-time

"I work nights and my partner works day. It's the only way we can make it work."

Partnered mother,
permanent part-time

Employment-based arrangements that work well

Having predictable shifts was important for a fifth of participants who answered this question (20%). For some this was having a set roster, while for others it meant having sufficient advance notice of the roster – often this was 2 or 3 weeks' notice.

Having a set roster/shift so I can have my kids and my brother's dialysis schedule organised and not having to have to worry every week with what I'm going to do with them.

Partnered mother, carer for person with long-term health condition, permanent full-time

Having a roster 3 weeks in advance to plan for the times I will be away from the kids.

Sole mother of child with disability, casual

Knowing in advance when I'll need extra help with school drop-offs or pick-ups.

Partnered mother, casual

However, as the quotes below show, some participants pointed to the challenges of insufficient, sometimes very short, notice or changes in their work schedules.

I should get two weeks' notice with my roster. This doesn't happen, and since I've been taking copies of my roster I'm getting treated like crap when I speak up. Some weeks these changes occur overnight.

Partnered father, permanent full-time

More than 4 days' notice. With the current arrangement in the [rostering] app we can see our new roster 4 days prior to starting the next week. And if changes are made there in no sort of external notification from the app to inform us of those changes.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

The roster I have had now for over 2 years fits my family perfect and no stress. But now they are saying it will be changed I have been very stressed and sick cause I can't deal with the change.

Sole mother, permanent part-time


In part, the predictability of rosters was connected to workers' ability to set their availability, and to stick to it. As one mother said, 'To start with it was stressful but now things are set in stone and nothing budes'. Some reported that their managers were accommodating of their preferred hours, while some felt they had to fight to keep to the hours that suited them.

My employer checks my availability listed and offers shifts that allow me to drop off and pick up my child from childcare.

Partnered mother, casual

Being firm with workplace regardless of bullying and sucking up for shift covers about what times I can start and finish.

Partnered mother, carer for person with long term health condition, permanent part-time



"I have told work my availability and they are happy to work around that."

Partnered mother of child with disability,
permanent part-time



"All my child care is situated close to my workplace and this is very important to me."

Partnered mother,
permanent part-time

Formal child care arrangements that work well

Very few participants (6% of those who answered this question) said that formal child care meant that their work and family arrangements worked well. When they did, they most commonly pointed to issues of convenience. For some, a convenient location, near home, school or work, was helpful.

Childcare is at my children's school in the hall, so it's very convenient.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

The childcare is very close to home.

Partnered father, permanent full-time

But for most, it was long day care services with early starting hours and late opening hours that made the difference.

I can drop my kids off early so I can be at work on time.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent full-time

It helps that the childcare open early and close late.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

It's open from 6.30am to 6.30pm which is within my roster.

Sole mother, elder carer, permanent part-time

¹⁸ Taggart, B., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., & Siraj, I. (2015). Effective pre-school, primary and secondary education project (EPPSE 3-16+). Research Brief, UK Department for Education

Parental leave and return to work

Parental leave and return to work

Parental leave is important for supporting working parents around the time of childbirth or adoption of a child, and when a child is very young. Paid parental leave for women and men is recognised to improve work-life balance through this important period of human development and family adjustment, and to promote a more equal division of unpaid care and paid work in households.

SDA members with a child aged 5 or under were asked about whether they took parental leave, for their most recent birth, and the type of leave they took. Figure 7.1 shows many did not receive support from their employers or the Australian Government to take leave around the birth of a child. Overall, 19% of parents of young children in the sample said they did not take any paid or unpaid leave for their most recent birth. This was higher for fathers (35%) than mothers (14%). Having used no leave for the last birth was also higher among those currently employed on a casual basis (37%).¹⁹

The Australian Government’s provision of Parental Leave Pay is an important source of support for SDA members. Parental Leave Pay was the most common form of leave taken, reported by 72% of mothers and 34% of fathers with a child up to age 5. Only half of parents of young children had accessed paid parental leave provided by an employer (50%), although the figure was higher for mothers (56%) than fathers (31%).²⁰ Around a quarter of parents took unpaid parental leave. Again, utilisation was lower for fathers.

Figure 7.1 Proportion of parents with children aged 5 or under who took parental leave for their most recent birth (%)

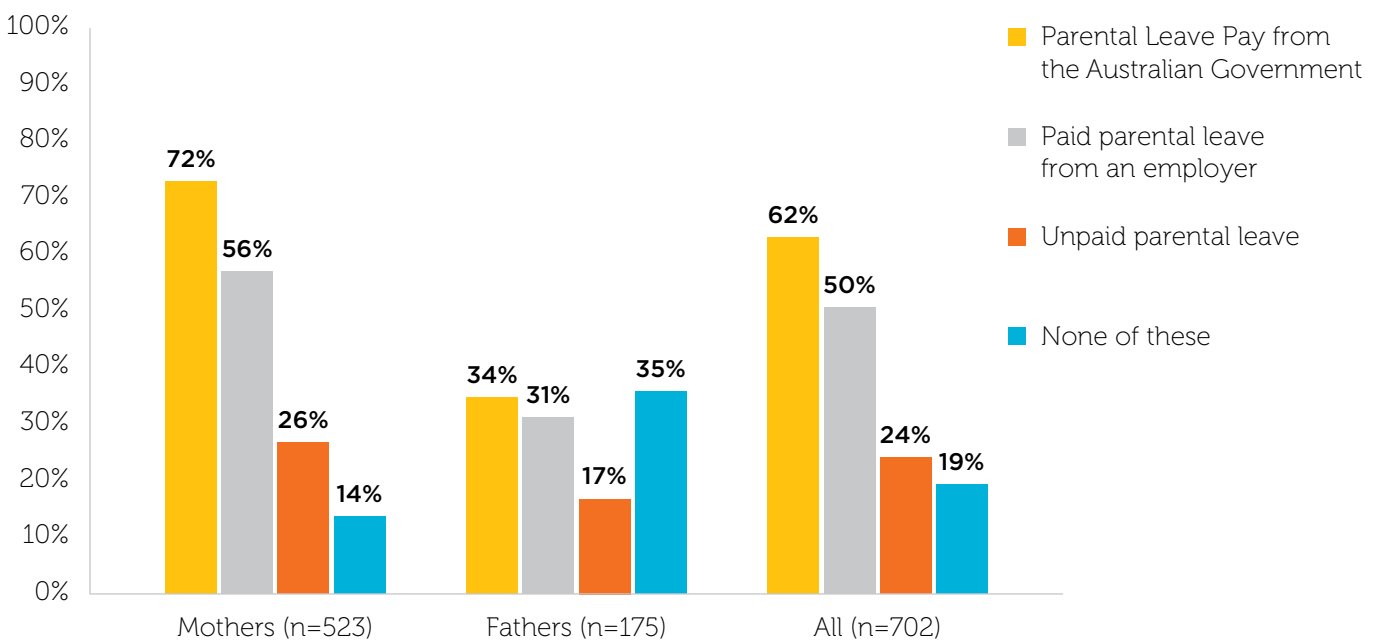
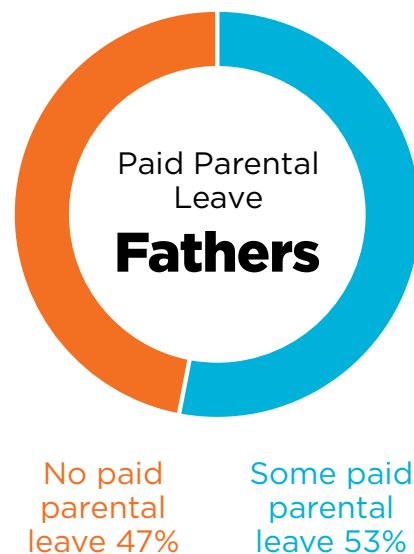


Figure 7.2 Use of paid parental leave for most recent birth, mothers with a child aged 5 or under (n=523)



Figure 7.3 Use of paid parental leave for most recent birth, fathers with a child aged 5 or under (n=175)



7.1 Reasons for mothers' non-use of paid parental leave

Figure 7.2 shows that 81% of mothers with a child aged 5 or under had received some form of paid parental leave for their most recent birth, whether from the government and/or an employer, as had 53% of fathers (Figure 7.3). Reasons that parents did not access paid parental leave for their last birth were not directly captured in the survey, and as such, it is difficult to precisely determine why paid parental leave was not used. Some may not have had access to paid leave schemes if they had not worked for their employer for the required period, i.e. 12 months for the government scheme, while others may not have been eligible for other reasons, such as visa status or residency rules, or expectations of continuing work (for casual employees), or the maternal income threshold. Casual staff may have been ineligible for employer schemes.

The circumstances of mothers with very young children, and who were working for their current employer at the time of the birth, provides some insight into the non take-up of leave entitlements. In the sample, there were 32 mothers with a child aged 2 or under who said they had not received paid parental leave for their most recent birth, and for whom information was available about length of time with current employer. Among these 32 mothers, 18 had worked for their current employer for more than 2 years, and 11 had worked for their employer for more than 5 years. These mothers were not temporary visa holders and would be expected to be eligible for government paid parental leave, even if working on a casual basis. Among the 38 fathers with a child 2 or under who had not received any paid parental leave, 25 had worked for their current employer for at least 2 years, and 17 had done so for at least 5 years, indicating likely eligibility.

It is not clear why these parents did not access the paid leave to which they were likely entitled. Reasons for non-use of paid parental leave among both mothers and fathers requires further exploration.

7.2 Time away from work

Parents were asked in total, how many weeks away from work they had when their youngest child was born. On average, mothers reported 42.2 weeks and fathers reported taking 4.6 weeks. However, many took much more or less than the average. Among mothers with a child 0 to 5, those employed on a casual basis reported having had more time away from work for their most recent birth; casuals reported 60 weeks on average, compared with 39 weeks among those employed on a permanent basis.

Figure 7.4 shows a third of mothers each took between 26 and 52 weeks, and more than 52 weeks. Figure 7.5 shows that among fathers, the largest group had taken between 2 and 4 weeks off (38%). Figure 7.6 indicates that most mothers and fathers would have preferred more time away from work (79% of mothers and 87% of fathers). The small minority of mothers who said they would not have preferred more time away had already had a long period away from work (average of 75 weeks).

While this information describes the circumstances of survey participants, further information is required to fully understand their circumstances, including information about the employment status of parents at the time of the birth, before drawing strong conclusions about the use and effectiveness of leave entitlements.

Figure 7.4 Time away from work for most recent birth, mothers with a child 0 to 5 (% , n=523)

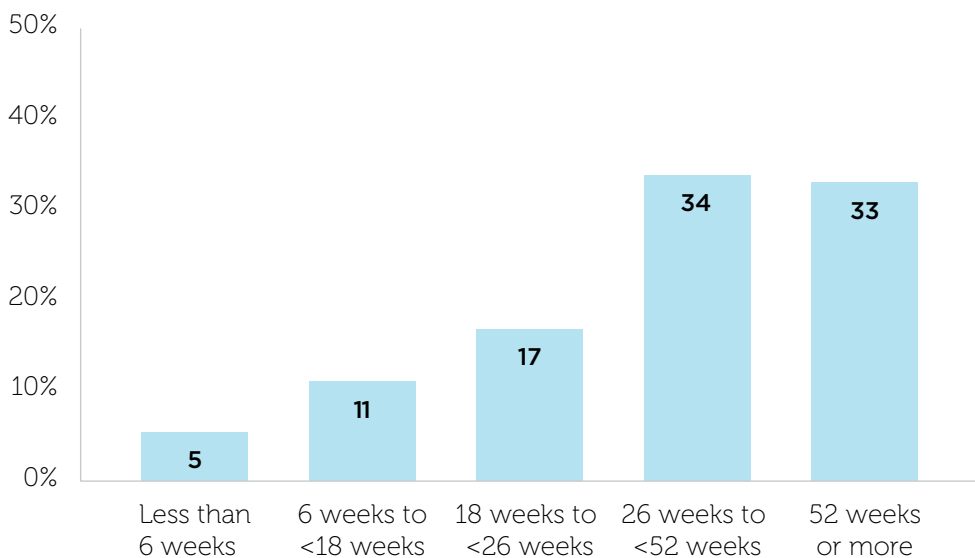


Figure 7.5 Time away from work for most recent birth, fathers with a child 0 to 5 (% , n=175)

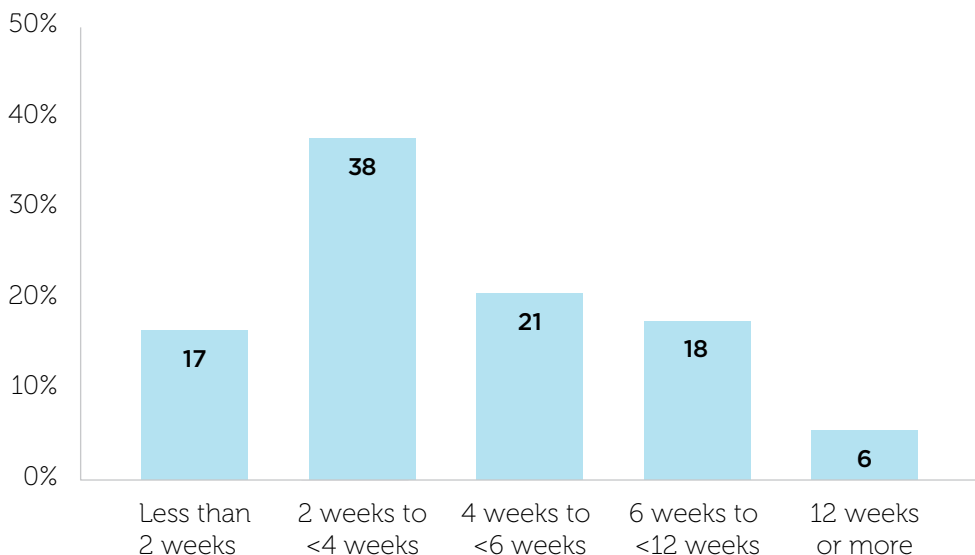


Figure 7.6 Whether parents would have preferred more time away from work when their youngest child was born, if they could afford it

	Would not have preferred more time			Would have preferred more time			Not sure			All		
	n	%	Average weeks away	n	%	Average weeks away	n	%	Average weeks away	n	%	Average weeks away
Mothers	33	7%	74.7	382	79%	36.8	65	14%	57.7	482	100%	41.8
Fathers	7	4%	2.7	138	87%	4.9	14	9%	3.1	159	100%	4.7
All	40	6%	62.1	520	81%	28.2	79	12%	46.9	641	100%	32.7

7.3 Comments on parental leave and returning to work

Both mothers and fathers appreciated parental leave, and both groups said they would like more time. But their experiences were different. Partly because fathers tended to take much shorter leave than mothers, and largely because mothers expected to be highly involved in their children's earliest lives.

Mothers' experiences

Mothers appreciated paid leave, but wished they had longer.

I would have loved a year off paid by the government - we would have had more [children] if this was the case.

Partnered mother, permanent full-time

This was my third pregnancy and it was definitely less stressful knowing that I was being paid parental leave this time... I would have preferred the 18 months but I couldn't afford that.

Sole parent, permanent part-time

Some pointed out that much of their short time of paid leave was used at the end of their pregnancy, before the birth of their babies, which meant the time they had on leave after the babies' births was even shorter. Paid parental leave can start during pregnancy. The mother below, for example, said she took a mix of paid and unpaid leave from her employer when her baby was born. She did not receive Paid Parental Leave from the Australian Government but does not explain why. Because she needed to start her leave around 6 weeks before her baby was born, she needed to return to work before she felt ready.

I think work places should have a mandatory leave programme in place for mother's to be to take prior to commencing parental leave. As in my case due to medical issues and my boss not being willing to change my shifts to [accommodate my pregnancy], I had to commence leave at 34 weeks. This meant that although I had annual leave, I was bullied into coming back when my son was 9.2w old.

Partnered mother, carer for person with long-term illness, permanent part-time



"I would have preferred to be at home for 12 months but I couldn't afford to. I hated returning to work knowing I was missing out on important milestones."

Sole mother, casual

For some, returning to work before they were ready made them feel that they were 'bad mothers', who were missing milestones.

I missed so many of [my baby's] firsts, e.g. first walk, first word etc.

Partnered mother of child with disability, casual

Just having 18 weeks' pay for parental leave is not enough. I had to back to work after 18 weeks and had to put my baby in family day care...I noticed she [the FDC educator] is not doing the right things and always she turned the TV on for my baby. I'm blaming myself all the time that I had to stay away from her when she was just 18 weeks.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Some said that they had little or no communication from their workplace in preparation for returning to work. This made returning to work difficult, because they did not know about or understand organisational changes, or had little opportunity to negotiate their return to work conditions and roles.

It has been really difficult. There has been no dedicated time to learn new procedures. My sign on number isn't working correctly and I can't do my job to full capacity. They should have had this all fixed. Since coming back I have been thrown around to all sections [and I am] not back to where my hours were prior to being on leave. [It has been] difficult and distressing not knowing what has changed, or how to do different things. I feel very used and abused.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

A few praised their employers for being supportive when they returned to work:

I was fortunate to return from casual to a contract.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

I enjoy going to work after my son as it gave me a purpose in life and to my family.

Partnered mother, carer for adult with disability, permanent part-time

My store was very welcoming and I was made to feel as if I was a part of the team even though I was only doing a total of 22hrs over 3 days. I had to take about a month off due to my child being sick and then also myself - and my store manager did not have concerns with this.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

"My manager has been flexible and understanding with my return to work roster. They allow my partner and I to have alternating shifts to care for our child."

Partnered mother,
permanent part-time

More commonly, participants found the return to work difficult and struggled to return to the same position or a position that accommodated their families' needs.

Finding it hard to agree on hours with my store with returning back to work... my previous hours aren't suitable anymore and I'm being told jobs I was doing before I left are now no longer available.

Partnered mother, elder carer, permanent part-time

Initially after returning from maternity leave I was told there were no available hours and to wait till managers came back off leave a week later. I was then provided 3 roster options with nowhere near my entitled work hours. Shifts were too late or too early as childcare wouldn't be open, so was told I miss out on hours then. The transition has been extremely stressful for my family. I definitely thought I would have been more supported in my return to work.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

After my first daughter was born, the store manager tried to move me to checkouts even though my job still existed in the department I worked in. Luckily the department manager still took me back regardless. After my second daughter was born, the job that I had left, in my department that I had worked in, was permanently filled by someone else. And whilst that job was still there and given to another person, the store manager used the excuse that because I came back earlier than stated in my form, he could only offer me checkouts, which wasn't the department that I had worked in for a number of years and totally disregarded my health issues in standing in the same spot for a number of hours.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

Through their accounts, parents shared their sense of precarity in transitioning back to work:

It was hard to jump straight back into full-time work [while] juggling sick baby. No sick leave entitlements...was hard. I was made to feel like I had to get straight back into it full force or they would find someone to replace me.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

Several commented on the difficulties of returning to work while still breastfeeding, and alarmingly two reported that they were explicitly informed they could not express breastmilk while at work.

I had to go to formula feeding as my workplace and shifts do not allow for me to express milk.

Partnered mother, carer for person with long-term illness, permanent part-time

"I was told as a casual I wasn't allowed to express pump or I would get sacked."

Sole mother, casual

There were also experiences of insufficient opportunity to change hours to accommodate breastfeeding and parenting a young child, and concerns about return to work among those preparing to return to work:

Returning to work was not a positive experience...My employer would not change my contract hours upon returning to work to reflect being a parent and still breastfeeding my baby. Not very flexible in terms of family and work balance.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

I am concerned that my workplace will not be accommodating to a flexible working roster upon my return from maternity leave.

Partnered mother, elder carer, permanent full-time

Fathers' experiences

Fathers also wished for more time, with most mentioning they had taken 2 weeks leave paid by the Australian Government, and some supplementing this with a week or two of paid leave from work. They reported that this was insufficient time to support a new mother, especially when the birth had been by Caesarean section.

"It would be better if fathers were able to get another week paid leave to support mothers. Three weeks was just not enough time - two weeks via government assistance and one week employee paid leave was received."

Partnered father, permanent full-time

At least 6-8 weeks is needed to settle in with a newborn and mother.

Partnered father, carer for person with long-term illness, permanent full-time

Being a father I don't think 4 weeks paid leave is enough to bond with the child. I think it should extend to 4 weeks from employer and 4 weeks from the government as the first 6 weeks of the baby's life is basically stuck at home helping with getting baby into a routine which can be a struggle for some parents.

Partnered father of child with disability, permanent full-time

I feel the type of birth the woman has should be taken into consideration. My wife had 2 C-sections where the help from myself after birth was quite significant for the first 3 weeks of recovery. My wife also wasn't able to drive for the first 6 weeks after the C-section.

Partnered father, permanent full-time

Some fathers said their employers were very accommodating of them taking leave when their children were born.

My workplace was very accepting to my time off for my child and partner. It was unpaid leave. (Partnered father, permanent full-time)

Some fathers found themselves under pressure to work despite wanting to take leave:

My second child was born on the 22nd of December and I was not given adequate time off due to the time of year.

Partnered father of child with disability, permanent full-time

"Area manager would not let me take my holidays for my daughter's birth made me come back to work in middle of my holidays cutting short my time with my family."

Partnered father, permanent full-time

¹⁹ While parent's employment status at the time of their most recent child's birth was not captured in the data, the survey data nonetheless indicates who, according to current characteristics, is most likely to have missed out.

²⁰ Some reasons for mothers' non-use of leave is below in Section 7.1.

Working time and rostering practices

Working time and rostering practices

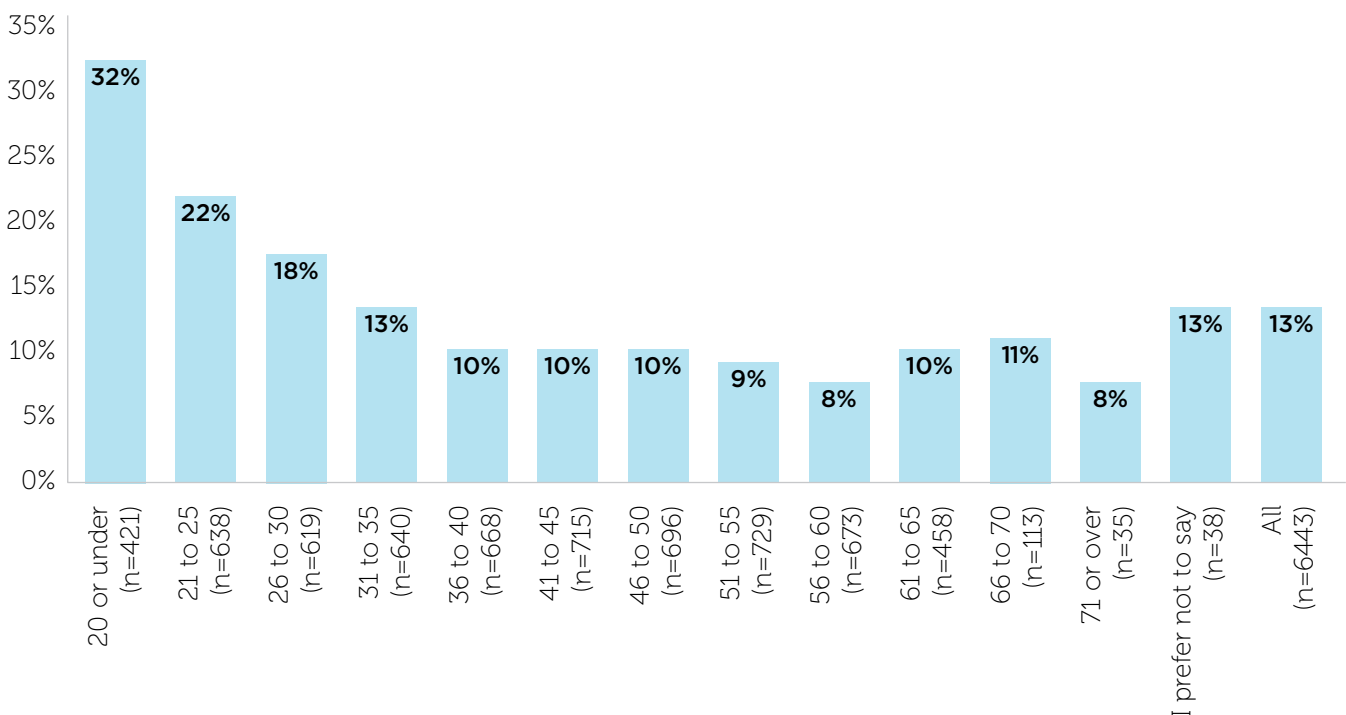
Given the importance of rostering to workers' experiences of managing work and care, the survey asked questions about how rosters were set, and workers' experiences of shift allocations and working time arrangements. SDA members described poor working time security. Very high proportions of participants work non-standard hours, face challenges relating to unpredictable rosters (and income), and experience lack of consultation over changing work times. While affecting everyone, these factors exacerbate difficulties workers face in providing care.

8.1 Regular working times

Irregular work times increase the work of coordinating care, especially for mothers who tend to carry the responsibility for managing, reassessing and changing care arrangements, day to day and week to week. As indicated in Section 3.3, among all participants, two in five (40%) reported that they work the same shifts each week 'all of the time'. While casual work offered least stability, many employed permanently did not experience stable, predictable hours. This was similar for workers employed in supervisory and non-supervisory roles, and even where workers were employed on a permanent basis, shifts often varied. However, as indicated in Section 3.3, the proportion working the same shifts all the time was higher for fathers (48%) and slightly lower for mothers (37%), but did not differ significantly between men and women without children.

Consistent with the fact that many workers do not work the same shifts each week, many workers do not have a regular work day, and so work with a very high level of variation in their requirements. One in 10 (10%) of parents with a child aged 18 or under had no regular work day, and 14% of other workers had no regular work day (13% among all participants). As Figure 8.2 shows the proportion with no regular work day was highest among younger people, but this affected around 10% of workers in their thirties and forties.

Figure 8.1 Proportion of participants who had no regular work day by age



8.2 Setting rosters

The survey asked men and women in supervisory and non-supervisory roles who set their rosters. Table 8.1 shows that most said their rosters were set by a manager they are in contact with. In the comments however, it was clear this did not always mean that their roster was set with a personal understanding of their circumstances: some said they found the relevant manager to be unapproachable, or that contact with them was limited to SMS or an App. Women in non-supervisory roles were most likely to have rosters set by a manager who they were in contact with (84%). One in five supervisors set their own rosters (19%). The complexity of experiences with rostering, and challenges involved in negotiating suitable arrangements, especially for parents, is explored further in Section 8.6, below.

Figure 8.2 shows the work and stress experienced by parents as they co-ordinate rosters and family arrangements. Among those with a child aged 12 or under, 68% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "When I get my roster, I have to check it fits with the family's childcare arrangements", and only 14% disagreed. Higher proportions of mothers agreed than fathers (70% compared with 61%). 69% of either agreed or strongly agreed that their work times affect when other family members can work. Most (62%) found it stressful to organise childcare around work times, and 57% of parents said it was time consuming to organise childcare around work times.

Table 8.1 Who sets rosters by gender and supervisory status

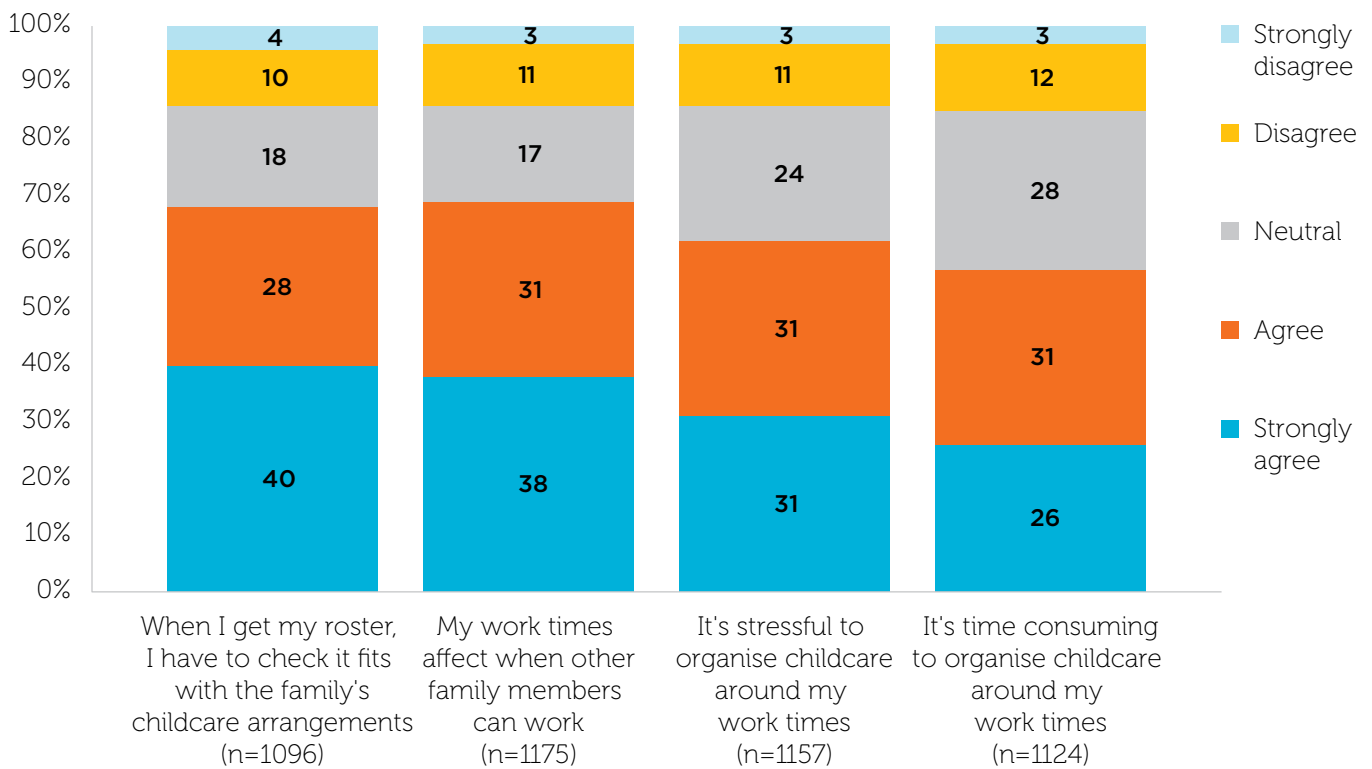
		A manager (regular contact)	A manager (no contact)	Computer	Me	Other	All
Male	Supervisor (n=408)	67%	5%	4%	19%	4%	100%
	Non-supervisor (n=1325)	78%	11%	7%	1%	4%	100%
	All (n=1733)	75%	9%	6%	6%	4%	100%
Female	Supervisor (n=1266)	71%	3%	3%	19%	4%	100%
	Non-supervisor (n=3368)	84%	7%	6%	1%	3%	100%
	All (n=4634)	80%	6%	5%	6%	3%	100%
Other	Supervisor (n=23)	78%	0%	9%	9%	4%	100%
	Non-supervisor (n=45)	78%	13%	2%	2%	4%	100%
	All (n=68)	78%	9%	4%	4%	4%	100%
All	Supervisor (n=1697)	70%	4%	3%	19%	4%	100%
	Non-supervisor (n=4738)	82%	8%	6%	1%	3%	100%
	All (n=6435)	79%	7%	5%	6%	3%	100%



"Being on set contract hours often means it's hard to get shift changes as I work in a specialist area of the store and often hard to have cover at all times."

Male, aged 26 to 40

Figure 8.2 Experiences of rostering and organising family life, parents with a child aged 12 or under



8.3 Computerised rostering

Many workers commented on the use of computerised rostering and requirements to check apps for roster changes. There was a general preference for personal communications with managers around rostering and roster changes, with apps used as tools but not substitutes for personal communication, for example:

I've been quite lucky in my current place of employment. Our managers converse with us regularly about our availability and we can adjust when needed on our work app.

Woman aged 25 and under, carer of person with long term illness, casual

Overwhelmingly, comments reflected frustration with apps, including the lack of notification of changes, and failure to account for stated availability. Apps were not fit for purpose, failing to notify when changes had been made, which placed the onus on workers to frequently check the app for their work times.

Nobody tells you it just appears on the computer sometimes you can't plan family events.

Male aged 25+, carer for person with disability, permanent part-time

I have to constantly check the roster because our roster app does not give notifications if a change is made.

Partnered mother of child with disability, casual

I would like more hours but unable to get them and dislike having to check online to see if I've been given an extra shift without asking me first.

Partnered mother, elder carer, permanent part-time

With the current arrangement in the app we can see our new roster 4 days prior to starting the next week. And if changes are made there is no sort of external notification from the app to inform us of those changes.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

"We have an app that we place out availability, and I'm forever asking for shifts to be removed as they are rostered on days that I cannot work or before or after the hours I've stated that I am available."

Mother of child with disability, casual

Changes in computerised rosters could be very frequent, leaving workers without required warning:

Well we are meant to get 2 weeks' notice on roaster changes but it seems to be at the moment daily or hourly. It's not fair we get told on our phones to check our rosters all the time.

Woman aged 25+, permanent part-time

Some also noticed that computerised rosters could differ across platforms and with hard copies, causing confusion:

The communication of the roster is not good, with multiple, different rosters in different areas, e.g. two online rosters and one paper form in store that can often be different to each other.

Partnered mother working part-time

"The company online systems can vary from the internal shop rosters, which causes issues when it happens."

Partnered mother, casual





"It's normally automatically generated, and we get no say."

Sole mother, carer, casual

Running through these comments were a sense of frustration and disempowerment where rosters were computer generated and impersonal, and where they had no say:

That they roster according to a "shape" that is best for the company. I have said many times we are people and not just a line on a computer screen that can just conform to what they want.

Partnered mother, carer, permanent full-time

8.4 Length and spread of hours

While some participants were comfortable with the amount of hours they work and how their working time is structured, many are not. Figure 8.3 shows that:

- 40% either agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement "I would like to work more hours" and 34% disagreed (or strongly disagreed)
- 37% of participants agreed or strongly than agreed with the statement "I would prefer if the shifts available were longer", compared with 34% who disagreed
- While more disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement (45%), a substantial minority (27%) felt their work hours were spread across too many days.

Figure 8.4 provides a breakdown of agreement with the statement "I would like to work more hours", by how many hours were worked in the last fortnight. This shows that the highest proportion of those with very short hours wanted to work more hours; this was the case for more than half of those who worked less than 20 hours over the past two weeks, with 58% of these short hours workers agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. However, even among those working longer part-time hours (60 to <76 hours in the fortnight), 40% agreed or strongly agreed that they would like more hours. Among full-time employees, 17% wanted more hours, likely reflecting low hourly rates of pay.

Figure 8.5 provides a further breakdown, by age, of agreement with the statement "I would like to work more hours". This shows that wanting more hours is most common among younger people, with underemployment falling over the life course. However, even among workers in their thirties and beyond, underemployment is high. Almost half of those in their early thirties agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (47%), as was the case for 40% of those in their early forties, and a third (34%) of those in their early fifties. Even among those in their early sixties who are approaching retirement age, one in five (20%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Figure 8.3 Agreement with statement about the length and spread of hours

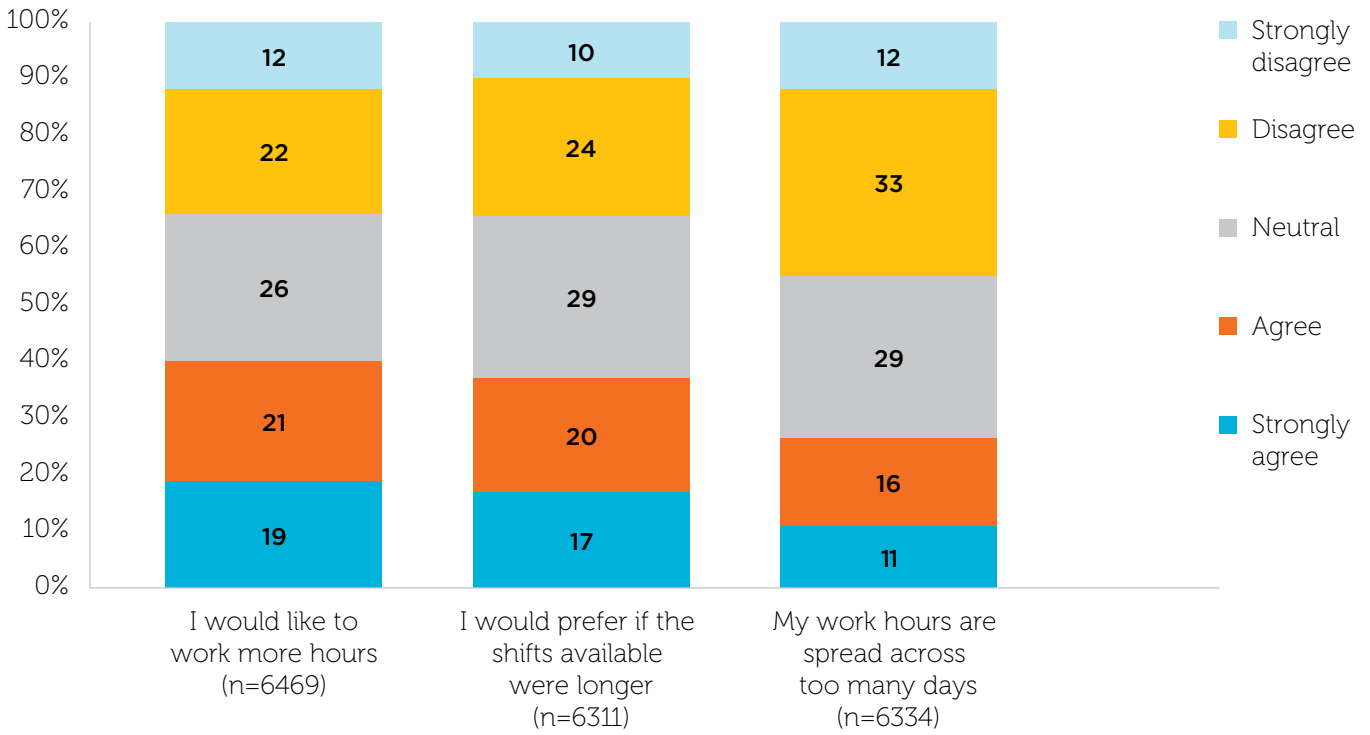


Figure 8.4 Agreement with the statement “I would like to work more hours” by hours worked over last two weeks

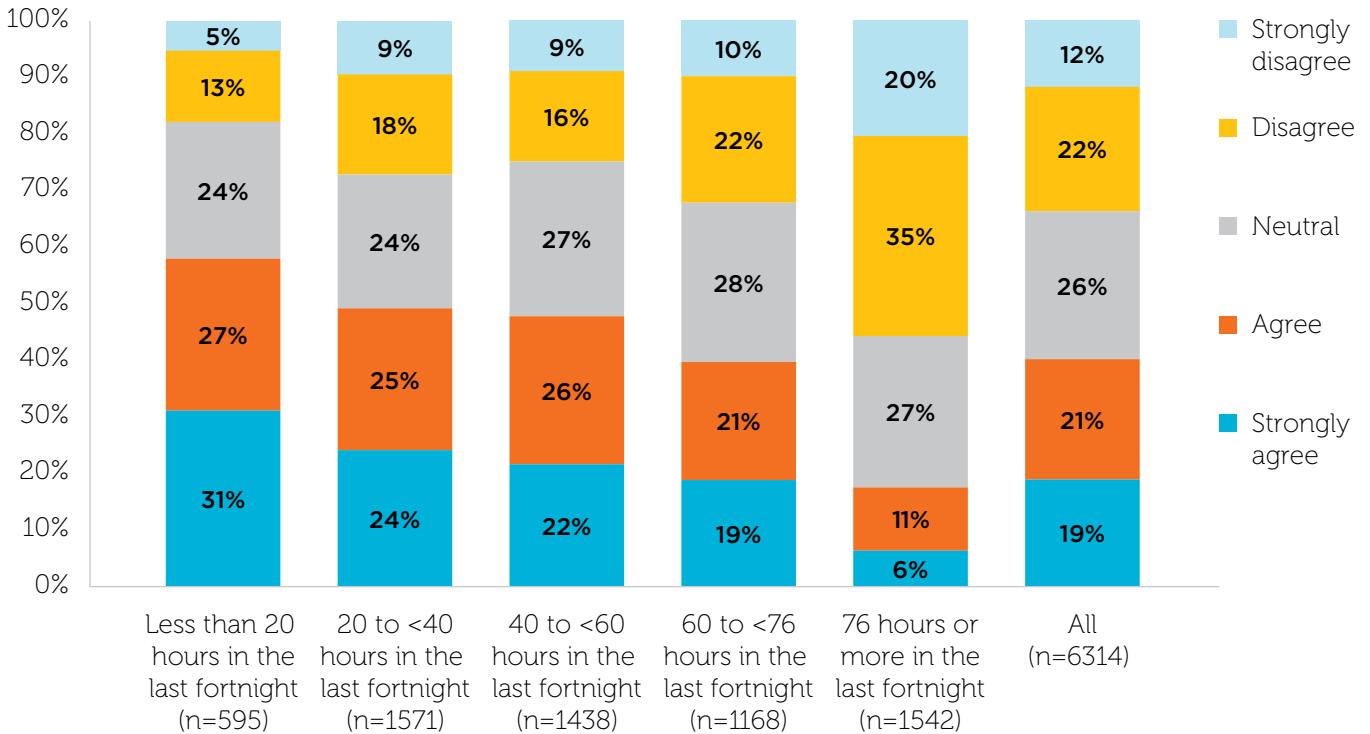
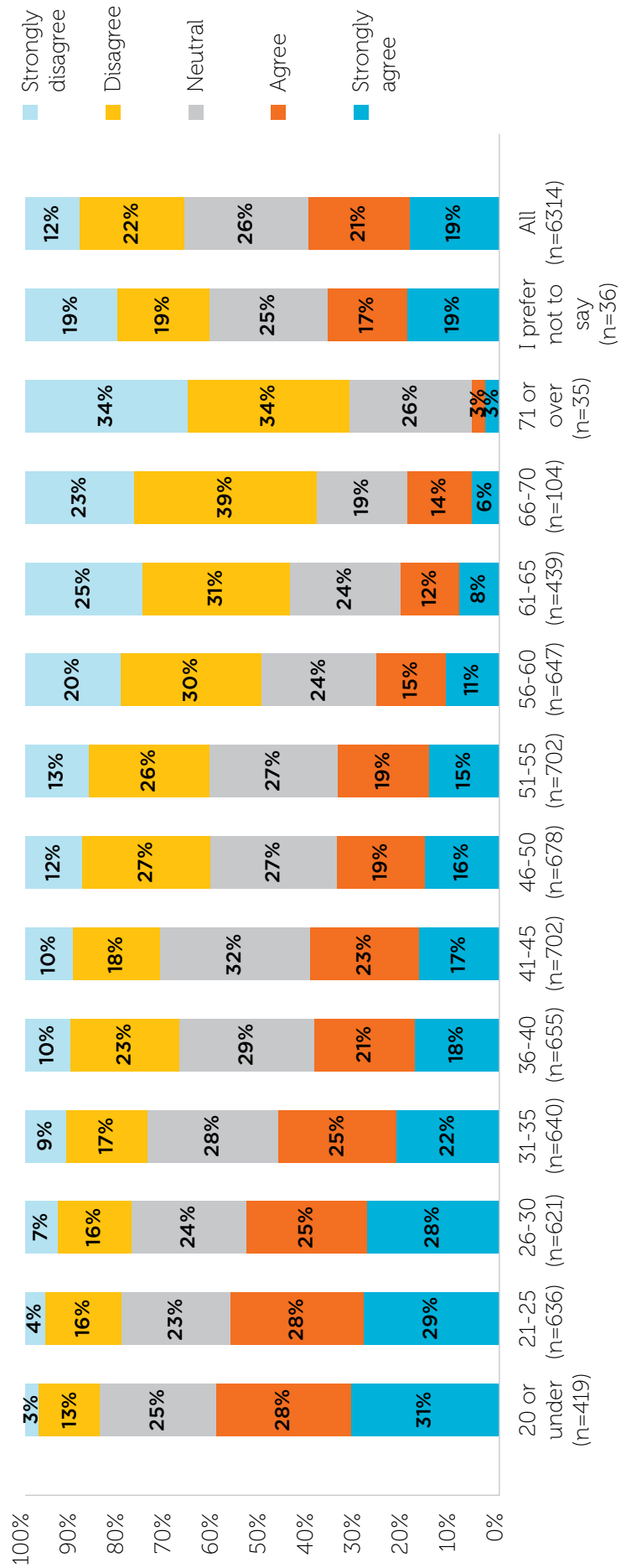


Figure 8.5 Agreement with the statement “I would like to work more hours” by age



8.5 Variability of hours

A major problem for SDA members, including parents and others with care responsibilities, is that the working hours offered by employers are highly variable, and can change at short notice, making it difficult for employees to plan stable care arrangements. Two in five participants, including two in five parents (41%) said their shifts can change unexpectedly. Those working on a casual basis were most likely to experience unexpected changes in shifts (65% agreed this was the case). However, 36% of permanent full or part-time workers also agreed their shifts can change unexpectedly (Table 8.1).

Table 8.2 Agreement with the statement “My shifts can change unexpectedly”, by contract type

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Casual	287	30%	330	35%	182	19%	107	11%	42	4%	948	100%
Permanent part-time	450	13%	801	23%	713	21%	1012	29%	469	14%	3445	100%
Permanent full-time	241	13%	452	24%	370	19%	529	28%	325	17%	1917	100%
All	978	16%	1583	25%	1265	20%	1648	26%	836	13%	6310	100%

Variability of hours impacts on the total number of hours people can work, and their ability to work sufficient hours to meet financial needs. As shown in Figure 8.4, a third (34%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “If my hours were more predictable, I would be able to work more”; however, this was much higher among those employed casually (53%) compared with those employed on a permanent basis, 29% of whom agreed with the statement.

In addition, employees reported having very limited ability to control their working times. Figure 8.5 shows that across the sample, only 19% said they can easily adjust their start and finish times, whereas 60% disagreed (or strongly disagreed) that this is the case. Only 21% said they can change their work days when they want, while 56% could not. One in three reported having to closely monitor their phone or device to receive notice of shifts (32%).

Figure 8.6 Agreement with the statement “If my hours were more predictable, I would be able to work more”

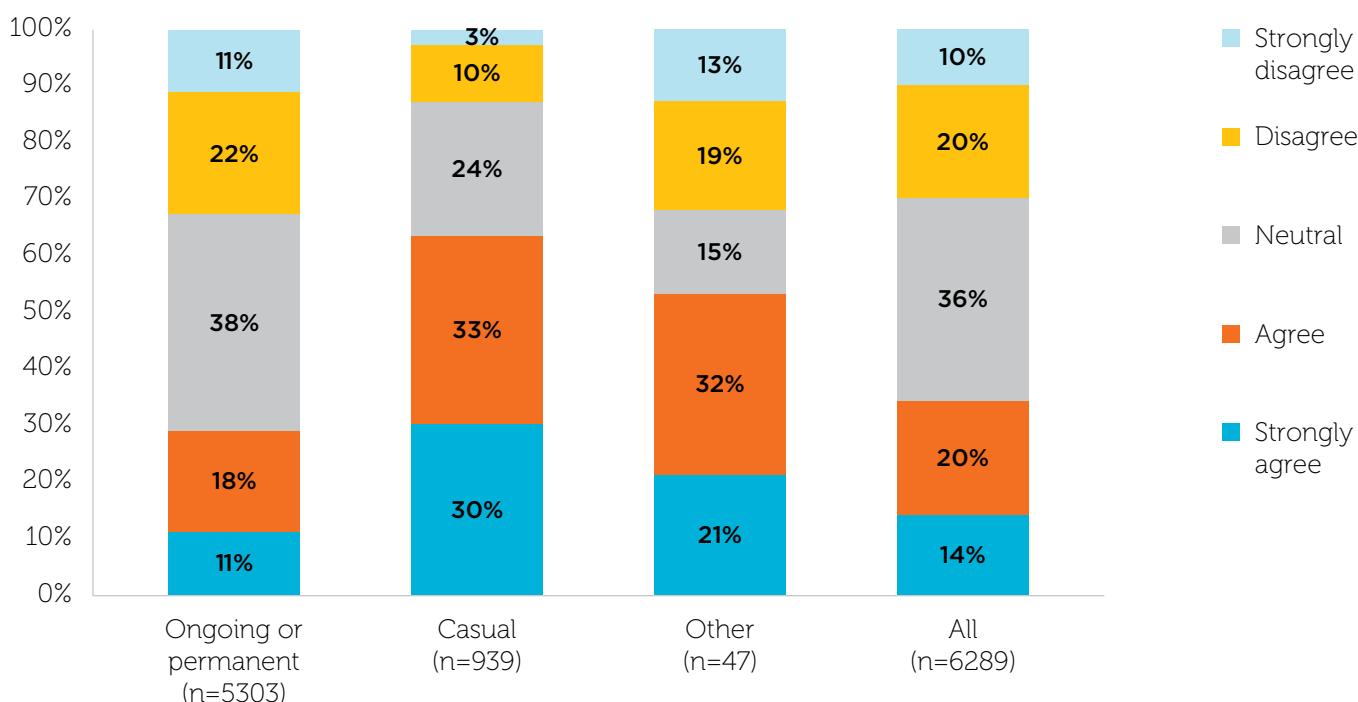
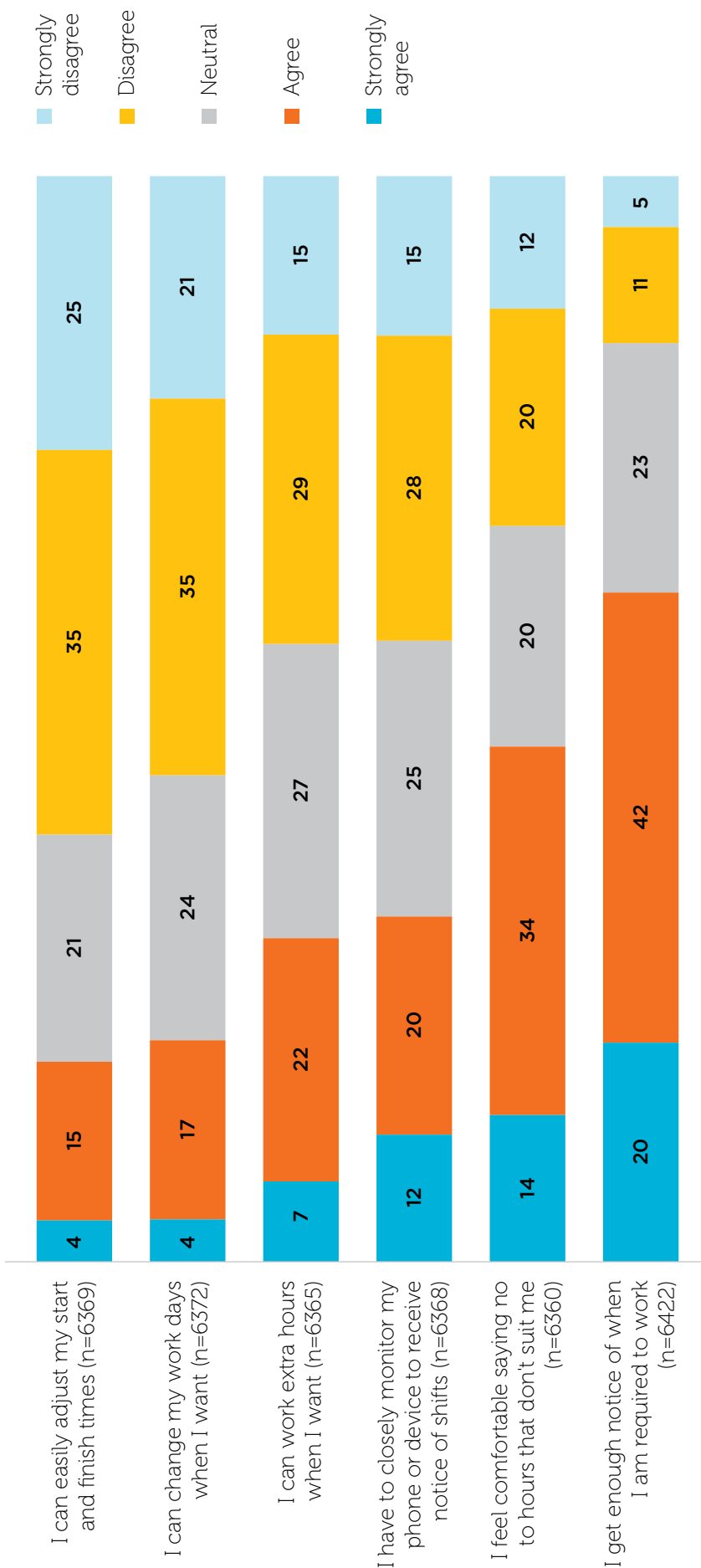


Figure 8.7 Agreement with statements about changing working times



8.6 Comments on rostering

Participants were asked to comment on rostering practices, and its effects on family and childcare arrangements.

"Work is always supportive if I need family time, especially recently with me being a blood donor to my brother with leukaemia."

Woman aged 25, permanent part-time

Positive comments on rostering

Some participants described that their rosters suited them, and that managers were able to accommodate their needs. For example:

I have great hours that suit my family, I am part-time and my hours always remain the same, I'm very lucky.

Woman aged 25+, permanent part-time

I've been quite lucky in my current place of employment. Our managers converse with us regularly about our availability and we can adjust when needed on our work app.

Woman aged 25 years and under, carer, casual

Many of the workers making positive comments expressed appreciation that employers had recognised and catered appropriately for their individual circumstances and care requirements. For example:

After 35 years with the company I now only work 5 shifts a week and they suit my lifestyle as I am a guardian of one and a carer of my mum. Work has always been thoughtful of my needs.

Partnered mother of child with disability, elder carer, permanent part-time

I have been a single Mum for 17 years and I have had the best shifts that take into account my son. For 13 of those years I've been full-time and have not had to work weekends.

Sole mother, permanent full-time

However, those sharing positive experiences were a minority. Further, where workers described their arrangements as suitable, they also highlighted feeling 'lucky', and framed their arrangements as atypical and precarious.

I am very lucky with current dept manager. He understands my circumstances and works around me. This is not say if he left I would be this lucky.

Woman, elder carer, casual

The comments provided by workers give a strong sense of the variability of rostering practices, and how it affects them. Some had been subject to very poor management practices in the past, so wanted to 'hang on' to jobs where rostering was fair and accommodating:

My current manager is extremely understanding of my commitments outside of work and never changes my roster. This has GREATLY improved my mental health and capacity to work happily at my job. Previous to this, other managers were never this understanding and I have blocked managers who would text 8 times a day, expect responses within 15 minutes for a part-time worker who did 1 shift a week. They would change the roster at 8.00pm at night to have me scheduled on the next morning at 8am and never contact me about the change then act like I was a "no show."

Woman aged 25+, permanent part-time

Insufficient consideration of personal needs and circumstances

Most workers however described that their rosters were determined in much less favourable circumstances. These workers described how their personal needs and family circumstances were not appropriately recognised and accommodated in the ways employers arranged their working time. This was especially the case for people experiencing more complex family and care arrangements, for example:

I have an autistic child and my manager doesn't understand how hard it is for myself to work outside of a schedule that I have set for the fortnight.

Woman, carer of person with disability, permanent part-time

My workplace are often very inconsiderate to the personal needs to each of their employees. Often suddenly cancelling leave which was applied for and approved in the correct manner. They are extremely non-understanding when it comes to family emergencies. I have non-English speaking grandmother with Alzheimer-dementia who still lives at home and is often unpredictable. When extra care is needed I have been told to come to work and find someone else to deal with it.

Woman aged 25 years or less, carer for person with long term illness, permanent part-time

Often, workers described being acutely aware that rather than their own circumstances, shift allocations were determined around business priorities:

We had to change our start and finish times on night fill so the company can save on penalty rates. We were not given a choice just told it was changing so all our contracts had to change too. There was no consideration for night fill members that have to pick their children up from school etc. Now we also get paid less because of this.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

[There is] no respect for carers even if you're a really good employee. It's big business, [we are] easily replaced. They look at staff as an expense not an asset.

Woman, carer for person with long term illness, casual

Comments on rostering by workers caring for people with complex needs

Have advised my department manager that I was unavailable after 5.30pm as I have a child with special needs and require routine at home, but they still roster me on once a fortnight after that time and regularly ask me to do shifts after that time as well.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

My hours affect me and my family. I have an 11 year old to care for and my husband has terminal cancer. I need to be at home of a night time, but work don't seem to care about that.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

Because I am only given 1 month contracts, I get no sick leave or annual leave. As a single parent, this means that, if one of my disabled children needs to be removed from the school, either due to illness or autistic meltdown, I need to leave work to collect my child, missing out on wages for the remainder of that shift, and any shifts that occur before my child is able to attend school again. This causes financial stress. If I was able to go on a 12 month contract (as opposed to simply renewing a month long contact every month for the past 14 months), I would be able to accrue leave to relieve some of the stress caused by needing to leave work for a sick child.

Sole mother of child with disability

Rostering and underemployment

Overwhelmingly, dissatisfaction with shift arrangements related to insufficient working hours, experienced either as lack of shifts, or shifts which were too short. Underemployment due to too few shifts emerged as a strong theme, with rostering arrangements leaving workers underemployed and unable to earn the income they needed to meet needs.

I am permanent part-time 25 hours per week and work will not allow additional hours. Therefore I have struggled financially to pay my bills and mortgage and have had to find additional work which is challenging to fit around my rostered hours. I feel that it is negligent of the company that an employee cannot have an acceptable standard of living working for them only.

Woman aged 25+, permanent part-time

I have asked for more hours multiple times, and have recently been told (after 1.5 years) they only give them to people who want to step up into manager roles. I just want a steady job with hours to afford to live comfortably.

Woman aged 25+, permanent part-time

[My employer] doesn't give me enough shifts, it's rostering system isn't like [others] where you get shift every week. ...they keep hiring new staff all the time. Every month. The staff that's already hired don't get shifts. Majority of the people working in [my workplace] say that they haven't been rostered for more than a month, this rostering system is ridiculous.

Woman aged 25 years or less, casual

Another strong theme related to shifts that were too short:

Rostering sucks. It is bad now. A big company that made so much money last year cut our hours down. Instead of doing a 5 hour shift like we usually do it's cut down to 3 hours.

Man aged 25 years or less, permanent part-time

I don't like the way they change my rosters without my permission and I don't like that I have to drive for 30min to do 4 hours or less shift. [I would] rather work more hours and less days.

Woman aged 25+, permanent part-time

"3 hour minimum shifts are frustrating. Apparently these are the new requirement and working 15 hours a week doesn't support my family."

Woman aged 25+,
permanent part-time



Inflexibility in work times

Inflexibility was a further theme, including inflexibility relating to start and finish times, and to notice for preferred hours or leave:

"No notice when needed for an extra shift. This morning I had 45mins notice and sometimes extra shifts are added without been asked."

Woman, carer, permanent part-time

Despite explaining I am a sole parent with primary care responsibilities my manager is very inflexible about my start and finish times. I have a set roster to start at 9 am but cannot get there at that time due to dropping my child at school. I have explained my situation but she acts disappointed that I am 'late' even though I fulfil my hours each week.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

We have to give at least 4 weeks' notice to get a day off. With children, things pop up with short notice. If I need a day off, I am meet with an extremely rude and no understanding. I am made to feel guilty for asking.

Partnered mother, elder carer, permanent part-time

We have to put a request at least two weeks before. And they offer extra shifts which we won't be able to do as it is hard to find someone to look after the kids.

Partnered father of child with disability, elder carer, permanent part-time

Changes in working times

In addition to being inflexible in responding to employee needs, employers often changed rosters unilaterally, causing difficulties, especially for workers with caring responsibilities:

Shifts regularly get added or changed without any communication, meaning I have had to put my family out on several occasions, leaving them to fend for themselves. I've had to cancel medical appointments [without] notice because shifts have altered. On the rare occasion I'm actually asked to do extra shifts and I have to turn them down, I'm made to feel like a disappointment to the boss and then am asked less and less to do more hours. But my roster changes without notice more often. They force us into doing extra or different shifts. We are also only given access to the weeks roster (starting Monday) from the previous Thursday morning, giving us a very short amount of time to know the following weeks roster, which makes other commitments difficult to arrange.

Woman, elder carer, permanent part-time

If [my hours] were consistent week to week I could plan doctor's appointments for my elderly mother. As they change often it's very hard to plan for outside your work life.

Woman, elder carer, permanent part-time

Frequent changes to working times presented difficulties for grandparents:

I don't think it's fair that they can keep changing my start times. It makes it difficult to collect my grandchildren.

Grandmother, permanent part-time

I wish [rosters] could remain the same so my granddaughter and us as older grandparents can arrange our lives.

Grandmother, casual

"It's all over the place. Shifts get changed last minute, I never get the same shifts every fortnight. You ask for extra contract hours and they give you the bare minimum but expect you to give up your weekends without notice."

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

"I have to work every weekend, meaning no family time. But I don't have a choice as I have to have days off during the week to save on daycare."

Partnered mother,
permanent part-time



Unsuitable working times

Many workers' comments on rostering focused on the need to regularly work non-standard hours such as weekends, night-shifts, or early morning. Some sounded exasperated that as sole parents, they were rostered on to work late at night or for closing shifts.

[My employer] wants to have a model roster that would require me to work late at night but that's not possible as I am a solo parent. They do not understand that.

Sole mother, permanent full-time

Because I open the store, it has made it very difficult to be there for my children when they need my attention the most. I get up at 2am, and therefore by the time school finishes, I am either just getting home, or exhausted and need to go to bed before dinner time.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Doing a close then an open shift, means I get very little sleep and won't see the family for some time. Having to work every public holiday and weekend, means we can never do anything as a family. My shifts change at short notice, which means I have to cancel appointments.

Female, elder carer, permanent part-time

Working weekends had a huge impact on family time, and was seen to reduce opportunities for families to spend time together. However, the penalty rates and opportunity to save on childcare could help make ends meet.

Weekend work is hard for family life especially when trying to assist in caring for grandchildren and caring for elderly parents.

Man, elder carer, permanent full-time

My hours were cut but to try and keep my wage at a similar level I had to work every Sunday to get penalty rates so I could afford to feed my family. Because I now work every Sunday we can't really go anywhere.

Woman, carer for person with disability, permanent part-time

I have to work every weekend, meaning no family time. But I don't have a choice as I have to have days off during the week to save on daycare.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Others wanted to work weekends, but could not obtain their preferred shifts:

I would like to work on weekends, because my partner is there to take care of kids and I can work more, but could not get weekend shifts.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Shift allocations and repercussions for refusing requests

An additional set of comments related to issues of fairness in allocating shifts, and fears of repercussions if people could not agree to ad-hoc requests. Some felt overlooked for the shifts they needed, which were allocated to younger and cheaper staff without family responsibilities, while others felt restrictions on their time put their seniority under threat.

Rosters are unfairly distributed. Preference is given to younger staff members for all shifts. Regular casuals can be given more than 30 hours a week. Part-time staff who are older are rarely given additional shifts and tend to be given evenings even though they have family commitments.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

I have time limits as to when I can start and finish due to child care opening hours, primary school drop off times, etc. These sometime threatens my role as a manager. You are made to feel you must be available 24/7 without the excuse of family (being a male would be so much easier).

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

Workers often were made to feel bad for communicating their availability, refusing unsuitable shifts or taking leave, and described that they could be penalised by falling off the roster, or being offered less suitable shifts:

I submit hours of availability and they are ignored then work get upset when I tell them I can't do those hours that are outside my availability. They also get upset that I can't work certain hours as I have no care for the kids to go too and it's close to costing me my job. I also find I get told there are no more hours during my availability but then I see newer staff members being rostered on for the hours I've been told don't exist.

Sole mother of child with disability, casual

Managers still make you feel bad for calling in sick or taking personal leave, and sometimes ask for medical certificates which are really hard to get when you're caring for someone.

Woman, carer for person with disability, permanent part-time

If I knock back shifts I'm told I'm unreliable and henceforth may not get future shifts.

Woman, elder carer, casual

Expectations of repercussions for refusing unsuitable shifts

You sometimes feel like you are being taken off shifts for weeks if you ask for one shift off if you can't work due to kids.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

I will often get asked if I can come into work ASAP with little notice and feel obligated to say yes due to a lack of available hours on offer. If I say no it could mean a week to two weeks of no work.

Woman aged 25+, casual

I dislike 3 hour shifts as it is not cost effective but I can't say no as I don't want to be penalised for other shifts.

Partnered mother, casual

They change rosters without consultation or even notice. We have to work crazy hours that are inflexible and inconvenient. If casuals knock one shift back their hours are cut. All this negatively impacts home life and energy levels when not at work.

Partnered father, elder carer, permanent full-time

Impacts on workers and families

Impacts on workers and families

Working time arrangements impact on workers' mental health, family stress, and children.

9.1 Mental health

Among all participants, 35% either agreed or strongly agreed that the way they are rostered impacts on their mental health. This was a little higher for parents. Of those with a child 12 or under, 36% of mothers and 41% of fathers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "The way I am rostered to work impacts on my mental health" (see Appendix data Table A. 7). The proportion who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement was higher for those with more complex caring arrangements. For young carers, almost half agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (47%), as was the case for sole parents (46%), those caring for a person with a long-term illness (45%) and those caring for a person with disability (44%).

Workers left comments which reflected the ways working time impacts on their mental health. In doing so, they cited poor job security and understaffing as well as roster resets:

The roster resets affect my mental health as I am worried about having to explain my situation often. When my kids are home I worry about them being unsupervised.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

It is very hard and stressful being a long term casual and it very much affects my mental health.

Sole mother, carer, casual

Expectations from store management are appalling, staff shortages are making our shifts stressful and it affects my mental health.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Be good if we weren't expected to do 8 hours work in 5. Our work load at the moment is horrible and expectations are too much. Mental health and morale is at an all-time low.

Partnered mother of child with disability, elder carer, permanent part-time

Disappointment with rostering contributed to family stress:

It's very stressful and tiring to constantly be disappointed about the roster. My family feel the brunt of this constant unhappiness.

Grandparent with no regular work day

A single parent described that the stress was worse recently, because of the need to miss work because of illness in the context of the pandemic:

It's different and sometimes a little more difficult for me as a single parent. Especially with COVID as well and that I miss work because my kid might have the tiniest cough but aren't allowed at school. This stuff has really messed with my mental health this year.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

A supervisor noted the mental health challenges they faced, and lack of recompense for the tasks and stress involved in supervisory roles.

If I work a public holiday I only get an extra \$80 after tax and I sacrifice family time. I worked mostly late nights and weekends for the extra penalty rates to assist with the rising costs of living. My mental health really suffered due to the long late hours and family commitments. I think supervisors on shift should receive more than an extra \$0.50 an hour for what they are expected to do. The amount of times I have seen supervisors work understaffed, go without breaks, have no security and deal with customer abuse.

Partnered mother, permanent full-time

“Changing shifts constantly after rosters are sent out is not good. Every now and then is fine, i.e. someone calling in sick, but getting messages to always be checking your roster for changes...sometimes daily...is too much.”

Sole mother, carer of person with long term illness and disability, casual

9.2 Family stress

Among participants with caring responsibilities (whether for children or adults), 37% either agreed or strongly agreed that their shifts and work schedule cause stress for them and their family (Table 8.1). This was higher for sole parents, half of whom either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “My shifts and work schedule causes stress for me and my family”.

Table 9.1 Agreement with the statement “My shifts and work schedule causes stress for me and my family” by parenting status

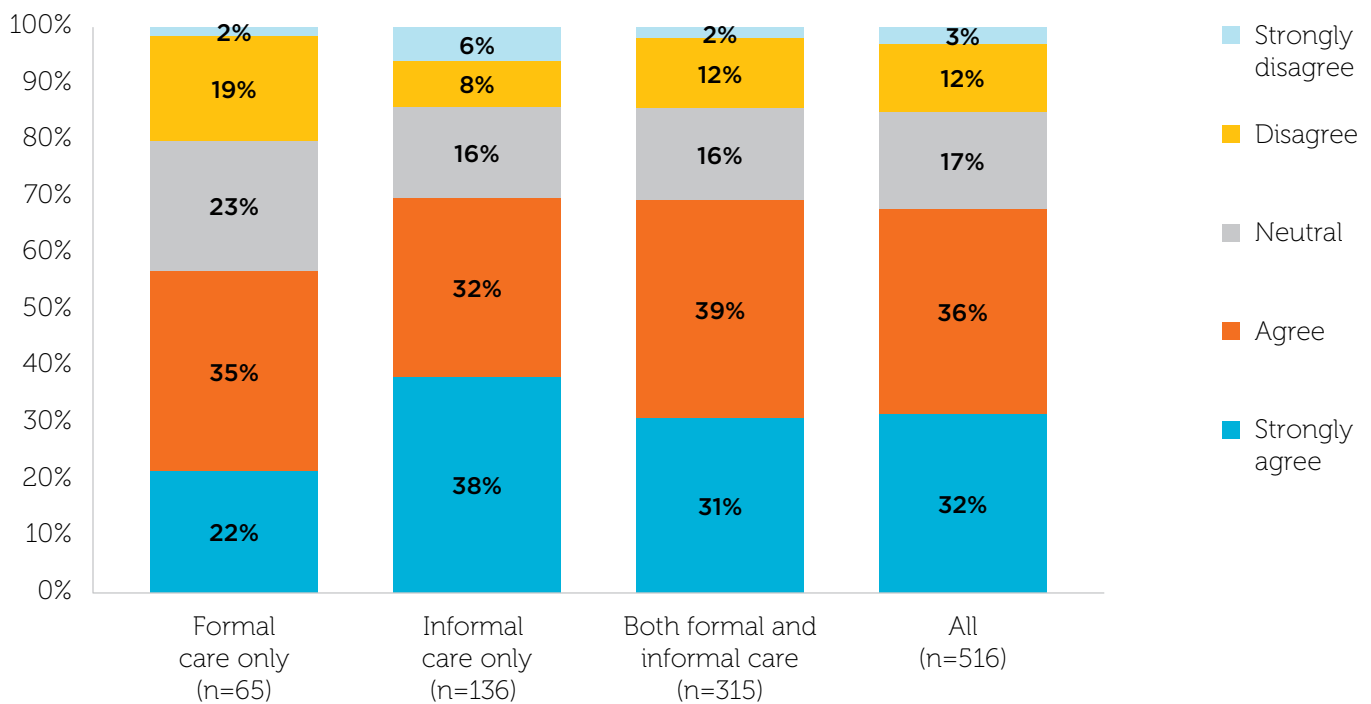
	Not parenting a child <18		Couple parent with child <18		Sole parent with child <18		All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Strongly agree	502	11%	272	19%	114	24%	888	14%
Agree	980	22%	375	26%	119	25%	1474	23%
Neutral	1281	29%	429	30%	128	27%	1838	29%
Disagree	1203	27%	316	22%	85	18%	1604	25%
Strongly disagree	482	11%	62	4%	23	5%	567	9%
All	4448	100%	1454	100%	469	100%	6371	100%

Parents were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement “I worry about what goes on with my children while I’m working”. Data in Appendix Table A. 8 provides a breakdown for parents, according to the age of their youngest child. This shows that for parents with a child under 5, 68% of parents agreed with the statement, as did 69% of those with a youngest child in the 6 to 12 age group. While worrying was lower among those whose youngest child was aged 13 to 17, most parents with a teenage child (56%) nonetheless agreed with the statement.

Figure 9.1 shows that among mothers with a child aged 5 or under, those accessing formal care only (and not using informal care) were significantly less likely to agree or strongly with the statement, and a higher proportion disagreed. Indeed, 57% of parents of a young child who were using formal care agreed or strongly agreed that they worry about what goes on with their children whilst working, compared with 70% of those totally reliant on informal care, and a higher proportion disagreed (21% compared with 14%). This underlines the importance of formal child care use in alleviating maternal stress.



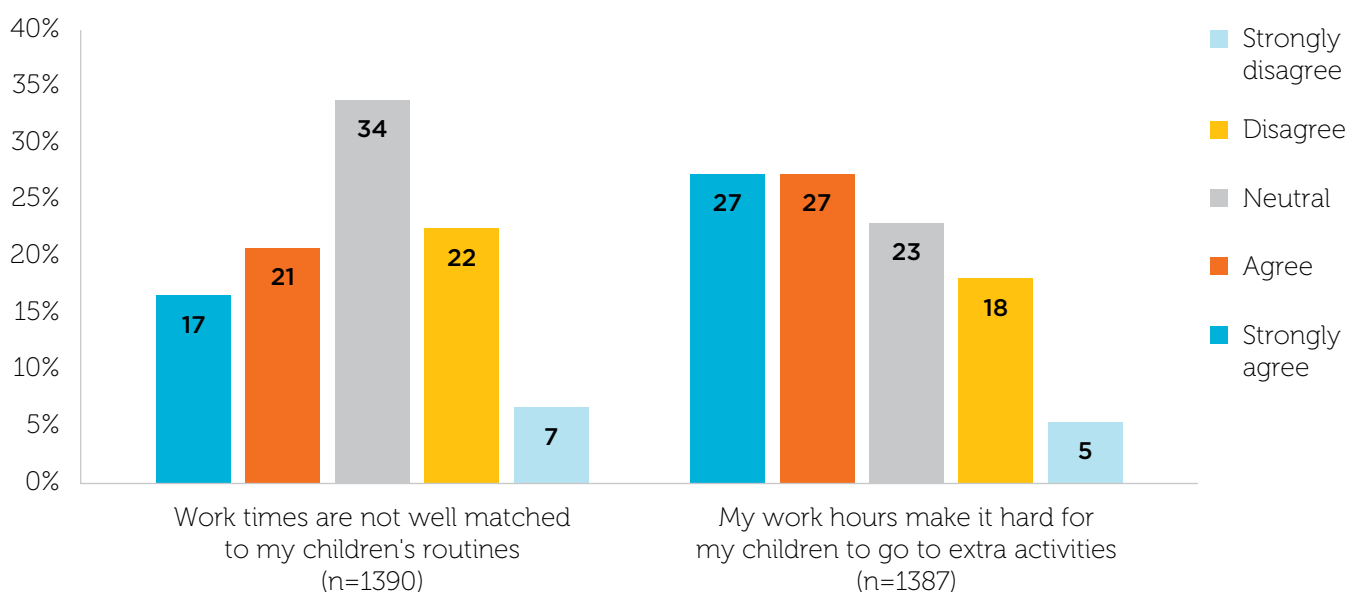
Figure 9.1 Agreement with the statement: “I worry about what goes on with my children while I’m working” mothers with a child 5 or under by use of formal and informal care



9.3 Children’s routines and activities

Working time arrangements and parents’ stress about working time impacts on children’s routines and activities. Figure 9.2 shows 38% either agreed or strongly agreed that work times are not well matched to children’s routines, and more than half (54%) agreed or strongly agreed that work hours make it difficult for children to attend extra activities, such as swimming, sport and music.

Figure 9.2 Agreement with statements about children’s activities and routines, parents with a child aged 12 or under (%)



Comments highlighted the difficulties raised for parents, with instability of hours impacting on children's activities and daily lives. These issues were described in detail by sole mothers:

As a single mother I am committed to working hard for my children. With consistent hours, I have been able to have stability. Now due to low hours of only 9 hours a week, all of a sudden I have found myself more stressed and losing sleep at night worrying about how I am going to survive. I've considered ...quitting their sports because me having to take them to training and their games doesn't suit my managers idea of rostering. [But] I know it can be done, as it was managed well once before with many hours without me having to stress.

Sole mother, casual

My manager doesn't care that I'm a single mother and that my girls have to hang around outside the school for 1 hour and 10 minutes for me to pick them up. She also didn't care when she changed my roster and my daughters couldn't see their psychologist any more ...and she didn't care that my girls had to give up their sports... This has affected my and my girls' mental health and it affects our daily lives. Our lives are very stressful because of my work hours and my girls suffer because they only have me and they always miss out, and my boss couldn't care less.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

9.4 Childcare

Further, comments left in the survey by parents showed the way that rostering arrangements and inability to shape working arrangements made childcare arrangements difficult. Some mentioned the lack of childcare that would enable them to cover the shifts requested of them. Others mentioned the short shifts or unpredictability:

Store wants me to work more late nights afternoons and early starts but unable to due to lack of childcare.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

If I had a chance to work long hours while I send my kid to childcare that would have been easy instead of doing short shift for many days.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Short shifts also raised difficulties of affording childcare

[It's difficult] having to pay for full days of childcare (at the set rate) when I'm only working for three hours.

Sole mother of child with disability, casual

The lack of care availability to meet retail workers' needs was also an issue:

Public holidays are bad as they are closed and we are open.

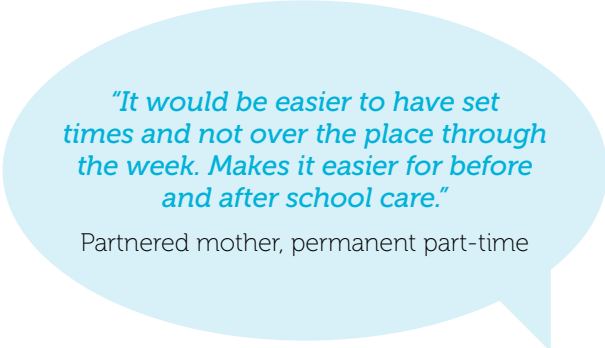
Partnered father, permanent part-time

Because I work really early and so does my husband, it's been very tough to find childcare especially I work different days every week and sometimes I do short hours or longer hours depending on the needs of my workplace.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

They [childcare services] simply don't open early enough or close late enough for retail workers. Also myself being a single parent and no daycare on weekends means I cannot work then either.

Sole mother, permanent part-time



"It would be easier to have set times and not over the place through the week. Makes it easier for before and after school care."

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Working arrangements and the lack of appropriate child care impacted on children and families. Many had informal care arrangements they could draw on, although these were often less than ideal:

My son is in year 7 this year and there is no scope for after or before school care. I am a single parent and my work roster includes 7am starts and one late night (till 9.00pm) per week. I have to use family members or my son sleeps at his Nans when I start at 7.00am or work late.

Sole mother, elder carer, permanent part-time

I have to rely on a school mum to take her which means dropping my daughter at her house at 7.00am.

Partnered mother, elder carer, permanent part-time

Others mentioned they were unable to spend time together as a family:

Our family never spend time together. Either I am working or my wife is working. One has to provide care to the kid.

Partnered father, permanent full-time

[I have] 5am starts and my husband does the midnight shift. We both work for [the same company]. The little time at home is sleeping. Most days it's a rush to get the kid to school or home. Work sees that they are more important, so my son suffers at the hand of it.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Parents commented on the challenges of the working arrangements on offer, with the span of hours unsuited to childcare or school hours. Some had difficulties accessing and paying for childcare because of short and variable shifts:

Constant shift changes without enough notice, no set days per week, which means I lose money booking after school care.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

I'm paying for days I don't need but knowing my luck if I remove my child I'll be rostered on then. It's hard being able to afford rent, food, bills, child care fees and other expenses if not getting many hours.

Sole mother, casual

However, long shifts could also be poorly matched to childcare availability:

I work 11 hour shifts. The long daycare service I use is not available for the whole time I am at work. Any changes to my contracted hours require others to also change their contracted hours, so I am not able to change them.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

Some comments provided insight into precarious working time arrangements, and the childcare difficulties associated with changes in rosters, which could mean more care was required or care required at times it was not possible to obtain it. For example:

Over the years I've had to change work hours, childcare arrangements and family activities to suit rostering. I was initially hired 9.30am to 5.30pm. This suited our family and meant I didn't have to rely heavily on childcare and carers. [My employer's] business strategy changed, I have now ended up 8.00am-4.00pm Monday to Friday which means I need care for my child both ends of the school day.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

I changed off of Saturday shifts when my mum was ill and dying last year. We needed more money after the birth of our child so my wife has been looking for a job and found some work on weekends while I was not working weekends. Now my work is pressuring me to go back to Saturdays even though we can't get childcare and my wife works every Saturday for extra money. I'm going to have to place a grievance in to fight going back to Saturday shift as they will not accept my reasoning even after working there 19 years.

Partnered father, permanent part-time

Financial security

Financial security

To understand SDA members' experiences of financial security, the survey asked a series of questions about perceptions of pay and expectations of retirement incomes.

In the sample, respondents tended to be from low income households. 52% of respondents live in households with post-tax income of less than \$1000 per week. This was the case for 32% of couple parents and 80% of sole parents, and 56% of workers who were not currently parenting a child aged under 18 (see Appendix Table A.10).

10.1 Perceptions of pay

Adequacy of hours

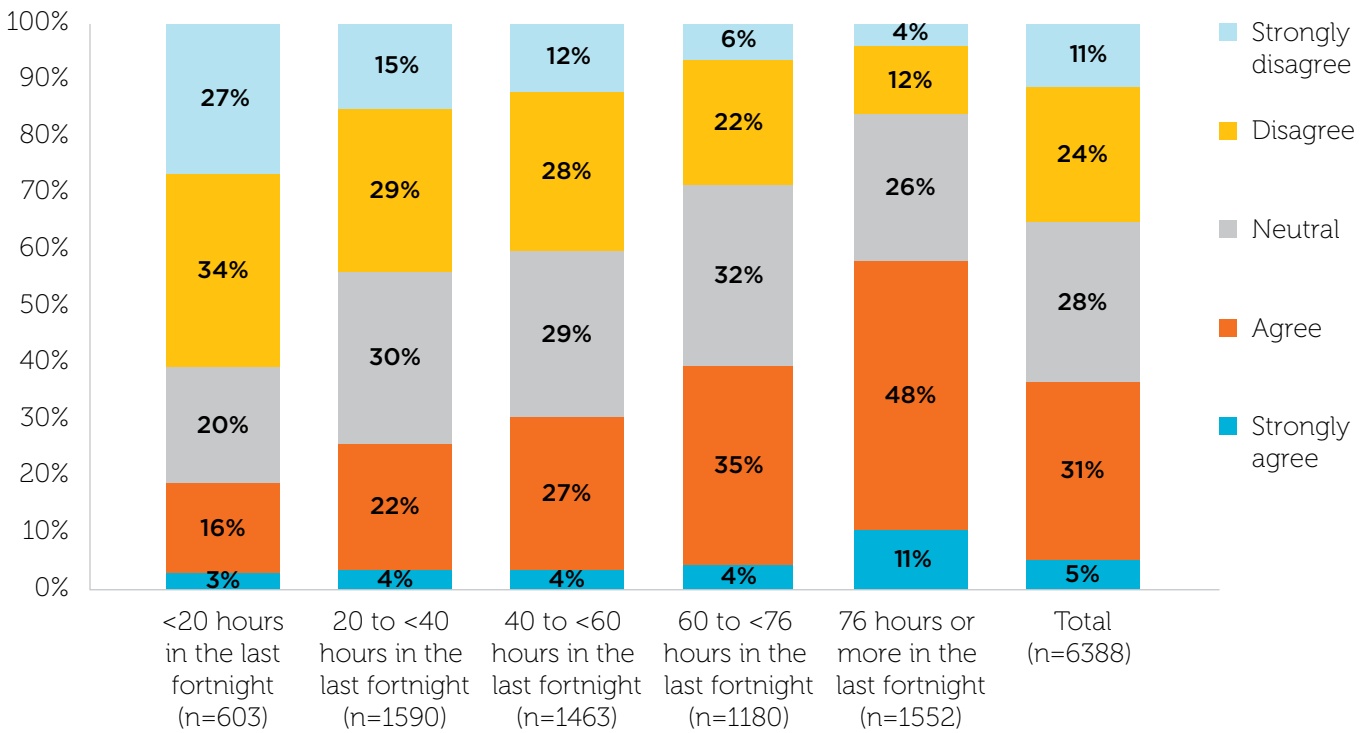
Because underemployment holds earnings down, participants were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement "I work enough hours to make a living". Only 36% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. This was lower for sole parents (25%) (Appendix Table A.11). Women were also less likely to agree, and more likely to disagree, compared with men (Appendix Table A.12).

As would be expected, among those working longer hours, higher proportions agreed with the statement, and fewer disagreed (Figure 10.1). However, even among those working full-time hours or higher, 16% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, and a further 26% were neutral. Only 59% of full-time workers agreed or strongly agreed they work enough hours to make a living (Figure 10.1, see also Table A.13).

It is also important to note that underemployment is affecting workers across the lifecycle. Figure 10.2 shows that substantial proportions in each age group do not agree that they work enough hours to make a living. Among those aged 20 or under, only 25% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, and 46% disagreed or strongly disagreed (30% were neutral). Among older people, there were still substantial groups who disagreed with the statement, for example among those in their early fifties, only 38% agreed (or strongly agreed) and almost as many (35%) disagreed or strongly disagreed they worked enough hours to make a living. In no age group did more than half of the sample agree with the statement, the highest proportion agreeing were those in their late 60s, where 48% agreed, although even in this group, over a quarter (27%) said they did not have enough hours to earn a living.

Data in Appendix Table A.14 confirms that agreement with the statement was much lower for casuals, only 20% of whom either agreed or strongly agreed they worked enough hours to make a living. Reflecting similar information by hours worked in the last fortnight contained in Figure 10.1, Table A.14 shows that among permanent full-time workers, only 57% agreed or strongly agreed they work enough hours to make a living.

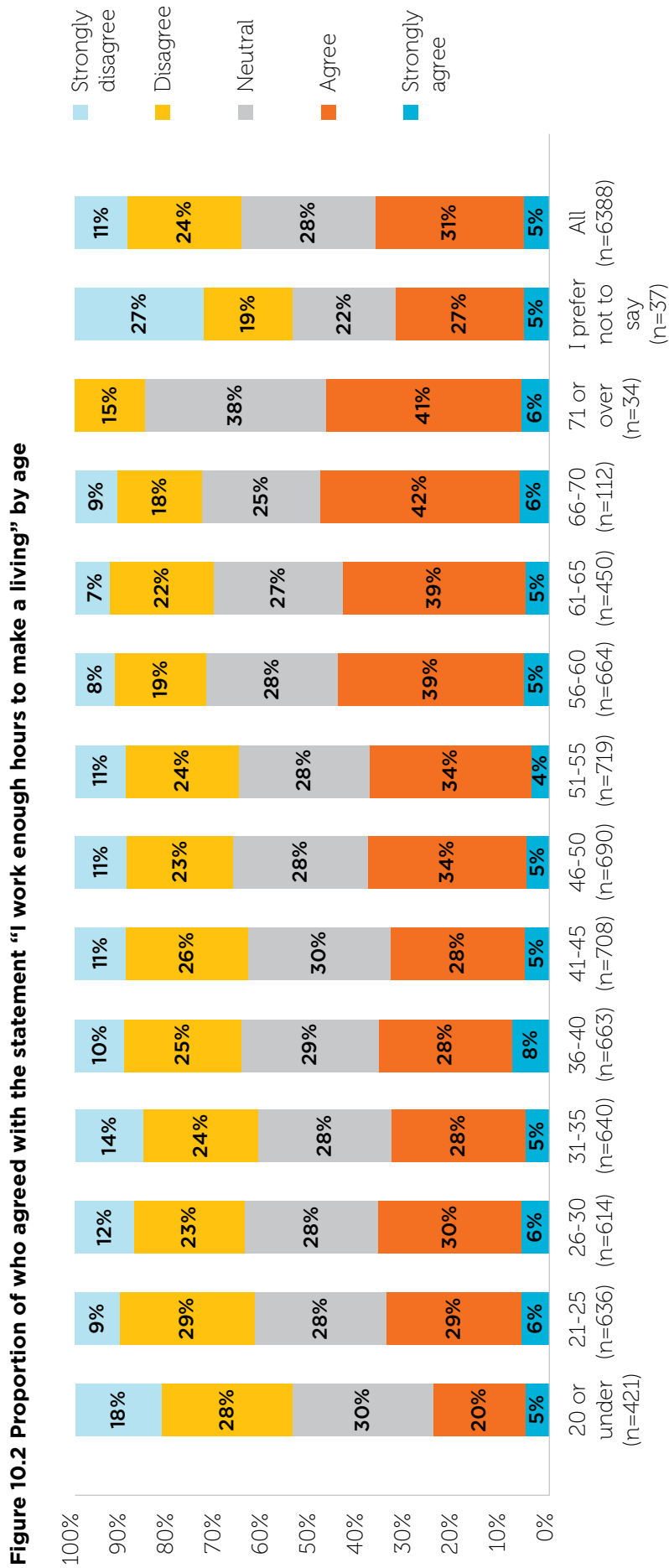
Figure 10.1 Proportion of who agreed with the statement “I work enough hours to make a living” by hours worked in the last fortnight



“I think the earnings for essential workers are still incredibly low, even though our work may not be considered as skilful... it can still be quite laborous, taxing mentally and just a dread a lot of the time. Essential workers are just not treated with enough respect and under-credited I feel.”

Female, young worker





Penalty rates

Low hourly rates make penalty rates particularly important to workers' financial security. For this reason, participants were asked how strongly they agreed with the statement "I rely on penalty rates to make a living". Half of participants (50%) agreed with the statement, but this was slightly higher among couple parents (54%) and among sole parents (57%) (Table A.16). Interestingly, while 48% of casuals agreed that they rely on penalty rates, this was the case for 53% of permanent part-time workers, and 50% of permanent full-time employees (see Appendix Table A.17).

Predictability of earnings

Two thirds (67%) agreed or strongly agreed that they know each week what their earnings will be, and 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table A.18). Casuals were most likely to disagree and least likely to agree (Table A.19).

Satisfaction with take home pay

Only 29% agreed or strongly agreed that they are satisfied with their take home pay, and this was lower among sole parents (23%). Substantial proportions disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. This was the case for 44% of those without a child under 18, 46% of couple parents and 56% of sole parents (see Table A. 20). By age, younger and older people are more satisfied with their pay, with pay satisfaction relatively low among those in their thirties forties and early fifties (see Figure 10.3).

Parents' earnings after tax and childcare costs

When parents with a child aged 12 or under were asked if they agreed with the statement "I turn down extra shifts because I won't earn much more after tax and childcare costs", around a third agreed, a third disagreed and a third were neutral. This was similar for both mothers and fathers, but the proportion agreeing was slightly higher for parents using a mix of formal and informal care arrangements (40%) compared with those using formal arrangements only (35%) or informal arrangements only (27%) (see Table A.22).



Figure 10.3 Proportion of who agreed with the statement “I am satisfied with my overall level of take-home pay” by age



10.2 Comments on pay

When asked if they had any brief comments about pay and earnings, a few respondents said their earnings were acceptable. However, the overwhelming majority commented on the unfairness of pay rates, and the difficulties they face attempting to live on a low income. Parents found pay levels particularly problematic given the cost of living, and childcare costs:

I'm a single mother that gets no child support and live week to week on my wages.

Sole mother of child with disability, permanent full-time

There are some days that I don't earn enough to cover the total cost I have to pay for my child to be in childcare.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

I feel like at my age I could be earning a slightly higher hourly rate...

If I didn't get evening shifts or weekend shifts where the rate is slightly higher, I would be struggling.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

"I'm not earning enough to afford childcare."

Partnered mother,
permanent part-time

Even full-time workers struggled:

It shouldn't be about working extra hours, it's about the hourly rate. 42hrs per week to struggle paying bills!

Sole father and carer of adult with disability, permanent full-time

Some parents sought to limit their hours of work to contain childcare costs:

I worked out if I worked an extra 2 days per week I would only be taking home an extra \$20 after daycare fees and taxes.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

It's not worth working and putting 2 children in daycare. I only take money home when I work while the kids are at school and not paying for before/after school care or vacation care.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

Others managed by reducing childcare use, and trying to work shifts where they did not require childcare, or would be paid penalty rates.

Average wage per hour \$26. Cost of a babysitter per hour \$25. If I need to hire a babysitter for an evening shift, by the time tax is taken out, I actually come out behind.

Sole mother of child with disability, casual

I don't like having to base my roster around penalty rate shifts to maximise my take home pay doing least hours so I don't miss out from my kids and home duties.

Partnered mother, elder carer, permanent part-time

"I work Sunday and Monday evenings so I can receive penalties this helps me be able to care for my mum and my children."

Partnered mother, elder carer,
permanent part-time

Problematically, low pay among mothers reinforced their dependency on partners. Many mothers recognised that they could only get by because they were 'lucky' their husbands earn better money in other industries. This makes them very vulnerable if their circumstances change and they needed to live without their partner's income:

It's shameful what retail workers earn. My friend works the same hours as me in a government department with no qualifications and earns 3 times what I do. I could never survive if my husband wasn't a tradesman.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Without my husband's employment, we simply would not survive. I work my shifts and caring for the kids around his career because of this.

Partnered mother, casual

Am lucky to have a partner on a good income. But if that was to change we wouldn't be able to even buy groceries etc for the week.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

"I rely on my partner to be able to make ends meet, of something happened to him, I and my children would be in dire straits."

Partnered mother, elder carer,
permanent part-time

Some comments related to the way wages were too low, given the nature, complexity and impact of the work, and the hours demanded.

It's not enough for the hours we do and the issues we have to deal with, e.g. threatening situations, customers who abuse us, unrealistic expectations, unrealistic workloads.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent full-time

We need to have the pay rises we are promised. We also should be paid a better rate for what we have to do, as well as put up with from customer, and the many different hours and days of trade.

Partnered mother, casual

Pay rates are too low for essential workers. Hazard penalties should apply to certain work sites.

Partnered father, permanent part-time

I think we earn a low wage for the work we do. I push myself daily at work to then come home with no energy for my children.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

"For what we deal with it isn't enough. And losing out on penalties is wrong as we are giving our time away from families."

Sole mother, permanent part-time

Some comments focused on variation in pay:

I do not know what my wage will be weekly. [My employer has] messed up wages so much I don't know what the rates are anymore.

Sole mother, casual

I am a casual and my hours and pay vary. Most of the time I have reasonable hours and pay, but at times my hours can drop by as much as two thirds. It's very unsettling.

Partnered mother, casual

Another strong theme related to equal earnings, both horizontal equity (between groups of workers at a similar level) and vertical equity (between groups at different levels). Horizontal equity issues related to different pay levels between different departments, or for workers doing different tasks:

We all seem to have different contracts and earning different amounts for doing the same job, men in electrical get bonus money and earning more than us women.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

Some workers are rostered to do easy jobs everyday while others are required to do hard jobs every day, but they paid same.

Partnered father, elder carer, permanent part-time

Vertical equity issues related to pay for supervisors, which was considered low:

I think supervisors on shift should receive more than an extra \$0.50 an hour for what they are expected to do. The amount of times I have seen supervisors work understaffed, go without breaks, have no security and deal with customer abuse.

Partnered mother, permanent full-time

To supervise a whole customer service department we get approximately \$7 IF we do it for an entire day. It's not worth the stress or the abuse from both customers and management.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

After being a department manager and stepping back voluntarily, I've noticed that 2ICs²¹ don't get paid enough for what they do compared to department manager salaries.

Partnered father of child with disability, permanent full-time

10.3 Perceptions of retirement savings

The survey asked how strongly workers agreed or disagreed with the statement "I expect to have enough superannuation when I retire". While a quarter were unsure (26%) around half (51%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and only 23% agreed. As shown in Table 10.1, mothers had particularly low expectations of their retirement savings, being least likely to agree with the statement (18%) and most likely to disagree (57%). Fathers were also less likely to agree and more likely to disagree they would have sufficient superannuation, compared with other men.

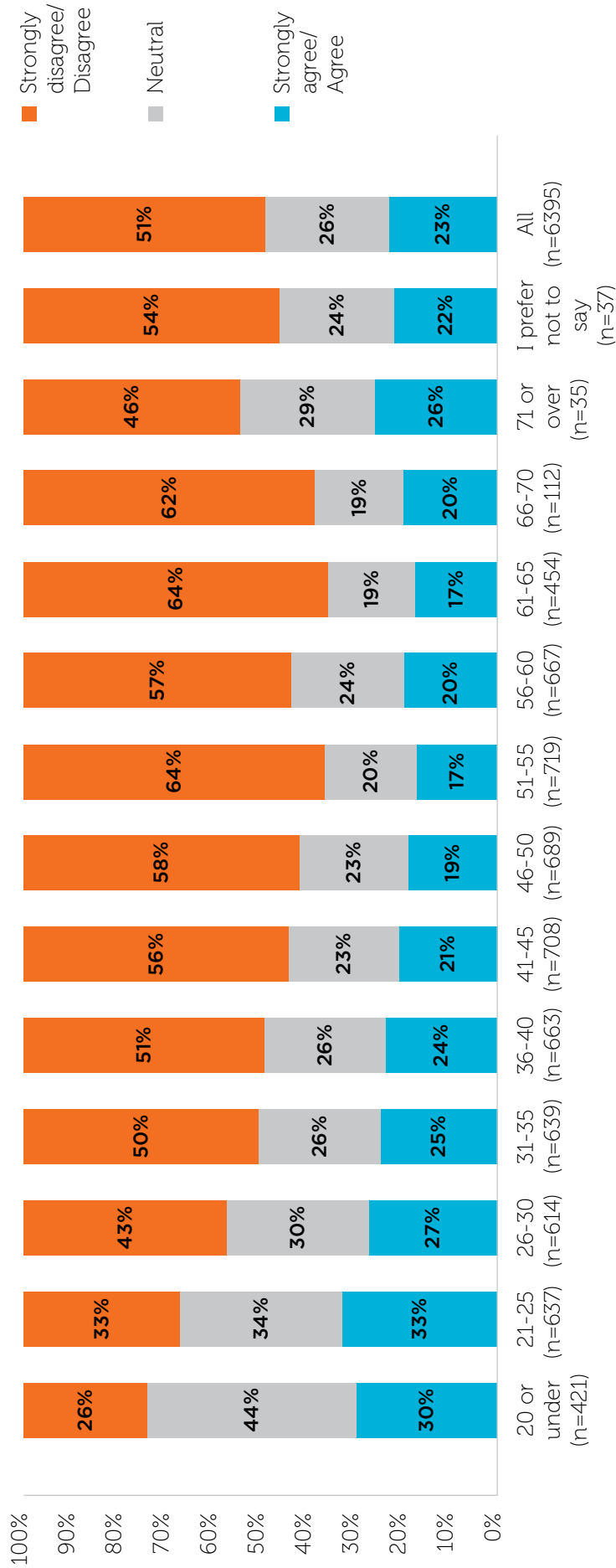
Table 10.1 Whether participants agreed or disagreed with the statement "I expect to have enough superannuation when I retire"

	Agree / Strongly agree		Neutral		Disagree / Strongly disagree		All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Mother with child under 18	277	18%	392	26%	868	57%	1537	100%
Female - no children under 18	666	22%	773	25%	1628	53%	3067	100%
Father with child under 18	96	25%	101	27%	181	48%	378	100%
Male - no children under 18	408	30%	380	28%	557	41%	1345	100%
Other / Missing	8	15%	20	37%	26	48%	54	100%
Total	1455	23%	1666	26%	3260	51%	6381	100%

Figure 10.2 provides a breakdown by age. This shows that while many workers are unsure about the likely adequacy of their retirement savings in their twenties, this gives rise to low expectations during workers' thirties and beyond, with the clear majority of workers disagreeing with the statement in their fifties and early sixties, and only a fifth or fewer agreeing.

²¹ 2nd in command

**Figure 10.4 Whether participants in each age group agreed or disagreed with the statement
“I expect to have enough superannuation when I retire”**



Conclusion: Improving work & care

Conclusion: Improving work and care

This report attests to the valuable contributions SDA members make through the unpaid care they provide in their families and communities, in addition to the contributions they make through their paid employment. SDA members perform unpaid care work across the lifecourse, as parents, grandparents, siblings and others caring for children, and as carers for vulnerable adults. Often they provide care in complex circumstances, as sole parents, young carers and carers for children with disability. As care is more often performed by women, poor recognition and support for care by governments and employers is disproportionately impacting on women's working time, earnings and retirement savings, and undermining prospects for gender equality.

Participants' perspectives attest to industrial relations settings which have shifted the balance too far in favour of employers. Employers offer rosters and pay rates which are shaped almost completely by agendas of cost minimisation and profit, and regularly change these to meet their needs. This constrains employees' ability to achieve stability in their work and caring lives, and limits children's rights to access early education and to fully participate in social and community life. As a result of employment precarity, unpredictable hours, and poor support for workers' unpaid care responsibilities, many families find managing work and care particularly difficult. Often, care is shifted to or shared with other family members, often older women such as grandmothers, but this is not possible nor desirable for all. SDA members lack genuine choice about their work and family lives. Often their ability to care is affected over long periods of time, because while retail and fast food employment has often been considered temporary and transient, this data shows many workers are employed long-term in these industries. Nearly all the workers who participated in the survey had worked for their employers for several years, and most for more than 5 years, showing long-term commitment. Even these committed, long-term workers, are being let down, by employers and by the formal childcare system.

Through the survey, participants provided numerous comments attesting to difficult experiences of managing the working time arrangements which are required by employers but which do not account for their needs, or those of their children. Many also described experiences of disrespect in their workplaces, relating to their care responsibilities. Particular challenges include variable, unpredictable hours and earnings. While these may be expected among people employed on a casual basis, many permanently employed workers also faced difficulties with their rostering. Even among full-time workers, many found they did not work enough hours to make a living.

These challenges exacerbated difficulties for parents and carers, especially for sole parents and those caring for people with complex needs. Too few have a meaningful say about the days they work, or the times that suit them. They feel their caring commitments are not understood or respected, and fear being penalised if they turn shifts down. Yet employees are clear about what works at work for themselves and their families: decent pay, job security, predictable shifts, control over work times, shifts of reasonable length, choices about work days, and ability to make schedule adjustments without fear of repercussions.

For employers, policy makers and regulators, the findings serve as a reminder that as well as contributing to the economy and society through their paid work, employees make essential and valuable contributions of unpaid care work, which families and communities depend on, and which paid work must be organised to support. While large companies in Australia are required to have and report on their gender equality policies, such as flexible working arrangements and supports for workers with family responsibilities, our findings show these policies are not delivering benefits to low-paid workers and their families. The retail sector should be recognised for providing a diverse array of employment opportunities to a large part of the population, including people with complex lives and diverse sets of needs. However, the working arrangements on offer should support not exacerbate the challenges faced by workers and families, and should impact positively on health and wellbeing, without constraining labour supply. Improving workers' ability to co-ordinate their work and family lives, through more stable shift times, job security, better pay and progression, and improved communication, will help secure and stabilize a quality workforce.

Those in permanent employment appeared better off on some measures which suggests that addressing the high rates of casualization will help improve work and care outcomes in retail, fast food and warehousing, and in other industries. However, in itself, such action is unlikely to be sufficient to address the problems of work and care. Many of the permanently employed workers who participated in the study also experienced poor working conditions which impeded their ability to make genuine choices about their caring lives. These included work times which are too unpredictable and wages which are too low to afford formal child care. Even among older workers, managers, and those working full-time, many faced difficulties making a living and paying for childcare. Many reported they needed additional or weekend hours with penalty rates to make ends meet, which further exacerbated difficulties finding time for care, and paying for formal services.

Changing childcare

Parents in the survey reported that formal childcare was often difficult to use. They commonly described ECEC as unaffordable, but often the challenges they face with cost relate to structural issues in the way ECEC is funded and provided. For example, if a child only attends long day care for 3 hours but needs to pay for a full day. Families also struggled to find ECEC that was available during the times they work, starting early, finishing late, on weekends and public holidays.

Being unable to use formal child care is affecting parent's wellbeing and limiting their employment opportunities. They described missing out on work hours and work opportunities because of inadequate access to ECEC. Parents with children with disability found this especially challenging. Parents reported that informal arrangements, and especially tag-team parenting, often put strain on family relationships. Research shows that such arrangements can affect family cohesion, with negative consequences for relationships between parents, and between parents and children, and on the wellbeing of children²². This is especially the case for more disadvantaged families, including many SDA members.

In addition, children and other family members are bearing the cost of their parents' lack of support from their employers and ECEC services. Informal carers upon whom retail workers depend on for support, most often grandmothers, sacrifice time and their own employment and earnings to support the next generation to manage their difficult work schedules. Working time arrangements, combined with low pay and rostering arrangements which are out of step with the routines of children and families, mean that many children are missing out on the benefits of extra-curricular activities, and on quality early education to prepare them for school, with long-term implications for their futures²³. Children's life chances should not suffer because of their parents' employment, and employers must ensure the arrangements they offer do not contribute to intergenerational disadvantage.

The way care is funded and charged should change to make it more accessible and affordable. Such changes should begin with access to early education in the year before school before expanding access to other ECEC services. In doing so, ensuring ECEC is of a high quality should be paramount. This could include:

- The provision of supply side funding by the Australian Government to ensure widespread availability of flexible ECEC places for children of workers with non-standard hours and unpredictable shifts. The benefits of such an approach to filling a gap in the childcare market were demonstrated by the provision of free childcare during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Greater availability of more adaptable childcare options such as occasional care and family day care, with incentives and supports for providers and educators to make care available to workers with non-standard, changeable hours.
- Expanding access to early education. Currently early education in family day care is not recognised. Innovative approaches are needed to ensure children who only attend family day care are also able to engage in a preschool program, whether provided by an appropriately trained family day care educator, or by linking them to a standalone preschool.
- Previous attempts to develop flexible ECEC floundered²⁴. Further research is needed to better understand how the ECEC system can better meet the needs of workers like SDA members.
- Improved access and affordability of outside school hours care, including raising the eligibility age of the Child Care Subsidy and outside school hours care into the teen years so that young people can have safe places to be cared for while their parents work. This is a particular need for some young people with disabilities.
- Provide better access and affordability of vacation care, especially for children who use no other form of care during term time.
- Provide supports to ensure older children can engage in extra-curricula activities outside of school time, even when these clash with their parents' employment.
- Ultimately, providing a free place for every child, regardless of the circumstances of their parents, would address many of the challenges SDA members face, while also simplifying the system for families, and addressing children's right to early education.

Changing industrial relations settings and employer practices

We have seen through the data and perspectives of employees that industrial relations settings and employer practices create significant barriers for workers to manage working time arrangements which is resulting in unpredictable hours and earnings, not only for casual employees but also for those employed on a permanent basis, those working full-time, and those who have shown long term commitment to their employer. Problems are particularly acute for workers with caring responsibilities, including parents. Significant changes are needed to industrial relations settings, to enable workers to manage and control their hours, and rebalance arrangements in ways that provide better protections and rights for workers, particularly those with caring responsibilities. This should include:

- Changes to industrial relations settings and employer practices to reduce casualisation and improve security of employment, working time, and incomes.
- Changes to National Employment Standards and Awards to improve rostering protections for permanent and casual workers, to ensure they have levels of certainty and predictability of working hours and income needed to organise their care responsibilities and other aspects of their lives.
- Improve access and eligibility for unpaid and paid parental leave for all workers, including casuals, supported by further research about experiences of utilising leave, and why some eligible workers appear not to use it.
- Assessing the extent to which the Fair Work Commission, as Australia's employment regulator, is able to proactively tackle gender inequality across all of its functions.
- The Fair Work Commission should monitor and regulate the nature and impact of flexible working arrangements, and access to unpaid as well as paid parental leave. Currently, the Fair Work Act prohibits the Commission from dealing with disputes in these areas, which disproportionately impacts on carers and women. The exclusions in the Fair Work Act preventing employees from appealing to the Commission when refused a request to extend unpaid parental leave beyond 12 months or when refused a request for flexible working arrangements, should be removed.
- Ensuring working time and scheduling arrangements are consistent with the Fair Work Act's object of assisting employees to balance work and family.
- Addressing the design of Awards and the historic gender-based undervaluation of work in retail and fast-food, including compressed classification structures that reinforce low pay rates.
- Ensuring the full range of industrial rights and protections are accessible for grandparents providing care to grandchildren.

Promoting income security

Survey analysis, and comments left by SDA members, indicate that despite their paid employment, many require government income support to supplement their low pay and inadequate hours, resulting both from the need to care and from the failure of industrial relations settings to ensure a living wage. Given levels of financial stress demonstrated from the survey responses, wages and government payments are not currently providing adequate support for low-income workers and their families. Policy makers should review and consider improvements to the full range of payments and supports available to workers and their families. Eligibility and effective marginal tax rates should be considered, with the interactions between low paid work and the full mix of supports in scope, including the Child Care Subsidy; Family Tax Benefits, and all pensions and allowances accessible to parents and others with care responsibilities.

Policy failure costs families

Industrial relations policies, policies within workplaces and in ECEC are converging in ways that are failing families. This was most evident when parents reported in the survey that the most effective solutions for managing work and care were developed at home, not at work or with child care services. Instead, parents described care that was patched together with grandparents, friends, siblings and through tag-team parenting arrangements. Neither employers nor the childcare system offered arrangements or supports to families that families found useful. This constitutes policy failure, evident in that working parents must manage their care commitments privately, so they can avoid or reduce their engagement with systems which cater poorly to their needs.

Moreover, lack of genuine choice about work and care arrangements exacts a heavy toll on workers including stress, missing work opportunities, worrying about children, and additional unpaid work to coordinate an ever-changing patchwork of work and care arrangements. The negative consequences of the enormous challenges that SDA members face when managing care have flow-on effects for their children. In the present, children's family relationships are negatively affected, with implications for family cohesion. This, in turn, threatens their own ability to create cohesive families when they grow up. Plus, their educational and future employment opportunities are potentially limited by their reduced capacity to engage in early education and extra-curricular activities. Policy reforms are urgently needed: failure to intervene will allow disadvantage to be transferred intergenerationally from SDA members to their children.

²² Li, J., Johnson, S., Han, W., Andrews, S., Kendall, G., Strazdins, L., and Dockery, A.M., 2012, Parents' nonstandard work and child wellbeing: A critical review of the existing literature, CLMRDISCUSSION PAPER SERIES 2012/02, Centre for Labour Market Research, Curtin University.

²³ Laureau, A., 2011, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. 2nd ed., University of California Press.

²⁴ Baxter, J. A., Hand, K., & Sweid, R. (2016). Flexible child care and Australian parents' work and care decision-making (Research Report No. 37). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Appendix

Appendix: Australia's early education and care system²⁵

Australian early education and care is delivered through a mixed market made up of for profit, not-for-profit and government providers. In the years before school, children may attend:

Long day care - Centre-based care for children from birth to school age. Long day care typically operates for 10 to 12 hours per day, for example between 7.00am and 6.00pm. Some long day care centres may also provide preschool and kindergarten services (i.e. a preschool program).

Family day care - Services providing small group early childhood education and care services for children in the home environment of a registered educator. Family day care is primarily aimed at 0–5 year olds, but primary school children may also attend. Staff work in partnership with service management and coordination unit staff who oversee quality.

Occasional care - Services usually provided at a centre on an hourly or sessional basis for short periods or at irregular intervals for parents who need time to attend appointments, take care of personal matters, undertake casual and part-time employment, study or have temporary respite from full-time parenting.

Preschool or kindergarten - Centre-based services for children in the years before school, usually 3 and 4 year olds. Kindergarten's typically offer shorter hours more like school opening hours. Preschools are operated by state governments in some jurisdictions, or at least funded by state/territory governments. In some states or territories, preschool is free, and it is usually low cost.

For primary school aged children, **Out Of School Hours (OOSH)** care offered before or after school care during vacations care provide options outside of school hours.

Children attending any of these services, except usually preschool/kindergarten, are eligible for the Australian Government's Child Care Subsidy (CCS).

Child Care Subsidy

The Australian Government funds ECEC through the provision of fee subsidies for families. Some limited funded is provided directly to services where the market is deemed unable to operate successfully to provide adequate services, typically in rural locations.

The Child Care Subsidy was introduced in 2018 as part of a package of reforms intending to make a "simpler, more affordable, more accessible and more flexible early education and child care system".²⁶ Despite this aim, the CCS is complex. The rates paid to families are determined by:

- An income test
- An activity test
- The type of ECEC service their child uses

The hourly rate of the CCS is different for long day care, family day care and out of school hours care.

Income test

CCS is available to children from birth to the end of primary school. It pays up to 85% of the cost of ECEC, up to a cap, so families usually pay some costs in addition to the CCS. The income test determines what percentage of the fees a child is eligible for, with the highest percentage paid to families on the lowest incomes, decreasing to 0% for families with very high incomes. Rates taper for families as follows:

Those with a combined family income of:

- \$69,390 or less receive 85% of service costs
- Above \$69,390 and below \$174,390 receive a gradually tapering percentage of between 85% and 50%
- Equal to or above \$174,390 and below \$253,680 receive 50%
- Equal to or above \$253,680 and below \$343,680 receive a gradually tapering percentage of between 50% and 20%
- Equal to or above \$343,680 and below \$353,680 receive 20%
- Equal to or above \$353,680 receive 0%

Families are required to estimate in advance how much they are likely to earn, which can be difficult for people relying on unpredictable hours of paid employment. At the end of the financial year, eligibility is reassessed using families' actual income. If they miscalculated, they may need to pay back any CCS which they received beyond their entitlement. In recognition of the challenges this arrangement poses, Centrelink retains 5% of families' CCS which gives a buffer when their annual income is reconciled. But this may not be sufficient for families with very variable incomes.

Families in exceptionally difficult circumstances may be eligible for Additional Child Care Subsidy which can pay a higher rate.

Activity Test

The Activity Test introduced a stronger connection between employment and eligibility for government support with ECEC fees. It makes the number of hours of CCS a family can receive each fortnight dependent on the number of hours they spend in employment or another recognised activity. The Activity Test applies to the parent with the lowest level of activity as follows:

- Up to 8 hours of activity per fortnight = 0 hours of CCS (Unless the family earns \$69,390 or less, in which case they may be eligible for 24 hours of CCS or 36 hours if the child is in the year before school.)
- 8-16 hours of activity per fortnight = 36 hours of CCS
- Over 16 to 48 hours of activity per fortnight = 72 hours of CCS
- More than 48 hours of activity per fortnight = 100 hours of CCS

Recognised activities include paid employment, job search, voluntary work and study, as well as travel time.

The Activity Test rules interact with usual practice in long day care services in ways that complicate the amount of CCS families receive. Long day care services typically charge families for a full day of care, regardless of how much of that day a child actually attends. A full day is usually between 10 and 12 hours long.

This means that a family using 12 hour day long day care, who is eligible for 36 hours of CCS can only receive 3 days of subsidised care per fortnight. But, long day care services usually like families to book the same number of days each week. So this family would have to enrol their child for just 1 day per week, and miss out on a day of CCS. Or, enrol their child in 2 days per week, and pay full fees without subsidy for one of those days.

Families working full-time and booking 5 days per week of long day care, in a service that charges for 11 or 12 hour days, exceed their 100 hour CCS maximum limit for the fortnight, reaching 110 or 120 hours. They would need to pay full fees for these additional hours. Note, however, that the Coalition Government announced plans to remove this upper cap on hours in the 2021-22 Budget.

People working unpredictable hours are required to estimate their fortnightly hours for a three month period. They are eligible for CCS each fortnight at the level of their highest fortnightly estimate. So, for example, someone who works 45 hours in some fortnights, but zero hours in other fortnights, would be entitled to 72 hours of CCS each fortnight, regardless of whether or not in that particular fortnight they work 72 hours.

Changes to their hours each fortnight will not affect their CCS entitlement so long as they meet their 3 monthly estimate. CCS recipients are not required to present evidence of activity, but Centrelink may do a random spot check.

²⁵ Further detail is available from the *Guide to Social Policy Law, Family Assistance Guide*, Law <https://guides.dss.gov.au/family-assistance-guide>

²⁶ Porter, C., 2016, Second reading speech on the Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Jobs for Families Child Care Package) Bill 2016, Minister for Social Services, Australian Parliament, Canberra.

²⁷ Guide to Social Policy Law, Family Assistance Guide, Section 3.5, Income levels for the 2020-2021 financial year.

Appendix: Supplementary tables

Appendix: Supplementary tables

Table A.1 Age profile of respondents

	n	%
20 or under	421	7
21 to 25	639	10
26 to 30	624	10
31 to 35	644	10
36 to 40	670	10
41 to 45	716	11
46 to 50	698	11
51 to 55	732	11
56 to 60	676	10
61 to 65	460	7
66 to 70	114	2
71 or over	36	1
I prefer not to say	39	1
All	6469	100

Table A.2 Fortnightly hours of work among men and women in supervisory and non-supervisory roles

		Less than 20 hours in the last fortnight	20 to <40 hours in the last fortnight	40 to <60 hours in the last fortnight	60 to <76 hours in the last fortnight	76 hours or more in the last fortnight	Total
Supervisory role (e.g. store, department, line or duty manager or supervisor)	Men (n=408)	3%	11%	15%	16%	55%	100%
	Women (n=1267)	4%	17%	21%	20%	39%	100%
	Other (n=23)	0%	30%	26%	9%	35%	100%
	All supervisors (n=1698)	4%	16%	20%	19%	43%	100%
Non-supervisory role	Men (n=1330)	10%	25%	20%	17%	28%	100%
	Women (n=3375)	12%	29%	26%	19%	14%	100%
	Other (n=46)	17%	39%	17%	9%	17%	100%
	All non-supervisors (n=4751)	12%	28%	24%	19%	18%	100%
All	Men (n=1738)	9%	22%	19%	17%	34%	100%
	Women (n=4642)	10%	26%	24%	19%	21%	100%
	Other (n=69)	12%	36%	20%	9%	23%	100%
	All (n=6449)	10%	25%	23%	19%	24%	100%

Table A.3 Hours worked in the last fortnight by age

	Less than 20 hours in the last fortnight		20 to <40 hours in the last fortnight		40 to <60 hours in the last fortnight		60 to <76 hours in the last fortnight		76 hours or more in the last fortnight		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
20 or under	138	33%	152	36%	80	19%	35	8%	16	4%	421	100%
21 to 25	110	17%	192	30%	155	24%	80	13%	102	16%	639	100%
26 to 30	53	9%	159	26%	128	21%	121	19%	163	26%	624	100%
31 to 35	58	9%	163	25%	143	22%	110	17%	170	26%	644	100%
36 to 40	50	8%	134	20%	158	24%	126	19%	202	30%	670	100%
41 to 45	41	6%	171	24%	162	23%	151	21%	191	27%	716	100%
46 to 50	33	5%	141	20%	166	24%	156	22%	202	29%	698	100%
51 to 55	45	6%	157	21%	163	22%	165	23%	202	28%	732	100%
56 to 60	41	6%	161	24%	163	24%	140	21%	171	25%	676	100%
61 to 65	24	5%	126	27%	104	23%	87	19%	119	26%	460	100%
66 to 70	16	14%	28	25%	37	33%	13	11%	20	18%	114	100%
71 or over	3	8%	13	36%	10	28%	5	14%	5	14%	36	100%
I prefer not to say	3	8%	15	39%	7	18%	7	18%	7	18%	39	100%
Total	615	10%	1612	25%	1476	23%	1196	19%	1570	24%	6469	100%

Table A.4 Responses to the question “Do you work the same shifts each week?” by contract type

	Casual		Permanent part-time		Permanent full-time		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes, all of the time	66	7%	1436	41%	991	52%	2493	39%
Most of the time	280	29%	1427	41%	668	35%	2375	38%
Some of the time	246	26%	365	11%	157	8%	768	12%
A little of the time	148	16%	126	4%	42	2%	316	5%
None of the time	211	22%	110	3%	65	3%	386	6%
Missing	1	0%	1	0%	1	0%	3	0%
Total	952	100%	3465	100%	1924	100%	6341	100%

Table A.5 Agreement with the statement “Because of my caring responsibilities, I have to turn down work activities or opportunities” by parenting status

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Not parenting a child <18	228	5%	579	13%	1398	31%	1349	30%	909	20%	4463	100%
Couple parent with child <18	258	18%	462	32%	367	25%	297	20%	77	5%	1461	100%
Sole parent with child <18	98	21%	151	32%	112	24%	87	18%	24	5%	472	100%
All	584	9%	1192	19%	1877	29%	1733	27%	1010	16%	6396	100%

Table A.6 Parents' use of formal and informal care arrangements by age of youngest child and work hours

		Less than 20 hours in the last fortnight	20 to <40 hours in the last fortnight	40 to <60 hours in the last fortnight	60 to <76 hours in the last fortnight	76 hours or more in the last fortnight	Total
Youngest child aged 0 to 2 (n=372)	Formal care only (n=37)	9%	7%	11%	13%	12%	10%
	Informal care only (n=139)	62%	30%	33%	33%	33%	37%
	Both formal and informal care (n=196)	29%	63%	56%	54%	56%	53%
Youngest child aged 3 to 5 (n=331)	Formal care only (n=54)	27%	16%	16%	13%	17%	16%
	Informal care only (n=65)	27%	16%	24%	19%	17%	20%
	Both formal and informal care (n=212)	47%	69%	60%	68%	67%	64%
Youngest child aged 6 to 12 (n=705)	Formal care only (n=38)	19%	4%	3%	6%	5%	5%
	Informal care only (n=482)	61%	78%	74%	58%	64%	68%
	Both formal and informal care (n=185)	19%	18%	23%	36%	31%	26%
All (n=1408)	Formal care only (n=129)	16%	7%	8%	9%	10%	9%
	Informal care only (n=686)	54%	52%	53%	43%	45%	49%
	Both formal and informal care (n=593)	31%	41%	39%	48%	46%	42%

Table A.7 Agreement with the statement “The way I am rostered to work impacts on my mental health” by gender and parenting status

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Mother with child under 18	210	14%	338	22%	451	30%	397	26%	131	9%	1527	100%
Father with child under 18	60	16%	91	25%	125	34%	62	17%	34	9%	372	100%
Female - no children under 18	383	13%	606	20%	938	31%	789	26%	325	11%	3041	100%
Male - no children under 18	209	16%	285	21%	413	31%	285	21%	151	11%	1343	100%
Other / unknown	12	22%	13	24%	16	30%	8	15%	5	9%	54	100%
All	874	14%	1333	21%	1943	31%	1541	24%	646	10%	6337	100%

Table A.8 Agreement with the statement “I worry about what goes on with my children while I’m working” by age of youngest child

	Youngest child aged 0 to 2		Youngest child aged 3 to 5		Youngest child aged 6 to 12		Youngest child aged 13 to 17		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Strongly agree	84	31%	79	32%	198	35%	114	26%	475	31%
Agree	100	37%	88	36%	197	34%	135	30%	520	34%
Neutral	41	15%	47	19%	78	14%	99	22%	265	17%
Disagree	36	13%	26	11%	81	14%	78	18%	221	14%
Strongly disagree	9	3%	6	2%	18	3%	20	5%	53	4%
Total	270	100%	246	100%	572	100%	446	100%	1534	100%

Table A.9 Agreement with the statement “My work hours make it hard for my children to go to extra activities, e.g. swimming, sport and music” by how often they work the same shifts each week

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Works the same shifts each week												
All of the time	124	23%	114	21%	135	25%	125	23%	45	8%	543	100%
Most of the time	138	26%	159	30%	125	24%	89	17%	18	3%	529	100%
Some of the time	63	38%	50	30%	33	20%	18	11%	3	2%	167	100%
A little of the time	14	19%	31	43%	11	15%	13	18%	4	6%	73	100%
None of the time	37	50%	13	18%	14	19%	5	7%	5	7%	74	100%
Total	376	27%	367	27%	318	23%	250	18%	75	5%	1386	100%

Table A.10 Household income (after tax) by parenting status

	Not parenting a child <18		Couple parent with child <18		Sole parent with child <18		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Less than \$500 per week	706	16%	78	5%	102	21%	886	14%
\$500-\$1000 per week	1803	40%	393	27%	280	59%	2476	38%
\$1000 to \$1500 per week	576	13%	380	26%	37	8%	993	15%
\$1500 to \$2000 per week	265	6%	261	18%	9	2%	535	8%
More than \$2000 per week	135	3%	71	5%	4	1%	210	3%
Don't know/prefer not to say	1036	23%	288	20%	45	9%	1369	21%
Total	4521	100%	1471	100%	477	100%	6469	100%

Table A.11 Agreement with the statement “I work enough hours to make a living” by parenting status

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Not parenting a child <18	246	6%	1469	33%	1250	28%	1017	23%	477	11%	4459	100%
Couple parent with child <18	79	5%	429	29%	433	30%	367	25%	152	10%	1460	100%
Sole parent with child <18	19	4%	100	21%	127	27%	142	30%	81	17%	469	100%
Total	344	5%	1998	31%	1810	28%	1526	24%	710	11%	6388	100%

Table A.12 Agreement with the statement “I work enough hours to make a living” by gender

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Male	156	9%	598	35%	469	27%	330	19%	169	10%	1722	100%
Female	185	4%	1379	30%	1324	29%	1176	26%	534	12%	4598	100%
Other	3	4%	21	31%	17	25%	20	29%	7	10%	68	100%
Total	344	5%	1998	31%	1810	28%	1526	24%	710	11%	6388	100%

Table A.13 Agreement with the statement “I work enough hours to make a living” by fortnightly hours

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<20 hours in the last fortnight	18	3%	96	16%	123	20%	206	34%	160	27%	603	100%
20 to <40 hours in the last fortnight	57	4%	354	22%	481	30%	458	29%	240	15%	1590	100%
40 to <60 hours in the last fortnight	53	4%	394	27%	428	29%	413	28%	175	12%	1463	100%
60 to <76 hours in the last fortnight	52	4%	415	35%	378	32%	261	22%	74	6%	1180	100%
76 hours or more in the last fortnight	164	11%	739	48%	400	26%	188	12%	61	4%	1552	100%
Total	344	5%	1998	31%	1810	28%	1526	24%	710	11%	6388	100%

Table A.14 Agreement with the statement “I work enough hours to make a living” by contract type

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Casual	23	2%	173	18%	262	28%	294	31%	191	20%	943	100%
Permanent part-time	116	3%	898	26%	1000	29%	987	29%	429	13%	3430	100%
Permanent full-time	198	10%	894	47%	514	27%	225	12%	70	4%	1901	100%
Total	337	5%	1965	31%	1776	28%	1506	24%	690	11%	6274	100%

Table A.15 Agreement with the statement “I work enough hours to make a living” by age

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
20 or under	21	5%	82	20%	125	30%	116	28%	77	18%	421	100%
21 to 25	37	6%	182	29%	176	28%	182	29%	59	9%	636	100%
26 to 30	36	6%	185	30%	174	28%	143	23%	76	12%	614	100%
31 to 35	32	5%	181	28%	180	28%	155	24%	92	14%	640	100%
36 to 40	52	8%	187	28%	192	29%	163	25%	69	10%	663	100%
41 to 45	37	5%	200	28%	213	30%	182	26%	76	11%	708	100%
46 to 50	33	5%	231	34%	196	28%	155	23%	75	11%	690	100%
51 to 55	27	4%	245	34%	199	28%	171	24%	77	11%	719	100%
56 to 60	36	5%	260	39%	184	28%	128	19%	56	8%	664	100%
61 to 65	22	5%	174	39%	122	27%	99	22%	33	7%	450	100%
66 to 70	7	6%	47	42%	28	25%	20	18%	10	9%	112	100%
71 or over	2	6%	14	41%	13	38%	5	15%	0	0%	34	100%
I prefer not to say	2	5%	10	27%	8	22%	7	19%	10	27%	37	100%
Total	344	5%	1998	31%	1810	28%	1526	24%	710	11%	6388	100%

Table A.16 Agreement with the statement “I rely on penalty rates to make a living” by parenting status

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Not parenting a child <18	991	22%	1154	26%	1131	25%	888	20%	292	7%	4456	100%
Couple parent with child <18	372	26%	400	28%	343	24%	273	19%	68	5%	1456	100%
Sole parent with child <18	150	32%	119	25%	93	20%	79	17%	27	6%	468	100%
Total	1513	24%	1673	26%	1567	25%	1240	19%	387	6%	6380	100%

Table A.17 Agreement with the statement “I rely on penalty rates to make a living” by contract type

	Casual		Permanent part-time		Permanent full-time		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Strongly agree	171	18%	867	25%	454	24%	1492	24%
Agree	283	30%	933	27%	421	22%	1637	26%
Neutral	265	28%	805	24%	461	24%	1531	24%
Disagree	181	19%	644	19%	398	21%	1223	20%
Strongly disagree	40	4%	177	5%	165	9%	382	6%
Total	940	100%	3426	100%	1899	100%	6265	100%

Table A.18 Agreement with the statement “I know each week what my earnings will be” by parenting status

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Not parenting a child <18	618	14%	2375	53%	719	16%	545	12%	211	5%	4468	100%
Couple parent with child <18	226	16%	779	53%	206	14%	188	13%	62	4%	1461	100%
Sole parent with child <18	57	12%	234	50%	70	15%	74	16%	35	7%	470	100%
Total	901	14%	3388	53%	995	16%	807	13%	308	5%	6399	100%

Table A.19 Agreement with the statement “I know each week what my earnings will be” by contract type

	Casual		Permanent part-time		Permanent full-time		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Strongly agree	45	5%	433	13%	409	22%	887	14%
Agree	258	27%	1918	56%	1150	60%	3326	53%
Neutral	193	20%	573	17%	206	11%	972	16%
Disagree	288	30%	400	12%	106	6%	794	13%
Strongly disagree	162	17%	108	3%	32	2%	302	5%
Total	946	100%	3432	100%	1903	100%	6281	100%

Table A.20 Agreement with the statement “I am satisfied with my overall level of take-home pay” by parenting status

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Not parenting a child <18	196	4%	1162	26%	1154	26%	1309	29%	671	15%	4492	100%
Couple parent with child <18	48	3%	366	25%	376	26%	464	32%	211	14%	1465	100%
Sole parent with child <18	18	4%	89	19%	102	22%	174	37%	89	19%	472	100%
Total	262	4%	1617	25%	1632	25%	1947	30%	971	15%	6429	100%

Table A.21 Agreement with the statement “I am satisfied with my overall level of take-home pay” by contract type

	Casual		Permanent part-time		Permanent full-time		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Strongly agree	59	6%	117	3%	82	4%	258	4%
Agree	343	36%	808	23%	446	23%	1597	25%
Neutral	280	30%	899	26%	416	22%	1595	25%
Disagree	187	20%	1103	32%	620	32%	1910	30%
Strongly disagree	81	9%	520	15%	350	18%	951	15%
Total	950	100%	3447	100%	1914	100%	6311	100%

Table A.22 Agreement with the statement “I turn down extra shifts because I won’t earn much more after tax and childcare costs” parents with a child aged 12 or under by care use

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Formal care only	21	17%	23	18%	41	32%	30	24%	12	9%	127	100%
Informal care only	68	10%	113	17%	223	33%	192	28%	80	12%	676	100%
Both formal and informal care	84	14%	152	26%	176	30%	138	23%	39	7%	589	100%
Total	173	12%	288	21%	440	32%	360	26%	131	9%	1392	100%

