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Paid work & parenting: Charting a new course for Australian families

by

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Key findings in a page

This paper considers one of the key transitions in the life cycle: that involved with the birth and rearing of children. It is now clear that many people are dissatisfied with the balance in their work and parenting lives, and the situation is deteriorating. To date work and family policy has focussed on ad hoc initiatives that are based on the 'best practice' model of workplace reform. Congratulating a handful of good, usually large, employers and exhorting others to follow has failed to deliver any widespread positive change for workers. Problems in work and parenting require responses that are systemic.

A major source of the problem is the 'enterprise as island' mindset – the idea that any change is up to the enterprise. With apologies to John Donne: no enterprise is an island. Wider economic and political conditions can profoundly constrain and shape enterprise behaviour. Wider social conditions, especially those affecting household resources, determine how people divide their time between work and caring.

Our key finding is that new standards and support structures are needed to expand the range of choices available to individuals and households. The key initiatives required are:

- a comprehensive system of maternity and paternity leave paid by government but financed, at least in part, by employers
- a comprehensive, quality child care system in which issues of quality and access are predominant and not compromised by a need to maximise profit
- employee choice rostering arrangements buttressed by award, and if necessary, legislative specification of rights and obligations to give individuals greater capacity to fit work around their family lives
- a new deal for part-time workers, to improve the quality of their jobs and ensure access to part-time work for parents who need it
- experimentating with new support structures at neighbourhood level to help provide assistance on a regular basis for all households with dependents
- development of new support arrangements for employers to help them meet new pressures to improve the quality of the work/parenting balance for their workers
- formation of a Cabinet sub-committee on work and family issues to oversee the better integration of initiatives that affect the quality of balance between work and family life
- better collection of data and monitoring of preferences and policy impacts.

In the 1980s and 1990s Australia rapidly restructured key institutions to meet the challenges of increased internationalisation of the economy. It is now clear that these changes came at a significant social cost. In the coming decade Australia must introduce positive changes in the social realm. This is not simply to improve the quality of life for ordinary Australians – important though this objective is. It is also vital to ensure that one of the key underpinnings of our society and economy (ie the family) flourishes and is not treated as something which should simply 'adjust' to remorseless 'market forces.'

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Executive summary

Navigating the intersection of work and family obligations is a major problem for growing numbers of Australian workers. This paper identifies new ways to help working parents. It is based on insights from the latest Australian and overseas research.

Previous studies into the changing nature of work have established that people's working lives can only be improved if social, labour market and industrial relations policy are better integrated to help them navigate key transitions over the life cycle. An account of this research and our policy suggestions was published in *Australia at Work: Just Managing?* (ACIRRT, 1999).

This paper explores one of the key transitions in life: that involved with the birth and rearing of children. This experience usually coincides with people establishing or consolidating their position in the labour market. As a result the transition stage of parenting is often fraught with tension. How workplaces and households manage this tension has a profound impact on the quality of life of individuals.

Our major finding is that the tension between the competing demands of work and family is not being well managed. More importantly, most research indicates that the situation is getting worse. A troubling finding is that the research indicates that public policies are at best ineffectual and at worst exacerbating the situation. The traditional wage earner model of work and the household (ie based on the 'Harvester' model of the family wage) has major limitations, especially for women and unskilled male workers.

Neo-liberal or economic rationalist prescriptions for greater reliance in market mechanisms and contractualism have not improved the situation. For many households it has made matters worse. The limitations of market inspired policies arise from the vision of the business enterprise conceived as a discrete and privileged social entity. Change is expected to come primarily from individual employer actions at the enterprise level; so that the main policy prescription becomes persuading/educating employers. Many problems, however, are common across whole industries and society. They cannot be solved on an enterprise by enterprise basis. The 'enterprise as island' mindset that currently dominates public policy is a major factor behind the deteriorating quality of work and family life. The intellectual rigidity of this way of thinking retards constructive debate on how public policy could work better to support increased choices for people who want a better balance between their work and parenting lives.

In thinking beyond the 'enterprise as island' mindset we have structured our analysis around two ideas. The first is the notion of a *parenting pathway*. Throughout much of the twentieth century many wage, social and economic policies were structured around the single family wage earner model of employment, based on the assumptions of the 1907 Harvester decision – what we call the 'traditional model.' In the late twentieth century the prevalence of this model as a policy and practice broke down. Its demise has not resulted in a myriad of unique work-family situations based on the new found freedom of individuals to strike individual employment contracts.

Instead a limited number of work-parenting pathways have emerged. We have identified four of them:

- ‘Traditional’ model (one full-time paid worker, one full-time carer)
- ‘Career couple’ model (two full time paid workers)
- ‘One plus’ model (one full time and one part-time paid worker)
- ‘Sole parent’ model.

Our analysis examines people’s preferences for and arrangements associated with these pathways.

The second idea used to assist thinking beyond the ‘enterprise as island’ mindset has been the notion of *parenting phase*. We define these as:

- the months immediately before and after birth
- the pre-school years (0-5)
- the primary school years (5-12)
- the teenage years.

The clear picture that emerges from the literature is that current policies do not work well. Support structures are under-developed, and even where they exist, are poorly integrated. For example, Australia has one of the worst maternity leave regimes in the developed and undeveloped world. Child care arrangements are still heavily reliant on informal networks in which grandparents are prominent. Even within the formal child care sector policy shifts, introduced by the Keating Government (and subsequently deepened by the Howard Government), have reduced the importance of quality and access issues as policy priorities. Enterprises are not delivering family-friendly options as a result of workplace bargaining. Finally, changes in working time arrangements have generally made it harder, not easier, for families to co-ordinate their activities. Taken together, they amount to a series of trends that mean there is far from optimal support for those attempting to achieve a satisfactory balance in their work and parenting lives.

Our analysis of overseas experience provides insights into the policy initiatives and regimes enhance choices for individuals and households. In the international comparative literature we did not find any references that reported market based initiatives (such as those that prevail in the US) delivered superior outcomes in terms of the general choices for workers or the quality of care for children. On the contrary, initiatives in a number of European countries, notably Denmark, Holland and Sweden, appear to be associated with superior outcomes in terms of worker choice and quality of child care – both in the home and beyond. Recent literature has, however, also highlighted that innovative social policy on its own may not be enough – especially if market pressures are not properly managed.

Our analysis has informed our findings concerning areas requiring action in the short term in Australia. Policy can never be ‘read off’ from research alone. In deriving policy priorities we have been informed by seven key principles:

- relevance – address people’s preferences and practices
- promoting choice – don’t privilege any one pathway for parenting
- fairness in the distribution of the burdens of child rearing – currently most of this falls on families. Governments and employers have to recognise they have a greater role to play.
- quality of children’s lives – the challenge is to limit the ‘spillover’ of work to family, ensuring quality and regular time for parents and children outside the demands of work. In addition, children’s right to the best quality child care must be given priority over short-term cost-cutting considerations
- institutional innovation – move beyond reliance on market and state mechanisms. Indeed, nurture community building arrangements wherever possible
- economic viability - policy to focus not just on business profits but longer term economic issues such as the birth rate and women’s labour force participation rates
- integration of different arms of policy – ie move beyond the ad hocery of particular initiatives in this realm of policy.

Our research findings indicate that the following key areas require urgent policy attention:

- **a comprehensive system of paid maternity and paternity leave.** The ILO minimum standard for maternity leave is 12 weeks, on 2/3 pay. The European Union Directive specifies 14 weeks on full pay. In Australia only the public sector only which represents less than one-fifth of Australian workers, is there any provision even approaching this level
- **increased public support for child care** on a planned basis to maintain standards and access to quality, affordable care. In this context we note that the more ‘market based’ reforms resulted in increasing costs to parents, the closure of many community child care centres and an over-supply of places elsewhere (catering for more affluent parents)
- **experimentation with new forms of home help** or emergency nursing services to help situations involving sick children
- **employee choice rostering** or work scheduling arrangements to ensure that working time flexibility results in flexibility *for* and not simply *of* workers

- **improvements to the quality of part-time work**, two-thirds of which is casual in Australia. Companies now offer part-time work in industries and occupations where it suits them –usually with lower remuneration and career prospects. The right to part-time work is necessary so that parents can keep their place in all parts of the labour market
- **education and support structures for employers** to help them navigate the transition to a new regime of choice and improved quality of work and parenting life for the workforce
- **establishment of a Cabinet sub-committee** to focus on integrating policy impacting on work and family issues
- **collection of better information** on people's preferences and the impact of different initiatives on whether changes improve the balance in people's work and family lives.

The paper finishes with consideration of three scenarios of work and parenting balance in the future. Under Scenario 1 (continuation of current trends) the situation will only continue to deteriorate. Under Scenario 2 ('Best Practice') model – the limited number of islands of excellence in work and family practice will continue to increase, but at a glacial pace. Underlying market pressure will limit diffusion and some leaders may retreat from their advanced initiatives if the benefits of their policies are 'poached' by opportunist competitors. Only Scenario 3 (working life model) offers the potential of addressing structural problems directly. It introduces new standards and support structures that will actually increase the range of choices available to households and workplaces.

If serious inroads are to be made into the problem, doing nothing or more of the same are not options. Only an integrated set of initiatives that addresses all stages of parenting can have any chance of providing people with real choices for the future.

Paid work and parenting: Charting a new course for Australian families

Introduction

It is well known that a growing number of households are having difficulty achieving a balance in their work and parenting lives with which they are happy. There is a vast and growing literature on this subject but this paper does not provide a definitive overview of this work. Rather, as a piece of policy research it aims to identify viable new directions for policy in the area of work and parenting life on the basis of insights generated from the latest Australian and overseas research.

The immediate objectives of the paper are to:

- identify the key data of relevance (especially concerning current practices and preferences)
- identify the key issues policy needs to address
- assess the limitation of current policy approaches
- outline new policy priorities that will be more effective in addressing people's concerns.

One of the major findings of this paper is that current policy approaches are just not working well in helping people with children to balance their work and parenting lives. At the core of the current approach is the assumption that issues associated with this balance are best settled at the enterprise level. We call this 'the enterprise as island' mindset. This mindset underpins the work of various 'work and family units' run by governments at State and Federal level. It is particularly apparent in events which celebrate 'best practice' such as the annual 'work and family awards.' Congratulating a handful of good, usually large, employers and exhorting others to follow has failed to deliver any widespread positive change for workers. Problems of work and parenting require responses that are systemic.

Our policy suggestions build on our ideas for a new approach to working life policy based on the idea of managing key transitions in working life by a better of integration of industrial relations, social and labour market policy. The most comprehensive consolidation of this research and the development of new policy idea can be found in ACIRRT's *Australia at Work: Just Managing?* (1999)

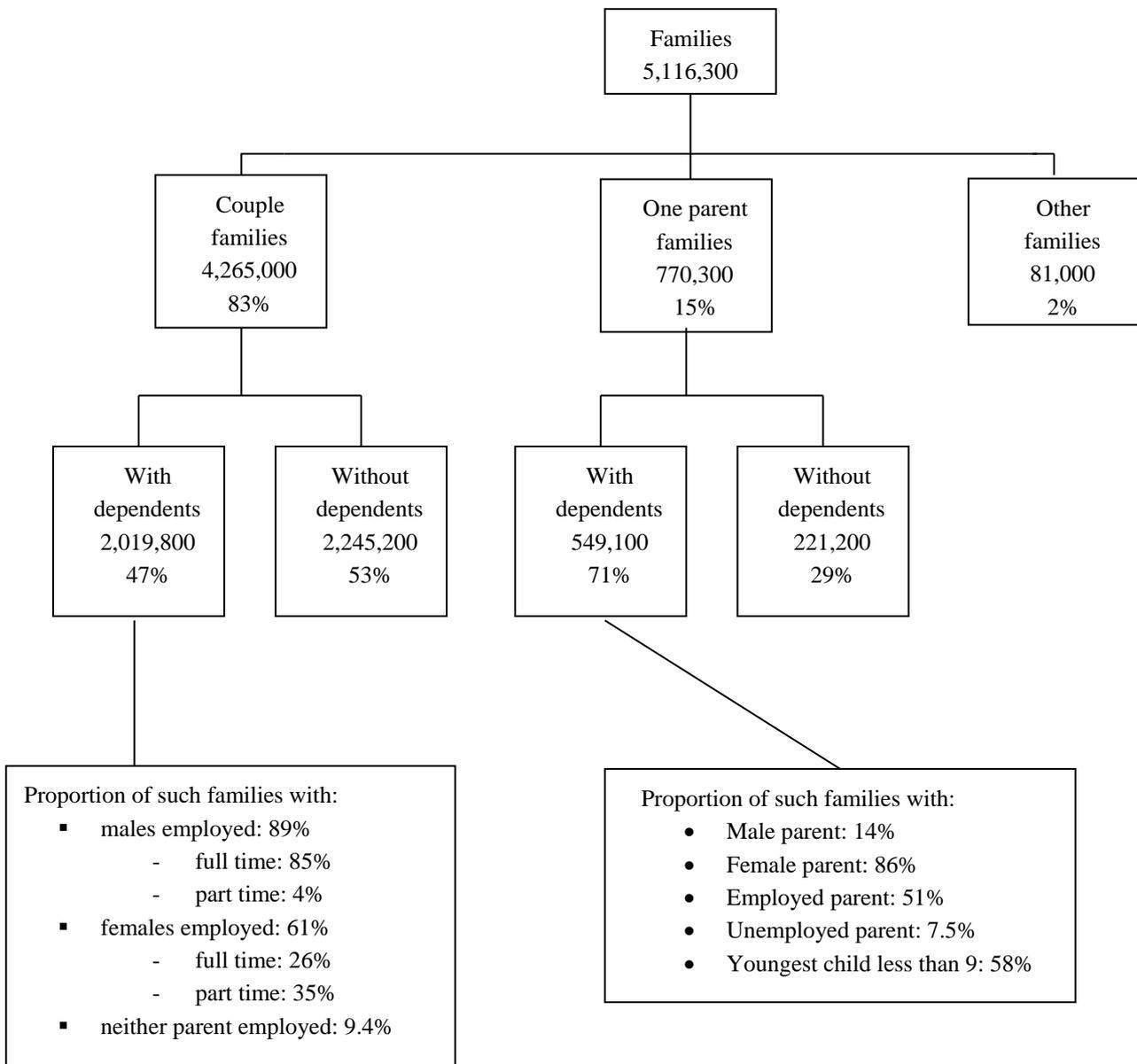
This paper builds on that work by exploring one of the key transitions in the life cycle: that involved with the birth and rearing of children. This experience usually coincides with people establishing or consolidating their position in the labour market. This transition is often fraught with tension. How workplaces and households manage this tension has a profound impact on the quality of life of individuals as well as society at large.

1. What do people want and what do they do?

1.1 Summary statistics on the current situation

In the vast majority of families with dependents, both parents, or, in the case of one-parent families, the sole parent, are engaged in paid work outside the home (see Figure 1). The proportion of dual-earning couple families and employed single parents has risen steadily, while the proportion of single-earner couple families has declined.

Figure 1: Profile of Families Balancing Parenting and Work, Australia, 2000



Source: ABS, *Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Families*, Cat. No. 6224.0, Australia, June 2000

Accompanying this profile of labour market participation has been a changing pattern of working hours. There has been three key changes since the 1970s: working hours have lengthened; they have become less standard and more irregular; and work at ‘family unfriendly’ hours has increased. These changes have been accompanied by the widespread intensification of work due to such factors as a rise in employers’ expectations of their employees’ time, performance and commitment, and technological changes that have reduced the separation of work and home (ACIRRT,1995, Chapter 5).

These changes have made it increasingly difficult for workers to balance their work and family needs. The proportion of families shouldering this burden has increased. Not surprisingly, studies suggest that Australians’ sense of being able to balance work and family may be deteriorating. The Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (1995) found almost twice as many people reporting that their satisfaction with work and family had decreased as those who said it had increased. Table 1 presents these figures and also shows the relationship with long hours of work. As Probert et al (2000: 43) observed, in some sectors workers now face a ‘relentless and continuous collision between work and life on a daily and weekly basis’.

Table 1: Workers accounts of whether satisfaction with the balance in their work and family lives increase, decreased or remained the same compared to 12 months ago, Australia, 1995

Changes in total weekly working hours	% of employees in workplaces with 20 or more workers		
	Satisfaction gone up	No change in satisfaction	Satisfaction gone down
All employees	14	59	27
Total weekly working hours gone up	14	43	44
No change in total weekly working hours	13	67	21
Total weekly working hours gone down	22	53	25

Source: A Morehead et al, *Changes at Work: The 1995 Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey*, Longman, Melbourne, 1997:289

The key changes evident in Table 2 below are a fall in the proportion of employees only working between Monday and Friday, a fall in the number entitled to ‘rostered days off’ and an increase in those able to work irregular hours to make up for time taken off for other reasons. The first two changes indicate the way working hours have become less standard and less family-friendly in recent years. In 2000, 60 per cent of Australian workers reported having done some work on weekends or at night over the previous 4 weeks’ (ABS, *Employment Arrangements and Superannuation* June 2000:8).

The ability to work extra hours in order to take time off may be potentially desirable if it represents an increase in the choices available to workers. Data on unpaid overtime, however, suggests that frequently the 'extra hours' are worked at the employer's behest, and that the demands of the job frequently make it impossible for workers subsequently to take time off (Pocock 2001).

Table 2: Full-time and part-time employees in main job by selected working arrangements, Australia, August 1993 and 1997

Type of working arrangement	% of employees with such arrangements	
	1993	2000
Usually only work Monday – Friday in main job	64.4	58.6
Entitled to rostered days off	28.2	20.4
Able to work extra hours in order to take time off	33.9	38.4

Source: ABS, *Working Arrangements, Australia, August 1997 and November 2000* Cat. No. 6342.0

It is often argued that problems of this nature are best managed at the individual enterprise level – either through collective workplace agreements or individual employment contracts. Table 3 reveals that the concern with work and family issues has only ever been included in a minority of enterprise agreements. And in recent years it has declined as an issue of concern amongst the parties to these agreements.

Table 3: 'Family friendly' provisions in enterprise agreements, by union status

	Year of registration								
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
% of total agreements with family friendly measures N = 8,178	2.5	3.4	4.1	2.2	12.8	13.8	22.3	16.4	13.8
Union agreements N = 5,764	2.8	4.0	4.6	2.7	14.3	14.0	23.2	18.4	22.9
Non-union agreements N = 1,348	-	1.1	-	0	6.6	13.2	18.2	13.6	7.5

Source: Agreements Database And Monitor (ADAM) maintained by ACIRRT. Report as at February 2001. Information derived from an analysis of agreements from the Commonwealth, NSW, Queensland, WA and South Australian jurisdictions.

Notes: Family friendly provisions include: references to child care facilities at the workplace, commitment to examine child care provisions at the workplace, elderly care referral service, work from home provision, career break scheme, job sharing, family/carer leave taken in addition to sick leave, paid maternity leave, paid paternity leave. NB unlike the Federal government Work and Family Unit (1999) we do not include changes in working time arrangements because we do not assume that these changes are necessarily family friendly.

These data reveal that there is a major problem. The growth in family-friendly provisions in the 1996-8 period partly reflects industry effects, with a rise in public sector and community service agreements at that time, and also increased incidence of personal/carer's leave and (from a very small base) paid parental leave (Whitehouse 2000). This is particularly evident in union-negotiated agreements (see above). The popularity in such provisions in the mid 1990s also appears to reflect a push to enhance new award based rights concerning carers leave that were introduced in the early 1990s. However, the data also show that enterprise bargaining never made a major contribution to the creation of family-friendly workplaces. And to the extent it did it is now declining in significance.

A recurring implicit finding from the research considered in this report is that the 'enterprise as island' mindset currently informing work and family policy is part of the problem not part of the solution. In thinking through new approaches it is important to recognise that there is no universal 'work and family' problem. Rather it is important to appreciate problems of family and working life vary depending on the parenting pathways chosen, the resources available to families, and the phase of parenting being managed in the household.

1.2 Parenting pathways and parenting phases

The issues that parents face in balancing the work and family vary depending on whether one or both parents work. In effect, households adopt a particular structure or parenting pathway. The pattern of labour force participation illustrated in Figure 1, indicates that there are four key **parenting pathways** as follows:

- **Traditional model**
This is the classical sole breadwinner household, in which the male is the wage earner for the family. It accounts for just under one in six of all families and over a third of working families with dependents.
- **Career couple model**
Dual breadwinner households with two parents in full-time paid work account for one in ten of all families and just over 20 per cent of all working families with dependents. According to Glezer and Wolcott (2000), women contribute an average of 43% of couples' earnings in these households;
- **One plus model**
This is a dual breadwinner household with one partner employed full-time (usually the male), the other part-time (usually the female). Such households are nearly as common as

those based on the “Traditional model.” Glezer and Wolcott, (2000) note that women’s contribution to household earnings in these households averages 27 percent.

- One parent model.
Single parent family constitute 12.2% of all working families with dependents. Nearly 90% of single parents are women. Varying levels of workforce participation apply¹.

Table 4 provides details on the number of families currently in each of the different work-parenting pathways.

Table 4: Incidence of different types of paid work-parenting pathways, Australia, 2000

Type of pathway	Number of families	% of working families with dependants	% of all families
Traditional	787,722	34.3	15.4
‘One plus’	706,930	30.7	13.8
Career couple	525,148	22.8	10.3
Single working parent	280,041	12.2	5.4
Total	2,299,841	100	44.9

Source: ABS, *Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Families*, Cat. No. 6224.0 Australia, June 2000

There are also distinct **parenting phases**, based on the age of dependent children in a household. In official statistics, the age of the youngest child is the reference point. Families shift between parenting pathways as the age of their youngest child rises and the family moves from phase to phase.

The key age brackets are:

- birth,
- up to 5 years
- 5-12 years, and
- over twelve years.

The workforce participation of women grows linearly with the age of their youngest child. *The Australian Family Life Course Study* found that when the youngest child is 0-4 years old, 26% of mothers are working full-time, when the youngest child is 5-12 years old, 43% of mothers are

¹ Clearly, these categories do not exhaust the range of family types in Australia. Over 11% of Australian two-parent families with dependent children have one or more parents unemployed, or both parents not in the labour force (ABS, *Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Families*, June 2000).

working full-time, and this rate rises to 62% when the youngest child is 13-18 years old. However, the age of the youngest child has a negligible effect on the workforce participation rates of fathers (Glezer and Wolcott 1997).

The next section explores current practices and preferences of Australian families in balancing work and family during the four parenting phases identified above. In particular, we examine practices and preferences in relation to maternity and paternity leave, forms of employment (full-time, part-time, casual etc.), and working hours and child care.

2. Practices and preferences on the work - parenting balance

2.1 Managing the initial transition to parenthood: parental, maternity & paternity leave

While there are notable exceptions, including much of the public sector, most Australian organisations do not provide paid maternity or paternity leave to employees. After 12 months of service with one employer, parents are entitled to 52 weeks unpaid leave at the time of the birth or adoption of a child. This is a combined maximum, when both parents access the leave. Improvements to these entitlements may be provided through awards, agreements and employers' policies.

Awards and human resource policies are, together, one of the a large source of parental leave entitlements. The 1995 AWIRS survey found that many public (59%) and fewer private (23%) of workplaces offer paid maternity leave, and fewer offer paid paternity leave (31% of public sector and 13% of private). Another recent Australian study of corporations had similar findings: that 25% of surveyed firms provided paid maternity leave and 14% paid paternity leave (Mulvena cited in Russell and Bourke 1999: 238). Generally, in both the public and private sector, leave is available only to employees who have completed twelve months continuous service with their employer. Significantly, the average amount of paid leave was 4 weeks – for most women, probably translating to 1-2 weeks only after the baby's birth.

Employee knowledge about maternity/paternity leave entitlements and management support of them are critical to the effective use of them. Probert et al's (2000) study highlights that knowledge and management support vary between industries and even within industries: some firms in the finance sector, for instance, are much more supportive of parental leave than others. The study points out that specific forms of parental leave are now a widely accepted feature of the workplace culture in the two areas examined, finance and teaching. Yet, in the finance sector, a low proportion of employees were aware of their paid maternity leave entitlements, and, in at least one firm, a large proportion reported concerns about lack of support from co-workers and managers when drawing on the provisions.

The net effect of existing parental leave provisions, which are largely unpaid, is that it is typically women who take leave after giving birth to a child. This is consistent with the standard male pattern of time allocation to parental matters: their involvement is sporadic and event-based. Quite simply, men are reluctant to forgo income in order to look after children. By comparison with women, they are more likely to structure their time to gain maximum income. This may be linked, in part, to the generally higher income earning capacities of men, and hence strategic decision-making within dual earner families. However, the result is that men readily avail themselves of paid paternity leave, but are less ready to take unpaid leave to look after babies (DEWRSB, 1998b: Insert).

At the same time, many men are dissatisfied with their current levels of involvement with their children. An emerging, critical theme in the literature on this subject is the fear that many men have of accessing family-friendly employment practices of any form. They fear losing career

opportunities because they are seen as less committed or productive; or because they take advantage of provisions widely viewed as only 'women's rights' in the workplace; or because their work may be undervalued, given that presence in the workplace is valued over actual performance and outputs (DEWRSB 1999: 3). Biggs' (1998) case study on flexible work practices highlighted that such fears made men were reluctant to use such provisions as parental leave.

Hence workplace and managerial cultures are a significant factor impediment to men's use of parental leave provisions. Also, some form of income maintenance and leave targeted at fathers is critical in making parental leave provisions a practical reality for men. As far as women's preferences for maternity leave are concerned, some form of paid leave would seem to be crucial to stemming the declining birth rate. Without exception, firms that provide paid parental leave, among other family-friendly conditions, report high return rates of qualified employees and more satisfied working parents.

2.2 *Managing older children: child care*

2.2.1 *CURRENT PATTERNS OF CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS*

There are two main forms of child care (other than parental care) which parents use either individually or in combination:

- formal care – the regulated care which takes place away from the child's home eg preschool, child care centre, family day care and occasional care;
- informal care – the non-regulated care which can take place at the child's home or elsewhere eg extended family, neighbours, friends and paid babysitters.

Working parents have three main types of child care need:

a) *Day care (0-5 years): full-time, part-time, casual and/or intermittent*

The *Australian Living Standards Study* found that, in families where both or a single parent was employed, 36% of couple families and 56% of single parents used formal care (family daycare or a child care centre). Either paid or unpaid informal care (relatives friends or neighbours) was used by 41% of couple families and 37% of single parent families. A further 20% of couple families and 7% of single parents rely on 'within household care' by parents, siblings or grandparents. One fifth of all preschool children are mainly cared for by their grandmother (Glezer and Wolcott 1995: 122).

b) *Before and After School Care: regular or intermittent.*

In the majority of dual parent households, mothers have organised to work during school hours only (50%) or the parents juggle rosters and shifts so that one parent is available to care for children. Grandparents (10%), friends and neighbours (11%) and paid babysitters are also used. After school programs are the only type of formal care used by families to any degree (14% of 'career couple' families). Children look after themselves (12% of 'career couple' families and 6% of 'one plus' households), and older siblings are the carers in 17% of 'career couple' households and 10% of 'one plus' households (data from the *Australian Living Standards Study*, cited by Glezer and Wolcott 1995: 123).

- c) *Event-based Care*: vacations, sickness, emergencies, teacher development days etc. In relation to sick preschool children, mothers are the primary carers. Other major carers include child care services, grandparents and fathers. Informal child care arrangements are the most resilient in this regard – 37% of pre-schoolers in informal care (compared to 7% in formal care) are able to continue with those arrangements when sick. In the case of primary school aged children, mothers are the main carers, with fathers and grandparents the main alternative carers (Glezer and Wolcott 1995: 118). Caring for children during school holidays is very much a juggling act, with mothers, fathers, extended family members, older siblings and council programs sharing the load. While permanent employees rely on paid leave and flexible work arrangements (including shift and roster changes) at these times, non-permanent employees use unpaid leave and flexible working hours.

Overall, in June 1999, 51% of children less than 12 years old used some type of child care. Informal and formal care were used by 37% and 23% of children under 12 years respectively. Of the children who used informal care, almost nine in ten did so at no cost. For 45% of the children who used formal care, the cost was less than \$20 per week in 1999, but it was more than \$100 for 9% of them. In general as family income increases, the proportion of children who use care increases, reflecting the higher proportion of dual-earner families. Of children in families with weekly income less than \$400, 46% attend some type of child care, compared to 61% of children in families with a weekly income of \$2000 or more. Further, the proportion of children who use formal care increases with family income, whereas use of informal care is not linked directly to family income. (Glezer and Wolcott 1995)

ABS data indicates that for the vast majority of children (94%) there are no additional formal care needs. However, there is still considerable unmet need for before and after school care, a form of care used almost solely by working parents as noted above. In June 1999, the unmet demand for this service represented the need for a 41% increase in this type of care (ABS, *Child care*, June 1999, Cat no. 4402.0).

Moreover, the above data on the relationship between income and use of formal care, suggests that cost is a major factor (ABS 1999). Lee and Strachan's (1998: 82) analysis supports this conclusion in its finding that those who are best placed to take advantage of formal child care services are those who are earning higher wages, are in full-time employment and are better educated.

2.2.2 *DIFFICULTIES AND PREFERENCES IN CHILD CARE PROVISIONS*

Given that working hours are becoming longer, more irregular and unpredictable, it is not surprising that child care arrangements are a source of considerable concern for working parents. For employees, the increased flexibility of working time gives rise to a number of problems in relation to their child care arrangements. Without much notice, employees may be required to work longer hours in a day or extra days in a week, perhaps including weekend work to finish a job. Roster changes and overtime pose problems, as does the sheer unpredictability of blocks of work for many in non-standard employment arrangements. Child care services are structured

around the 'standard' working day, week and year and on the basis that work is planned and predictable (Heiler 1996). This rigidity constrains the choices of working parents at work and affects how they meet *ad hoc* caring responsibilities. Child care services are also structured around the 'well' child. Child care services usually do not extend to the care of sick children.

Studies have highlighted the impact that these characteristics of child care services have on working parents. The Victorian Work and Child Care Advisory Service (WACCAS) study (1996) reported that 60% of workers with preschoolers experienced problems with child care arrangements. The most common issues were as follows:

- the time care was available;
- breakdown in care arrangements when the child was ill; and
- costs of care.

The consultancy group, Families at Work, surveyed 118,000 respondents in 97 NSW companies over 10 years. The study found that the operating hours of child care facilities posed difficulties for almost one in five respondents. Other difficulties were linked partly to child care arrangements. For instance, almost one third of respondents found it difficult to adjust work hours at short notice, and for 28% of respondents, it was difficult to work after hours when needed (DIR 1996:4-5).

Confirming those results, a Queensland study (Wedgewood and Forbes, 1994) involving 21,300 employees in 13 firms, found that difficulties with child care arrangements had a negative impact on their work in numerous ways. Particular difficulties were experienced with the following:

- | | |
|--|-----|
| • Travelling for work | 24% |
| • Flexibility at short notice | 21% |
| • Ability to work overtime | 18% |
| • Taking work related training | 18% |
| • Stress | 17% |
| • Ability to accept more responsibility or promotion | 17% |
| • Planning holidays | 15% |
| • Ability to work shiftwork | 13% |
| • Working required hours | 8% |
| • Concentration | 3% |

These difficulties are a direct result of the mismatch between school hours and holidays, child care service operational hours and work patterns. Respondents indicated 14 main problems with their present child care arrangements:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| • Finding sick care | 26% |
| • Finding temporary care | 22% |
| • Finding emergency care | 19% |
| • Hours care is available | 16% |
| • Cost of care | 16% |

- Finding school holiday care 15%
- Finding desired care 12%
- Finding before & after school care 10%
- Location of care 10%
- Transport to care 8%
- Quality of care 8%
- Reliability of care 7%
- Finding care for special needs children 7%
- Having multiple forms of care 7%

(Wedgewood and Forbes 1994: 122).

The most significant difficulties that many parents experience are in locating suitable care options when usual arrangements fail or are not available when a child is excluded from care due to illness. However, as the figures above suggest, the mismatch of work and child care arrangements is problematic for many parents in numerous and diverse ways. Many families spend few holidays together as parents schedule holidays separately so that children are cared for. When both partners are shift workers, many parents work opposite shifts for many years in order to manage child care responsibilities.

What sort of assistance do working parents consider they need with child care arrangements? The Queensland survey asked parents to indicate their preferred forms of direct child care assistance. Their answers were as follows:

- emergency care 54%
- vacation care for children 5-13 years 51%
- before and after school care 50%
- child care centre near work 49%
- care for sick children 43%
- information and referral service 43%
- child care centre near home 35%
- family day care near home 30%
- workshops on parenting 25%
- family day care near work 21%
- other 3%

(Wedgewood and Forbes 1994:124)

Public policy has, for the most part, failed to address the inflexibilities in child care provision to which these studies refer. Hence, we can assume that many of these difficulties remain for many working parents.

If employers provided child care on site, then working hours arrangements might pose less of a problem to working parents. Very few organisations provide child care for their employees. In 1997, around 4% of private sector organisations reported providing child care and these were primarily large organisations (over 1000 employees) operating on relatively new sites. A slightly larger proportion (9%) offer employees assistance with locating suitable child care facilities and

7% provide child care assistance for employees when requiring them to attend training outside standard hours. More recent data suggests that the figure has fallen. In 2000, the federal Department of Family and Community Services had only 65 employer-sponsored child care services registered, with another 1000 employer-sponsored places reserved in community child care centres. Overall, employers show little interest in this issue.

2.3 *Issues for parents with children of any age*

2.3.1 *WHAT DO PARENTS DO WHEN CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS BREAK DOWN?*

One of the main ways that parents cope with such difficulties, is to take leave from work. Working parents take leave for a number of reasons such as to care for a sick child, escort children to medical and dental appointments, and to care for children on school holidays and teacher development days. Studies provide differing data on the amount of such leave taken. The Department of Industrial Relations (1996: 4) reported survey findings that an average of five working days per parent employee are disrupted each year by child care difficulties, including just over two and a half days lost due to caring for a sick child. The federal Work and Family Unit recently reported an average of six disrupted days. These included 1.7 days for vacation care, 3.6 days for sick children, and 0.9 days for other failures in child care arrangements (DEWRSB 2000: 2).

The working days lost may be much higher. The *Dependent Care Study* found that 46% of parents had taken time off to look after sick children in the 12 months prior to the survey. Moreover, 58% of workers with dependants had taken time off to meet family responsibilities, for an average total of 9.4 days in the previous 12 months (VandenHeuvel 1993; Glezer and Wolcott 2000: 46) Citing data on the number of days that children of different ages are sick, Glezer and Wolcott (1995) emphasise that parents do not necessarily take time off work for all the days their children are sick or for all other child care breakdowns. Clearly, they also use a variety of other informal arrangements.

The amount of leave parents take to fulfil caring responsibilities varies according to parenting phase. A 1996 survey of over 30,000 respondents by the Victorian Work and Child Care Advisory Service (WACCAS) reported that working days lost due to parenting responsibilities diminished as children grew older. For instance, working days lost per annum included:

- nearly three full days and three part days for parents with preschoolers (55% of respondents had taken time off when a child was sick, and 40% when arrangements broke down for other reasons);
- two and a half full days and nearly three part days for parents with school age children;
- one full day and approximately one and a half part days for parents with teenage children. (DIR 1996: 4)

Women shoulder the lion's share of the burden of attending to sick children and other family matters. The *Dependent Care Study* found that while one half of working mothers had taken time off in the previous twelve months to care for sick children, only one third of fathers had.

(VandenHeuvel 1993; VandenHeuvel 1996; Glezer and Wolcott 2000). Another study, the 1991 *Australian Family Formation Project* had similar findings: in dual income households, fewer fathers (26%) than mothers (39%) had taken time off work to care for a sick child (Glezer and Wolcott 1995: 113).

2.3.2 WHAT TYPE OF LEAVE DO WORKING PARENTS TAKE?

The type of leave varies according to leave provisions and the employment relationships of working parents. In 1995, a large proportion (40%) of workers said that to care for a sick family member they would have to take time off without pay or that they could not take any time off at all. The situation was worse for female employees. Fifty per cent of women workers (who are more likely to be casuals) said they would be losing pay or could not take leave (AWIRS, reported in Morehead et al, 1997:115).

As a result of the *Personal/ Carer's Leave Test Case, 1994*, however, the situation has been changing. Personal/carer's or family leave clauses, allowing people to use forms of paid leave for family sick care, are being inserted into many awards. This has been a slow process; only in one state (Queensland) is personal/carer's leave provided through legislation.

Leave for family purposes is also the most popular work/family provision in workplace agreements, where it is found in some 28% of federal and 34% of state collective agreements (DEWRSB & OEA, 2000:48 and ADAM database). Sometimes, workplace agreement provisions are more generous than the award minimum. However, the leave is rarely available to all workers in a workplace. Because personal/carer's leave flows from workers' pre-existing award rights to sick, bereavement and annual leave, significant sections of the workforce (those not on awards, and casual employees) are automatically excluded.

Today, it seems that in large organisations, workers are far more likely to have access to paid carer's leave. According to the Equal Opportunity in the Workplace Agency (then Affirmative Action Agency) paid carer's leave was available in 72% of the mainly private sector organisations reporting in 1997 (WFU 1998: 22). These companies nearly all have over 100 employees. Recent ABS surveys suggest that a considerable proportion of workers - especially women workers - continue to lose pay when caring for a sick family member. A 1999 Tasmanian labour force survey found that some 21 per cent of women who had *actually taken* time off to look after sick family, had done so without pay (ABS, *Balancing Work and Caring Responsibilities in Tasmania* 1999, Cat no. 4903.6). Some 15% of women and 10 per cent of men in another recent labour force survey said that they had used unpaid leave for caring purposes in the last 6 months - but it should be noted that this survey covered a wider group - namely, anyone caring on an on-going basis for an adult or child (ABS, 2001, *Managing Caring Responsibilities and Paid Employment, NSW, October 2000*, Cat no. 4903.1). Both surveys found that access to paid leave - including personal/carer's leave - was a highly valued and helpful provision.

2.3.3 *WHAT HAPPENS WHEN PARENTS CAN'T LEAVE WORK?*

There is little literature on precisely how working parents deal with child care when they cannot take leave from work, and what their preferences would be. De Vaus and Millward (1998) report an increasing incidence of children who are unsupervised, at home, before and after school. In their Queensland survey, Wedgewood and Forbes (1994: 122) also found that many children look after themselves: 10% of children aged 6-13 cared for themselves before and after school hours, and 6% cared for themselves during school holidays.

It is likely that a significant number of children are also unsupervised when not attending school due to sickness. Having to leave children to look after themselves is a cause of great stress for working parents and is associated with numerous telephone calls from the workplace to check on children's well-being. There is substantial evidence that women, in particular, do additional parenting labour from the workplace, supervising their children after school by phone (Morehead, 2001).

The lack of facilities such as decent carer leave or alternate support arrangements appears to be a contributory factor for those parents who deliberately reduce their career aspirations in order to meet family responsibilities. According to Schofield et al, 16% of the employed care-givers they surveyed had taken less responsible jobs and 13% had refused promotions. In another study, Russell found that almost three quarters of employees with dependent children would refuse a job or promotion if it decreased the time available for family (Glezer and Wolcott 2000: 46).

2.4 *Issues for Parents with Children of Any Age: Forms of Employment and Working Hours*

Most Australians reject the 'traditional' household model, at least at an ideological level. The majority of people - 65% of men and 69% of women - support a sharing of the breadwinner role. In practice, men are the primary breadwinners in the vast majority of households. This is partly because women choose to remain at home after the birth of infants for substantial periods and partly because few return to work full-time. Half of all women employed during pregnancy do not return to employment within 18 months, and when they do, the majority return part-time. The women who return sooner to employment after the first birth are those with high levels of education, high status occupations, high incomes, strong work attachment, lower-earning husbands and an attitude that substitute child care is not detrimental to young children. (Glezer and Wolcott 2000: 51) In part, therefore, attitudes are critical, but so also are the existence of accessible, affordable child care and options for employment.

Australian men also tend to be the primary breadwinners because generally, their preference is to work full-time in contrast to Australian women's general preference for part-time work. Rather than embracing the 'career couple model', many women and men with dependent children prefer, at least in practice, the 'one plus model'.

This preference was well documented in the *Australian Family Life Course Study*, which the Australian Institute of Family Studies completed in 1996. The study involved a survey of about

2000 people on their actual and preferred working hours. Most of the fathers were working more than 41 hours each week: this included 68% of employee fathers and 70% of self-employed fathers. Some of these men were working many more than 51 hours, including 29% of employees and 48% of self-employed fathers. Typically, fathers were not satisfied with the length of these working hours. As Russell et al (1999) found, 68% of fathers feel they have too little involvement with their children. The majority of fathers consider that their working conditions, especially long and inflexible working hours, prevent them from being the father they want to be. This has not shaken the preference of most men for full-time work, but it has strengthened a preference for a maximum of 40 hours per week.

Among women working full-time, 43% would also prefer to work less. Yet by comparison, most women working part-time are satisfied with their hours. Those working between 15 and 29 hours per week appear to be the most content. Of those working fewer hours, 15% would prefer more hours, and of those working between 30 and 34 hours, 25% would prefer fewer hours. Not surprisingly, other research has confirmed that full-time work may not be an attractive option for many women. In 1999, ABS figures showed that, with 'career couples' (both employed full-time), 70% of mothers stated that they always or often felt rushed, compared to 56% of fathers and 52% of women with no dependent children. In addition, Morehead (2001) has pointed to evidence that working mothers strictly limit their part-time hours, firmly resisting encroachments and extensions of hours into their domestic labour time. Hence, as Glezer and Wolcott (2000: 53) argue, most women prefer to work part-time or not at all and they 'do not appear to desire any extreme social engineering to change this arrangement'.

Women's exact working hours preferences vary according to the ages of dependent children or parenting phase. The importance of work to women is underlined by the finding that almost two thirds of mothers (64%) would still prefer to have a paid job even if they did not need the extra income. (Glezer and Wolcott 2000; DWRSB 1998a: 4) In addition, the *Australian Family Life Course Study* found that four of ten mothers not in the paid workforce would prefer to be in the workforce on a half-time basis, and the vast majority planned to return to work in the future. (Glezer and Wolcott 1997: 4)

In 1997, the Affirmative Action Agency reported a steady increase in the number of organisations offering permanent part-time work for employees with family responsibilities. Between 1994 and 1997, this proportion of organisations increased from 70% to 81%. Also, 95% of private sector firms that offer permanent part-time employment indicated that they made promotion opportunities available to part-time employees. Job sharing opportunities have also improved: between 1994 and 1997, the number of private sector organisations offering job sharing rose from 45% to 63%. (WFU 1998: 20-21)

The presence of such conditions does not necessarily translate into effective part-time working arrangements. Probert et al (2000) revealed that in the two industries they had studied, teaching and finance, many employees remained ignorant of part-time work and job sharing opportunities. Further, managerial cultures were not supportive in some areas, and there was evidence that employees' use of such provisions inhibited their career opportunities. As Probert et al comment,

the negative relationship between part-time employment and career advancement has also been well documented elsewhere.

Similarly, in her analysis of how flexible starting and finishing times operate in practice, Lee (2001) provided further evidence that some provisions are heavily diluted. According to the ABS, more than one third of working arrangements provide employee discretion to vary their start and finish times. Other studies have pointed out that 6% of certified agreements and 22% of AWAs make specific provision for such flexibility. However, as Lee notes, this employee discretion is usually confined to within half an hour of the scheduled start and finish time. Further, of those start and finish times that are not fixed, 62% are variable on a daily basis, and a large proportion of working mothers are subject to these.

Bramble (2001) identified another limitation in such practices. He argued that family friendly provisions are increasingly justified on business outcomes criteria and this affects which employees are offered them. Firms tend to offer flexibility provisions to those employees they are most anxious to retain, and this tends to be professionals and para-professionals earning high incomes. However, even for this group, family-friendly provisions are more apparent than real. Many will not take advantage of them for fear of missing out on career opportunities.

In sum, research suggests that many Australian men and women are satisfied with the 'one plus model' for their households. Nonetheless, substantial numbers of working parents appear to prefer either the 'traditional' and 'career couple' models, and a small but substantial proportion are engaged in the one parent model. The task for policy is to make these preferences more attainable, and to facilitate transitions between available pathways and employment options.

3. How Does Policy Currently Help Or Hinder Achieving A Satisfactory Work-Parenting Balance?

In this section, we map out the key features of the current web of policies that impact on the work-family balance. These policy areas include industrial relations, child care, tax and income support. The focus is on federal government policy, except where state government policies provide particularly fruitful comparisons.

3.1 Parental Leave (Maternity & Paternity)

Australia is unusual in having no legislated provision for paid parental leave. Of 130 countries with parental leave policies, Australia is one of only three that provides no paid leave entitlements nationally. (NPWF 1998) As a result the distribution of entitlements is uneven across the labour market. Further, the deregulation of the labour market has meant that previous entitlements to paid maternity leave can be removed, particularly where awards are being simplified. (Probert et al 2000)

The *Workplace Relations Act* 1996 (Clth) entitles all working men and women to *unpaid* parental leave. Parental leave entitlements are as follows:

- all working parents are entitled to parental leave as outlined below, including those not covered by industrial awards or agreements;
- parents are entitled to a total of 52 weeks unpaid leave on a shared basis for their newborn or newly adopted child;
- this entitlement supplements other existing entitlements under other legislation and awards;
- except for one week at the time of birth, each partner must take parental leave at different times – with a combined leave not more than 52 weeks;
- an employee who takes parental leave is entitled, in most circumstances, to return to the position he or she held before the leave was taken; women who transferred to a different job because of pregnancy, are entitled to return to the earlier job;
- parental leave will not break an employees' continuity of service;
- entitlements rests upon eligibility criteria including, that the employee must have completed at least 12 months continuous service with their employer by the expected date of birth;
- parents are entitled to take other leave (eg paid annual leave) in combination with parental leave, but this will reduce the parental leave available such that the combined total for parents is not more than 52 weeks.

Public sector employees in most jurisdictions are entitled to *paid* maternity leave, although there are notable exceptions. In Tasmania, public sector employees have no paid parental leave entitlement but may use accrued sick leave up to a maximum of 61 working days. In the other jurisdictions, the length of paid leave varies from two weeks in South Australia to twelve weeks

in the Commonwealth Government and Victoria. A condition of at least twelve months continuous service applies in all jurisdictions.

After completing 52 weeks of unpaid maternity leave, what other entitlements do new parents have? Career breaks for fixed periods of up to several years are available to some employees although there is no statutory entitlement or policy standard at national level. With career breaks, generally a position is available at the same level on the employee's return. The ADAM database revealed that only 0.1% of agreements contained career break schemes at the end of 1997 (ACIRRT 1999: 124), while in 1999, Mulvena found that 16% of the 154 firms studied provided for career breaks. (Russell and Bourke 1999: 238) Almost two thirds of people (61%) who take career breaks are public sector employees, and over two thirds are women, most of whom take the breaks for child care reasons. (DEWRSB 2000b) While career breaks are a feasible option for balancing work and family, therefore, they are not a widely available option and, of course, they are unpaid.

Federal government policy also entitles many new parents to several forms of financial assistance, including:

- a) Maternity Allowance – a non-taxable lump sum payment of \$750, in recognition of extra costs incurred at the birth of a baby. This is targeted at low and middle income households, and is means tested;
- b) Maternity Immunisation Allowance - \$200 paid after the child reaches 18 months and either has been fully immunised or has a valid exemption.

Of course, this in no way compensates for the dramatic drop in income which households experience once a working mother takes unpaid leave. Indeed, economists have estimated that a woman's decision to have a child reduces her earnings (and that of her household) by an average of \$6,500 per annum for the rest of her working life. Each additional child reduces her earnings by a further \$4500 a year until the child reaches 16 years. Since the average mother has almost two children, her lifetime earnings are reduced by about \$250,000. (Gittins 2000: 19)

The three major limitation with current parental leave provisions are:

- the provisions exclude casual workers (among other groups) regardless of working hours or length of casual employment with the one employer. Recent Queensland legislation and a new Federal Award Standard provide notable exceptions in extending maternity leave entitlements to long-term casual employees who have completed two years of employment on a regular and systematic basis with the one employer (Werner 2000)
- the majority of female employees have no access to *paid* maternity leave. The 1995 Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey found that paid maternity leave was available in only 23 per cent of private sector workplaces, and only for an average of 4 weeks
- paid paternity leave is extremely rare – and yet payment is critical to men's use of parental leave provisions.

3.2 *Child Care*

Access to affordable, accessible child care is critical if working parents are to achieve a satisfactory balance of work and family. The Commonwealth government delivers its support for work-related child care through the *Children's Services Program* which covers formal care for children up to twelve years, and includes centre-based care, family daycare, occasional care and before and after school care.

Most of the government's funding is allocated to fees' subsidisation – with more than 80% of the budget funding child care 'assistance' and 'rebates'. The former Labor government introduced the fee relief scheme in 1984. The scheme offered means-tested fee relief for formal child care services in the community and not-for-profit sector, with the subsidy paid directly to the centre or service operator. The government tied this scheme to a national strategy for planning the location of new child care places. In 1991, the Labor government extended the scheme to private long daycare centres when it introduced the Child Care Cash Rebate which provided a form of universal fee relief. Since then, the government has increasingly relied on private providers of long daycare to meet its targets for new places. Consequently, the share of community-based centres – which typically provided care at lower cost - in the sector has declined. (Lee and Strachan 1998)

According to Lee and Strachan (1998), the current federal government's child care policy – in terms of the costs of child care, composition of care providers and means of providing monetary assistance to low income families – may be substantially reducing access to services for some families. The net effect of child care policy since 1996 has been as follows:

- policy has increased the effective cost of child care to parents and therefore the affordability of formal services – eg. by means-testing the cash rebate; capping the hours of care eligible for fees assistance raising the costs for families with multiple children; and a freeze on fees assistance/rebates that will see their real value decline.
- policy has changed the composition of care by removing subsidies previously available to some providers – eg. in the 1996/97 budget, the government ceased operational subsidies for community-based long daycare centres and in the 1997/97 budget it ceased operational subsidies for Out of School Hours Care. This resulted in higher fees for these services, which directly led many parents to reduce their care hours, and in many cases their working hours, and even to exit the labour force altogether.
- policy has altered the manner in which assistance is delivered/administered – initially, the current government shifted much of the responsibility for fee relief away from operators to parents – the result of which was that many parents failed to apply for and obtain their entitlements. In 2000, the government has modified this policy again – by merging the fees assistance and rebate into a single Child Care Benefit. Once parents are registered for the Child Care Benefit, the government pays fee relief directly to the operator unless parents opt for direct payment in the form of an annual tax rebate.
- policy has increased the provision of general income support available to families with dependent children, irrespective of use of child care services – of particular note here is the *Family Tax Initiative* which the current government introduced in 1996/97 and

revised in 2000. This initiative provides all families with dependent children under 16 (or 18, if a student) with a rebate per child. This is a means tested rebate payable via the tax system or as an upfront cash payment. The initiative also provides an additional means-tested rebate to single income families with a child under five years. Non-working spouses can receive a capped non-wage income without affecting their entitlement. Hence, at the same time as the government reduced child care assistance, it redistributed the savings to families not using child care services. This effectively rewarded the minority of families that choose the 'traditional' model at the expense of the majority that do not.

To the extent that it seeks any expansion in current child care services and assistance to working parents, the current federal government is relying heavily on enterprise bargaining to deliver the goods. However research suggests that there is little interest in child care issues at the bargaining table. By January 1998, approximately 2.6% of federal awards and agreements contained clauses that mentioned child care, and these were almost entirely concentrated in the public sector. One-third of clauses required the employer to take child care arrangements into account when changing working hours and shifts, relocating and transferring employees. A further third provided for reimbursement of child care costs when working outside standard hours and 17% dealt with child care provision or assistance with obtaining care. Rather than interest increasing, it seems to be steadily declining. The steady growth in the early 1990s has transformed into a dive. (Lee and Strachan 1999)

The government's *Stronger Families and Community Strategy* has also earmarked \$65.4 million over four years to providing greater flexibility and choice in child care. The strategy is directed at helping shift workers, families working outside standard business hours, families who have a sick child and families who live in rural and regional areas. This initiative is still at the inception stage, however, and there are, to date, no concrete results to report.

The main limitations of current child care policy for improving work/family balance are:

- cost – current government policy has increased the costs of formal child care for many working parents;
- inflexibility of services – to date, policy has not delivered child care facilities which meet the diverse and unpredictable needs of working parents – in terms of non-standard working hours; irregular working patterns, emergency and sick care, and other flexible child care arrangements
- impeding transitions – the costs and inflexibility of child care impact differentially on working parents according to parenting pathway and phase. A particular concern, however, is the way in which these two factors impede transitions between work and home.

Policies on child care and industrial relations operate relatively independently of each other. Yet for employees, work and child care arrangements are intricately connected. For instance, workers' entitlements in regard to work scheduling affect their child care needs. Yet there is a regulatory vacuum concerning a number of basic standards (eg. advance notice of rosters and

work schedules; minimum and maximum hours that can be worked over set periods; minimum and maximum call-in times; advanced planning of rostered days off, etc).

3.3 Carer's Leave

Carer's leave, otherwise known as family leave, enables working parents to take time off to care for sick children. There is no national entitlement for working parents to carer's leave. Entitlements may be contained in awards, agreements or employers' policies. In the 1994-95 *Personal/Carer's Leave Test Case*, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission established a standard for the types and amounts of leave available and the conditions under which employees under federal awards can access it.

The Test Case standard contains the following elements:

- employees are entitled to use their own combined sick leave and bereavement leave to care for an immediate family/household member who is sick; up to a maximum of five days per year;
- facilitative provisions may be inserted into awards to enable employers and employees to agree on additional arrangements in relation to taking annual leave (up to one week's leave in single day allotments); hours of work (time off in lieu, or working 'make up' time); and using unpaid leave.

The inclusion of the standard in awards requires each award being formally varied to include the provisions. Many awards have not yet been varied to include the standard, although some of those still not varied, may contain provisions for carer's leave in another form, such as 'family leave'.

The 1997 *Award Simplification Test Case Decision* included a model award clause for carer's leave. The clause established a form of leave called personal leave that encompasses sick leave, carer's leave and bereavement/compassionate leave.

In its *Fitting Fathers into Families* strategy, the federal government has recognised that many working fathers are dissatisfied with their work/family balance. However, this has not translated into concrete policies to encourage men to take on more of the care-giving responsibility within families. Rather, the strategy has focused on strengthening the parenting skills of fathers.

3.4 Working Hours

3.4.1 ACCESS TO PART-TIME WORK

The *Workplace Relations Act 1995* (Cth) provides for the concept of regularity for part-time work and the 1997 *Award Simplification Test Case Decision* clearly adopted the legislated provision. The decision provided guidance to the parties to awards to allow specific provisions to be developed having regard to the particular circumstances of the industry. In 1998, research

suggested that 45% of simplified awards contained regular part-time provisions. The *Hospitality Award*, on which the Test Case decision was based, included provisions as follows:

- a requirement for an agreement in writing on a regular pattern of work, specifying at least the hours worked each day, which days of the week the employee will work, and the actual starting and finishing times each day;
- a requirement that an employer roster a regular part-time employee for a minimum of three consecutive hours on any shift; and
- overtime for all hours worked in excess of the hours mutually arranged.

Such provisions could greatly improve the work/family balance for working parents. However, research suggests that only a minority of simplified awards with part-time work provisions actually have followed this standard. (WFU 1998: 37-8)

PORTABILITY OF BENEFITS

The issue of portability of benefits is crucial for improving the balance of work and family because of the following:

- workers who are employed on a casual basis are not entitled to such family-friendly benefits as maternity/paternity leave, carer's leave, sick leave, long service leave;
- workers who move regularly between jobs, or who are employed on a temporary and/or short-term basis often do not accrue entitlements to family-friendly benefits;
- women are particularly vulnerable because of their high participation in the casual labour market.

Current government policy has not addressed this issue of portability of benefits.

3.4.3 THE REALITY OF WORKING TIME REFORM: FLEXIBILITY OF BUT NOT FOR WORKERS

The previous chapter noted that changes in hours of work have been extensive. And the material in Chapter 1 showed that changes often involved extended hours of work for full-timers and less routine hours of work for all workers. Comprehensive and systematic information on people's views about the desirability and impact of these changes is scarce. Available data indicates the changes have had a net negative impact on the population. The 1995 AWIRS data was noted in Section 1. It revealed 26 per cent of all workers were less satisfied with their work and family life than a year ago. Only 13 per cent reported that their satisfaction with this issue had improved. The remainder reported no change. Amongst part-timers it is important to note that many people, especially women, are very satisfied with their hours of work. It should be noted, however, that a sizeable proportion (around 20 per cent) of part-timers want to work more hours. This is particularly pronounced amongst 20 - 24 year olds - 40 percent of who want to work longer hours. (Buchanan and Bretherton, 1999). Length of hours and dissatisfaction with them is particularly acute amongst professional and managerial employees. (ACIRRT, 1999) Clearly current working time arrangements are unsatisfactory for many workers, especially those in the growth sectors of the labour market.

Summary

The existing web of policies has instituted an ad hoc set of arrangements for facilitating a work-family balance. The policies fall short of meeting the needs of working parents. In addressing this shortfall, we need to identify better ways to co-ordinate complementary policy measures across portfolio areas. To help identify ways in which the problems identified in the previous sections could be addressed we examined a number of leading studies of how the problem of work-family balance has been managed in the US and Europe.

4. Insights from recent overseas experience and initiatives: the US and Europe

4.1 *The USA*

Much of the US literature on work and family is based on a few large data sets which the US Department of Labor and the New York-based Families and Work Institute have collected. There has been considerable analysis of these data sets and of 'family friendly' provisions in public and private sector firms.

As in Australia, much of the research in the USA has been devoted to exploring the spillover or interaction between work and family. In numerous quantitative and qualitative studies, the Families and Work Institute has explored this issue of work/family balance, although, unfortunately, its analysis has not always been particularly useful. Researchers have conducted little analysis of government policy in the area, as there hasn't been much policy on work and family issues, at least at a federal level. This shortfall is identified in much of the research on the subject, and various solutions are suggested.

Spalten-Roth et al (1997) analysed US statistics on the employment of managerial and professional women in non-standard working arrangements. They found that while family obligations were not an important explanatory factor for male employment in non-standard arrangements, they were for women. A substantial minority of managerial and professional women who are independent contractors or self-employed cited family responsibilities as their reason for choosing this arrangement, and more than half of those working part-time, did so for family reasons. In regard to preferences, the study found that marriage and children had no effect on men's preferences for full-time work but greatly diminished women's preferences for regular full time work. These findings were confirmed in Clarkberg and Moen (1999) who resurveyed a large cohort from the longitudinal *National Study of Families and Households* on working hours preferences, and identified a widespread preference for part-time work in married couples, a preference that is rarely met in the US.

Using data from the *General Social Survey, 1973-94*, Clarkberg and Moen (1999) investigated the aggregate hours of work for households in order to estimate the extent of time squeeze in dual-earner families. They identified a substantial increase in total working hours at household level since the 1970s. The combined hours of dual-earner families had risen from 77.8 hours in 1973 to 84.4 hours in 1994.

Levine and Pittinsky (1997) used a combination of the Institute's National Study data and case studies in large US corporations to explore the new pressures facing working fathers. They identified a significant lever for change in the concerns of working fathers to better balance work and family. Bailyn et al (2000) and Levine and Pittinsky (1997) both highlight the difficulties men face in using 'family friendly' provisions in firms, including their fear of potentially adverse consequences, and the constraints of workplace culture. Bailyn et al (2000) also discuss the deeply ingrained and pervasive acceptance of the traditional male breadwinner model, apparent

in the basic legitimacy attributed to men choosing work over family, and, in contrast, the legitimacy of women choosing family over work. As Bailyn et al noted:

‘Although both men and women spoke poignantly of the pain and unfairness of having to choose between career and family, we found that most do not challenge the gender roles that encourage men to give primary priority to their careers and women to their families. Indeed, these gender roles tend to be accepted at a very deep, often unconscious, level.’
(p.170)

In what seems to be the only study of its kind in the world, Galinsky (1999) surveyed more than a thousand children across the US to ascertain their attitudes to working parents and their experience of the work/family balance. Galinsky’s work highlighted that children were more concerned about parents’ stress and tiredness than the time demands of work, that they found substantial consolation in having knowledge about the nature of their parent’s work, and that, rather than time with parents *per se* being important, they especially value the maintenance of such shared experiences as family traditions. That is, issues of predictability and certainty in time is just, if not more important, than the quantity of time working parents spend with their children.

Policy analysis in the US has concentrated on the initiatives of corporations in introducing family friendly provisions either voluntarily, as part of human resource management strategy, or as a result of collective contracts. The Families and Work Institute’s Business Work-Life Study (*BWLS*) (1998) maps the incidence of a broad range of family-friendly and related enabling provisions in American firms with more than one hundred employees. The study found that corporate initiatives in this area were positively related to such factors as industry, company size, number of sites, proportion of top executive positions filled by women and minorities, and proportions of women, hourly employees, part-timers and union members in the firm. The Institute’s follow-up analysis of the needs of working mothers and fathers, *Ahead of the Curve* (1998) examined the challenges facing both new working parents and business in the contemporary environment, and suggested a range of supportive strategies to facilitate family/work balance.

The report singles out child care facilities in the US for special attention, arguing that child care imposes inordinately heavy costs on most users, and that it is often too distant from workplaces, inflexible in operating hours and of a poor quality. Bowen (2000) critically reviewed progress in family friendly conditions in public and private sector organisations. He concluded that many of the very large corporations, those he calls the top 5%, provide an impressive array of personnel policies and support programmes to help employees balance work and family demands. However, such policies have mostly failed to penetrate the other 95% or to bridge the ‘yawning divide between family-friendliness in theory and in practice’ (Hammonds quoted in Bowen, p.88 see also Carmody, 1992)

The National Partnership for Women & Families was a major organiser of the campaign for state regulation of parental leave provisions that culminated in President Clinton’s June 2000 Regulation. The National Partnership’s campaign and the information on which it was based is

available on its website. Bond, et al (1991) added fuel to the fire with their examination of legal provisions on leave and other work/family arrangements in four states. Several large international comparative studies provided supportive evidence, highlighting the poverty of US provisions on parental leave by comparison with most other western market economies. See Kamerman (2000) and Wilkinson et al (1997) below.

In short, six key findings emerge from the US literature. These include:

- In the US, the proportion of dual-earner families has increased markedly since 1970s, and with three-quarters of these couples, both partners work full-time. At the same time, while employed women spend more time than men on household chores and children, men's time spent on both has increased in the last 20 years, and women's time spent at work has increased. The result is that employed men and women have less personal time, and this is associated with lower personal well-being and greater susceptibility to negative spillover from job to home;
- employers' family-friendly policies and programmes currently are not sufficient to meet the needs of working mothers and fathers, particularly as they tend to serve only the more advantaged workers and those in large firms;
- a recent federal regulation encourages state governments in the US to provide for paid parental leave (drawing on unemployment insurance);
- major shortfalls in child care in the US include lack of proximity to the workplace, negligible and/or inadequate financial assistance, lack of emergency backup, care for sick children and child care during non traditional hours;
- as in Australia, there appears to be a growing awareness of work/family conflict among working fathers in the US;
- for children, when considering how their parents' work affects their lives, shortage of time is not at the top of their list – the stress levels and tiredness of their parents as well as certainty of time with parents are more critical.

4.2 *Europe and international comparative studies*

There has been considerable documentation of policy initiatives in various European countries on work and family. The European Commission's 'Family and Work' Network has published comprehensive reports which encompass the fifteen EU countries on a range of work/family issues. In the 'Dual Income Families' issue of its quarterly publication, *New Way* (1998), the Network reported on the difficulties dual income families face in reconciling the demands of paid work and family. The reports provide useful data on working hours and arrangements (statistics given), child care, and various problems faced in the different countries. The effect of the reports is to provide a critical analysis of policy in action – that is, the actual experience of working parents, behind the policies. In the 'Work Time Solidarity' issue of *New Way* (1998), the Network reports on innovative working time policies and arrangements in the fifteen countries, and evaluates the gaps between policy and reality, the impediments to implementation, the policy successes and failures, and who actually uses the various provisions. The Institute for Applied Socio-Economics (1998) also provides detail on new policy initiatives to reduce

working time in Spain, Austria and Finland. Overall these studies show that in Europe over the last two decades a new 'climate of rights and entitlements' has emerged to increase choices available to people. These rights typically include:

- paid leave for women (and increasingly for men) for time off at the birth of their children (Wilkinson, 1997, Rubery et al 1996)
- publicly provided child care - often fully funded by the state (eg Sweden, Denmark, Holland)
- a range of initiatives directed at allowing workers greater choice in their hours of work, especially rights for full timers to work part-time to enable them to devote more time to their children when they are young. Such workers also have the right to revert to full time employment when their children get older. (For a particularly comprehensive set of legislative entitlements dealing with issues of this nature see recent developments in Holland.)

There are numerous published articles on changing working time/flexible working patterns in European countries. Many such studies are largely focused not on *work and family*, but rather, on mapping and explaining the changing nature of working arrangements. A comprehensive data source is the Price Waterhouse *Cranfield Study of Human Resource Practices* which forms the basis of a useful, though now dated, analysis of family friendly policies in firms across Europe. Over a three year period (1990-92), researchers surveyed firms across Europe with more than 200 employers, using a data set of 15,000 responses. Brewster and Hegewisch (1994) provides some of these statistics and analysis. In recent years, there have been specific country analyses of changing workforce patterns of working mothers and fathers and the nature of work/family conflict. For instance, Brannen (2000) documents labour market patterns for mothers and fathers 1984-1994 in the UK and both charts and explains the distribution of domestic and child care obligations among mothers and fathers (both in terms of working hours and preferences of women as well as men).

On parental leave, Wilkinson et al's (1997) study compares policies and practices in 17 countries, including 13 European countries, the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. The study canvasses the following features: duration, mother/father right, payment, take-up, funding, job security, eligibility and flexibility. Parental leave systems varied considerably among the countries examined in terms of all these features, and it is difficult to draw comparisons on the basis of the information presented as so many countries provided no figures on key points. Moreover, not only do levels of statutory regulation vary considerably, but, also, employers vary across countries in the degree to which they enhance parental leave provisions at firm level. One constant feature, among those countries which made the data available, was that fewer than 10% of men took any parental leave, except in Sweden (78% of men) and Norway (33%). The availability of payment during parental leave cannot explain these exceptions alone, as in other countries with similar provisions, few men took leave. Another common thread across the countries is that, at firm level, corporations are more likely to enhance maternity leave provisions than paternity leave provisions.

Wilkinson et al's (1997) study also evaluated alternative models of parental leave in the UK context: through a comprehensive surveying of more than two thousand adults, and managers in 300 firms, and in depth interviews with seventeen firms. The evaluation covered four funding models of parental leave: parent loans, personal parental plans, employer payments, and social insurance, and investigated employers and employees experiences with parental leave, and employees' preferences for forms of leave. The evaluation of funding models will not be considered here as the analysis draws on a detailed understanding of the British tax and social security systems. In terms of parental leave preferences, the study had three main findings. First, in the UK, the largest proportion of men and women would prefer short-term parental leave on a high proportion of salary, followed by return to flexible hours at pro rata salary (for women) and regular hours at full salary (for men). Second, 35% of respondents would not feel their current job and career prospects would be secure if they took parental leave. Third, workplace culture is critical in transforming men's attitudes to taking up parental leave. Male use and duration of parental leave is substantially higher where women are in the majority and/or in significant numbers in senior management positions, and where other forms of assistance are available to help employees balance work and family.

Also on parental leave, the National Partnership for Women & Families in the US publicised Kamerman's (2000) study of new parent leave policies in 158 countries. Kamerman's work makes clear that of the 130 countries that have parental leave policies, *only three* – Australia, the USA, and Ethiopia - provide *no paid leave* whatsoever. The study argues that, in these three countries, the result is that many mothers and fathers cannot take the leave they need.

In terms of workers' attitudes and preferences, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions has published the results of its Employment Options for the Future, a survey of over 30,000 people in the European Union Member States and Norway (see Liatta and O'Conghaile, 2000). The survey investigated people's preferences for various types of working arrangements, and, while the study found considerable variations in preferences by country, there were also common threads. The study had four key findings. First, the preferred option, in all Member States, was that both men and women continue in paid employment. Second, there is a widespread preference for shorter working hours, and the preference among those who are seeking reduced hours, is for a large reduction in working hours. Third, there is a substantial preference among men to reduce overtime and reduce full-time hours to thirty hours or less. Finally, generally women prefer part-time work of a substantial nature to full-time work.

On the basis of the study's findings, Liatta and O'Conghaile (2000) point to five main policy priorities. First, there is a need to improve men's capacity for involvement in the family sphere through incentives to reduce overtime, enhance part-time employment opportunities for men, and address the negative image of part-time work and its damaging effects on career prospects for men. Second, an increased flexibility in working hours is needed to accommodate diverse needs and preferences for men and women. Third, policy must facilitate transitions between full and part-time work (eg through education and training). Fourth, levels of support for combining work/caring responsibilities must increase. Finally, countries need improved social protection policies for part-time employment. On the issue of male part-time employment, Hegewisch and Mayne (1994) reported that, while part-time employment is widely available in many European

countries, it remains a recruitment tool clearly linked to women's work and few male employees are likely to find employers offering them part-time work.

Hogarth et al's (2000) survey of British firms provided a detailed analysis of employee preferences for various other forms of working hours flexibility to balance work and family. In particular, their study in 250 firms, found 'a considerable latent demand from employees for the adoption of more flexible working time arrangements that would facilitate a better work-life balance'. As Liatta and O'Conghaile's study found, the men and women in Hogarth *et al's* survey differed greatly in their preferences:

- Men preferred working time arrangements that allowed flexibility of working time arrangements over the day, week or a longer period – in such forms as compressed hours, annualised hours and flexitime;
- Women tended to prefer practices that allowed for discrete changes in working time, term time working, and reduced hours.

Overall the study found a large, unmet demand for flexible working arrangements. For example:

- *flexitime*: while 24% of employees reported using flexitime, 47% of the remainder reported a desire to have such arrangements. In the study, flexitime was the area of greatest potential demand. Significantly, the preference was strongest among single parents – with 51% of those not working flexitime wanting to do so;
- *compressed working week*: while 6% of employees reported working a compressed week, 35% would like this option;
- *other flexible arrangements* for which employees reported a preference included: term-time working (25%); job share (16%); annualised hours (21%); reduced hours (24%); and part-time work (26%).

The significance of these findings on preferences for flexible working arrangements is underlined by a further findings that 56% of women who had taken maternity leave preferred greater flexibility over working hours to a longer period of maternity leave. The strength of this preference was related to occupational status, although the differences were not stark. Women managers and professionals (59%) were more likely to choose greater working flexibility on their return to work over longer periods of maternity leave than non-managerial working mothers (53%).

Hogarth et al found that a related and apparently critical preference of working parents is to be able to vary hours in the short term, in order to meet whatever pressures emerge for them outside the workplace. They wanted working arrangements that allowed them to manage their time. This appeared to be more important than having job share or annualised arrangements.

In comparisons of social policies, those in Sweden are often cited as the most progressive and most positive for achieving work and family balance. The history of the Swedish Government's work and family policies is well documented. One of the best historical accounts (in English) is Ruggie's (1984) comparative study of Sweden and Britain. Several more recent accounts provide

critical analyses of Swedish policies in practice and of working parents' attitudes/preferences in entitlements. For example, Haas and Hwang's (2000) study of parental leave describes Sweden's parental leave provisions, and then uncovers men's use of them. Based on their 1995 survey in 200 companies, Haas and Hwang observe that the proportion of men who take parental leave is no longer rising, and may be declining, and that fathers take a relatively small proportion of the leave available. They explain these patterns in terms of employer responses to the provisions and to men's attempts to use them. Bjornberg's (2000) study of Swedish provisions on work and family highlights the changing nature of attitudes towards policy, and the variations in attitudes and preferences by class. The study looks at the Swedish government's policy on parental leave and child care since the 1970s, the very different attitudes of workers by class to family policies (including financial support, child care, working conditions, and parental support), and the ways in which parents have adapted to work and family roles within the dual breadwinner model. Bjornberg identifies a declining support in segments of the population for any strengthening of government policy on work and family and predicts an increasing reliance on organisational policies to facilitate the work/family balance in the future.

Perhaps the most comprehensive comparative study is that of Fagan and Rubery (1997). The study, of the impact of motherhood on women's labour market participation provides an illuminating comparative overview of different policies for promoting the employment continuity of mothers in European Union countries. They argue that female participation in the labour market correlates directly with the degree to which the state provides two specific sets of policies:

- (i) entitlements to leave or reduced working time, and
- (ii) public provision or subsidy of non-parental child care.

Cross-national studies have found that women who work continuously during the pre-school years of their first child are more likely to go on to have a continuous career. A combination of measures is necessary to this labour market participation. In particular, entitlements to both extended leave and subsidised child care are, according to Fagan and Rubery, associated with the highest reconciliation of parental and employment responsibilities. A lack of co ordination of complementary policies undermines the effectiveness of any single policy. For instance, full-time leave entitlements may simply delay the timing of labour market departure unless other leave or child care arrangements exist. (Fagan and Rubery, pp.366-373)

In regard to maternity leave, Fagan and Rubery (pp.357-368) identified four critical issues:

- Whether the leave is paid: unpaid leave entitlements are rarely used.
- The length and flexibility of leave entitlements
- Whether the leave is complemented by public funding of child care
- Whether men take leave as well as women.

According to Fagan and Rubery, these two sets of policies form the core of maternal employment policy regimes. In the twelve member states they examined, Fagan and Rubery identified three regimes:

- (i) Weak breadwinner states: these are countries with an explicit policy commitment to facilitate the employment continuity of women during early child rearing years;
- (ii) Strong breadwinner states: these countries treat women as primarily wives and mothers rather than labour market participants. Provisions for the employment of working mothers are limited, hence encouraging women to spend early child rearing years at home, or organised as private concerns.
- (iii) Modified policy states: in these countries, the emphases of family policy have shifted in different directions over time according to the relative strength of different interest groups.

Table 5: The Strength of the ‘Male Breadwinner’ Presumption in State Parental Leave and Childcare Funding Policies

Breadwinner Presumption	Paid parental leave	% of publicly funded childcare places	% employment rate for mothers aged 20-39, 1991					
			Youngest child under 3 years			Youngest child aged 3-6		
			Under 3 years	3 years to school age	% employed (% employed in p/t work)	% total activity rate	% employed (% employed in p/t work)	% total activity rate
<i>Weak</i>								
Denmark	Yes	48	85	72 (31)	85	77 (39)	88	
<i>Modified</i>								
Belgium	Lower payment	20	95+	59 (36)	68	62 (39)	71	
France	Lower payment	20	95+	52 (27)	62	64 (27)	73	
<i>Strong</i>								
Italy	Lower payment	<10	85	42 (13)	50	42 (13)	51	
Germany	Lower payment	<10	65-70	38 (53)	41	48 (66)	52	
Greece	Unpaid	<10	65-70	39 (9)	45	40 (4)	46	
Spain	Unpaid	<10	65-70	32 (12)	43	35 (13)	48	
Portugal	Unpaid	<10	<55	67 (9)	73	72 (7)	78	
Netherland	Unpaid: only part time	<10	<55	37 (87)	42	42 (89)	49	
UK	Unpaid: only mothers	<10	<55	40 (65)	47	57 (71)	63	
Ireland	Unpaid: only mothers	<10	<55	33 (22)	41	30 (34)	40	
Luxembourg	Unpaid: only public sector	<10	55-60	36 (29)	33	42 (37)	44	

Sources: Table originally published in C. Fagan and J Rubery, ‘Transition between Family Formation and Paid Employment’ in A. Schmid et al (eds) *International Handbook of Labour Market Policy and Evaluation* Edward Edgar, Cheltenham, UK, 1996.

Fagan and Rubery's research also found a critical need for public policy interventions to help reconcile work/family responsibilities. They argue that, for employers, implementing family friendly initiatives can prove problematic. One reason for this is that the minority of firms that make such provisions available may find themselves subject to poaching of their experienced staff by 'free-riding' competitors. Another reason is that firms may be subject to intense economic pressure to reduce family-friendly provisions in time of recession. In terms of these issues, the advantage of public policy interventions is that they spread the costs more evenly across employers and over time, resulting in a more stable, wider female labour supply.

Hogarth et al's (2000) study of 250 British firms also emphasised the importance of public policy interventions in this area. They found that a substantial proportion of surveyed employers agreed that they had a responsibility to help employees balance work and other aspects of their lives. Almost two thirds of employers agreed that 'everyone should be able to balance their work and home lives in the way they want', while 91% recognised that 'people work best when they can balance their work and the other aspects of their life'. However, despite such views, most employers have made little concrete commitment to it. It would appear that reliance on the market to improve the work/family balance will result in a 'low equilibrium' response. Hogarth et al point out that, while agreeing with the sentiments, employers tend not to see this as a strategic priority. They also tend to overstate the constraints that production processes place on implementing flexible working arrangements that facilitate work/family balance. In this, perhaps unconsciously, employees tend to bolster employers by contributing to the development of workplace cultures that emphasise long working hours and by accepting that production processes constrain their employers' options in terms of flexible working arrangements.

4.3 Discussion

The review of research on the intersections of work and family in Australia, the US and the European Community points to several major changes in current practices and arrangements which are creating challenges for policy in Australia. First, patterns of labour market participation of mothers and fathers are changing. Of particular salience are the rising participation of women with dependants, the increasing proliferation of non-standard working arrangements, and changing patterns of working hours, especially in terms of the lengthening of the working day. A second challenge lies in the decline in universal standards and state protection of wages and working conditions, an increasing *ad hocery* in employment conditions, and an increased individualisation of employment contracts. Third, the increasing separation of wages from hours of work, and an accompanying decline in hourly rates of pay, in the long term will markedly affect the income prospects for working parents and their cost/benefit analyses of available employment options. A fourth challenge concerns the steady decline in the nation's fertility rate since the early 1990s, and the growing imbalance of work and family is widely reputed to be one of the causes for this trend. (MacDonald 1998 MacDonald et al 1999) Fifth, although a narrow range of 'family friendly' provisions has proliferated in Australian firms, in part due to collective bargaining at enterprise level, most employers have overwhelmingly failed to meet the key preferences of working parents and those aspiring to parenthood. Finally, all the international comparative literature on work and family issues clearly establishes that if we are interested in improving people's ability to balance work and parenting responsibilities no

research points to the benefits of the US/enterprise based model. The overwhelming consensus in the international comparative literature is that developments in Europe offer more promising leads for reform in the future. In particular a creative and well-financed blend of policies straddling industrial relations and social policy is essential if people are to be able to exercise real choices in how they navigate their work and parenting lives.

What are the key preferences of people with young children or aspiring to have young children? In Australia, as in other western market economies, there is a marked preference among working mothers for part-time work, and among working fathers for lower working hours that enable men to spend more time with their families. Provision for paid parental leave is a second critical factor in achieving work/family balance. Some form of payment or income maintenance appears to be crucial, especially in regard to paternity leave because men have proved reluctant to take parental leave if it involves a complete loss of income. Australia is alone among the western market economies in its failure to provide for paid maternity/paternity leave at national level. Another clear preference of working parents is for affordable, accessible child care that matches mothers' and fathers' patterns of labour force participation and the day-to-day needs of dual income couples. Related to this, is a preference for affordable, accessible child care that facilitates transitions between non-work and work (whether part-time or full-time).

In addressing these policy issues, account must also be taken of several characteristics of the work/family frontier. Of particular importance is the continuing attachment among many people to the traditional model of the household/family. Research in Australia and overseas, suggests a growing preference among mothers and fathers to be a dual-income household, with the father as primary breadwinner and mother maintaining at least part-time contact with the labour market. Another critical issue is that employer practices and demands appear to provide the greatest constraints on choice. Indeed, the preferences of working parents for policy reform – which, in the absence of precise research on the topic, appear to be largely directed at improving options outside their actual place of work - may be shaped by a perception of the types of change that they regard as possible in the current environment.

5. Proposed new directions

In developing possible new policy initiatives that could assist people achieve a better balance in their work and parenting lives we have undertaken the following:

- (a) identified seven key principles that should inform policy
- (b) identified specific initiatives which can, and should be, implemented in the immediate future to increase choices for families
- (c) outlined three scenarios of how the quality of work and family life is likely to evolve in Australia under different policy regimes.

5.1 Objectives of New Policy

Seven main principles have guided our thinking. These are outlined below.

1. RELEVANCE

Policy needs to address people's immediate problems and in a way that is consistent with their preferences. Such matters as maternity leave, child care (especially when children are sick) and upgrading the rights and rewards for part time workers are of particular relevance to working parents.

2. PROMOTING CHOICE

Historically many social and economic policies in Australia have assumed and/or promoted a model of working and home life based on a vision of the full time male breadwinner supporting a dependent wife and children. (Bittman and Pixley 1997 Chapters 7 and 8). This has sometimes been referred to as the 'Traditional Model' of work and family life. As a matter of aspiration and reality the relevance of this model has steadily declined over the last 30 years. The fact that fewer households conform to or even aspire to the 'Traditional Model' needs greater policy recognition. Growing numbers of households have either dual career couples or couples in which one works full time and the other part-time. Many families now have only a single parent. Policy should be directed at allowing households to make real choices about the type of situation they would prefer rather than promoting any one form of work/family configuration as 'the ideal'.

3. FAIRNESS IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE BURDENS OF CHILD REARING

A precondition for real choices lies in the distribution of the burdens of child rearing, and specifically, the levels of fairness in this distribution. Currently most of the burden associated with raising children falls on families. Within families, the burden falls

especially on women and children. Governments, through both setting standards and providing funds, have a central role to play in maintaining high levels of quality and access to children's services - regardless of a parent's income. Employers need to be more reasonable and accommodating in their approaches to hours of work.

4. *QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LIVES.*

Too often debate on work and family issues turns on how best to make other institutions meet the requirements of the workplace. Too often children's needs for quality time with parents, and especially routine and predictable time with friends and family, is overlooked in this debate. Recent US research has highlighted the importance of these issues for children. This is one of the reasons why in framing our policies we have been keen to ensure the costs of raising children are shared with employers and government and not only by families with children. Currently these costs are met by reducing the quality of care provided both within homes and beyond. In short, policy should not primarily be about giving workers more flexibility to 'fit the kids in' between work assignments. Rather it should be about allowing people to be better parents for their children.

5. *INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION*

Too often debates on public policy become preoccupied with relying either on market or state mechanisms. In particular the current fashion is to use the state to create quasi market mechanisms to deliver programs. Such conceptions of policy are limited and limiting. Historically Australia has made creative use of the community sector in developing and delivering children's services. This innovative strand in policy has withered in the 1990s with the preoccupation with greater reliance on market mechanisms and principles in social policy. Initiatives need to consider new ways of blending state, market and community arrangements to increase the choices available to families.

6. *ECONOMIC VIABILITY*

Too often debate about economic viability is couched in terms of maximising profitability and shareholder value. A concern with these issues is, only one part of the story. Economic viability goes to the sustainability of a society and population (McMurtry, 1998, 1999). For example, demographers have noted that work and family problems have been one of the key factors behind the declining birthrate. (eg MacDonald, 1998,1999). And Fagan and Rubery (1996) have identified a strong nexus between women's participation rates in the labour force and the type of work/family policy mix prevailing in a country. It is important that policy on work and family issues contributes positively to both the birth rate and women's participation in paid employment. A concern with work and family issues is important for the long run health of the economy and not just something that should be considered in a 'costs' or 'gains' to business framework.

7. *INTEGRATION OF POLICY (IE MOVING BEYOND 'AD HOCERY')*

The international comparative studies have identified that no one policy is central to improving people's ability to achieve a better balance in their work and family lives. Rather the key challenge is to effectively integrate of relevant policies into coherent regimes concerning work and family life.

5.2 *Specific initiatives*

In considering specific needs for policy, we can divide the critical problems pertaining to work/family conflict into three categories. These include first, those associated with particular parenting phases, second, those which parents experience at any and/or all parenting phases, and third, those relating to the incidence and extent of parenting at national level. An analysis of these problems in the light of the seven principles outlined above, suggests a number of policy proposals for each of the categories. Table 6 charts these proposals for specific policy initiatives.

Table 6: Proposals for specific policy initiatives

Type of problem addressed	Nature of the problem	Proposed initiative
<p>Specific problems associated with particular phases of childhood:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Newborns . Pre-schoolers . Primary school years 	<p>Disruption to parental routine and need for readjustment</p> <p>Help with child care, especially when sick and to meet short-notice demands</p> <p>Reliable, quality before and after school care</p>	<p>Paid maternity/paternity leave</p> <p>Increase flexibility in child care (eg pooling child care staff, at-home assistance)</p> <p>As for pre-schoolers</p>
<p>General problems affecting any parent with dependent children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . support in the home . support in the workplace 	<p>Problem of labour needed to run a household. Need for respite 'leave'. Need for support when child sick</p> <p>Problem of life constantly accommodating to the needs of work. (ie this situation needs to be reversed)</p>	<p>New home help entitlement</p> <p>Employee choice rostering schemes</p>
<p>National problem affecting the incidence and extent of parenting</p>	<p>Declining birth rate</p>	<p>Specific initiatives of the type noted above. More generally, however, a better integration of social, labour market and IR policy to enable smoother transition over different stages of the life cycle.</p>

An outline of the key issues that need to be taken to improve people's ability to strike a better balance in their work and parenting lives is provided below. It is important to note that these issues have been identified as the areas we believe require priority in the immediate future. The precise form of the initiatives to be taken in each of these area would require further detailed research. For example, Wilkinson et al (1997) have undertaken a comprehensive study of maternity leave arrangements, and Buchanan and Bearfield (1997) and Buchanan and Heiler (1998) have undertaken comprehensive studies of working reform.

1. INTRODUCTION OF A COMPREHENSIVE PAID MATERNITY LEAVE SCHEME²

There is a need for a national, publicly run scheme of paid maternity leave that offers support to women in paid work and to those who work at home. The Business Council of Australia has recently noted the importance of population growth for long run prosperity of the economy (BCA). Given this it seems only fair that such a scheme be financed, at least in part, by a levy on business - defined by reference to either cash flow or declared profits. This will ensure that the cost of employing women who become pregnant is shared across employers, reducing the costs to individual employers. Such a scheme of arrangement will ensure all women benefit, not just those in permanent, long term employment situations.

Paid leave should be available for an extended period. Currently the Commonwealth pays its women employees for 3 months. A number of overseas countries pay it for 12 months. Even in these countries, however, women still return to work before their children are 12 months, which is within the period frequently recommended for breast feeding.

2. QUALITY, AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE²

After school care, respite care and formal child care (in centres as well as family day care) are of central importance to families with children whether their parents work or not. Recent qualitative research has revealed that 'many women want to see government's increase their level of support for formal child care through greater subsidies, and direct funding to child care services', especially in the not-for-profit sector. (Pocock, 2000 p.86). The same report notes that:

'many women are concerned about the quality of care in child care centres at present, as many have reduced staff to reduce costs with the loss of government subsidy. It is hard to exaggerate the importance of these issues to women, whether working outside the home, or not; whether living in the city or on farms.' (Pocock, 2000 p.86).

The key issues requiring immediate action are:

- increasing subsidies and direct funding to child care centres and services, especially on the planned basis and for services that are run on a not-for-profit basis
- improved subsidies and support structures to encourage the provision of quality family day care

²Most of the wording and formulation of the ideas contained in this section have been taken from Barbara Pocock's recent highly informative report based on focus groups and semi-structured interviews with over 150 women and men in South Australia. See B. Pocock, *Having a Life: Work, Family, Fairness and Community Life in 2000*, Department of Social Inquiry, University of Adelaide, 2000 Manuscript, pp 74 - 75.

- increased provision of before and after school care at schools, including in the country
- provision of programs and activities for older students
- funding to establish seasonal child care for farming families.

Particular attention is needed to address the needs of low income families for whom quality, affordable formal child care is becoming increasingly unobtainable. It is important that consideration also be given to treating child care costs as a tax deduction as a work related expense.

3. *EXPERIMENTATION WITH NEW FORMS OF HOME HELP*

It is important to note that arguably the greatest child care need noted concerned the need for support when a child is injured or sick. Consideration needs to be given to trialling a number of different arrangements, such as new forms of home help schemes (HHS) to address this problem. For example, one form of HHS worthy of trialling would provide an entitlement to every household with children (or other dependants) to a fixed period of relief from child care/domestic duties. As an illustration, we would suggest that every family (with dependents) be entitled to the equivalent of two working days assistance per month. This assistance could be taken in the form of child care (eg two days care) or domestic assistance. *An underlying policy commitment would be to provide one day of formal child care per week to every child regardless of parental work status.* While federally funded, the HHS would be administered within established local structures [eg councils]. Such local organisations would engage a pool of staff to fulfil such purposes in the local area. Staff would also be available to meet emergency and other irregular/non-standard child care needs and would be known to the families concerned. In such cases, current forms of child care assistance would continue to apply. Some existing family allowances could be redirected to these services. Experimentation with arrangements such as these could also provide important lessons in community building and bringing renewed life back into neighbourhoods.

4. *EMPLOYEE CHOICE ROSTERING SCHEMES (ECRS)*

A family friendly strategy in the pioneering stage in several large European firms is the ECRS. Such schemes appear to be the initiatives of individual firms, with examples reported in Austria and Portugal. They provide for employees to choose their own rosters on a daily, weekly, seasonal and yearly basis. Linked to this is employee choice of vacations. In Portugal, the ECRS appears to be taking the form of flexible daily schedules whereby employees have a reduced number of hours (usually four) when they must be at their work station, and they can manage their remaining schedule in accordance with convenience and the demands of their job.

The ECRS has advantages for firms as well as employees. For instance, firms can operate at reduced staff levels during periods of low demand/production, and can meet large customer demand at other times, without the costs of overtime. A number of Austrian firms have adopted the ECRS to great advantage – with some reporting up to 70 rosters for production workers (in

one case, almost every employee works a different roster schedule). These firms are now employers of choice, with high levels of staff morale and productivity. Table 7 below describes two examples of the ECRS in Austria.

Table 7: Two Examples of an Employee Choice Rostering Scheme, Austria

<p style="text-align: center;">Neckermann, a mail order retailing firm No. of Employees: 442</p> <p>During the 1970s, Oelz introduced an employee choice rostering system, for its employees, 90% of whom are female. The firm's personnel advertisements included the following statement: 'Please select your working time for yourself'. Since then, the motto has become part of its creed. The firm opens at 5am and closes at 9pm and employees can select their working hours to fit the needs of their family. As a result, 45 different working times exist. In addition, employees can change their work schedule at any time. As well, vacations can be taken at any time and employees can take unpaid leave to deal with important family situations.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Oelz, a hosiery factors No. of employees: 110</p> <p>AT Neckermann, 85% of employees have part-time contracts, which vary from 13 to 30 hours weekly. The firm currently operates 70 different part-time work arrangements for these employees. Significantly, the firm has reserved 20 part-time work places for women with children under twelve years. All employees also have additional flexibility in their working arrangements. For instance, they can work up to 40 hours per week on an 'additional work basis', and the extra hours can be saved and used as free time in the off season. Neckermann reports significant cost savings in the 'standstill off season' periods, lower turnover and lower levels of sick leave</p>

Source: EU Network (Family and Work), 'Work-Time Solidarity', New Ways, 3/98, 1998

Key rights that need to be established to make choices real would include:

- rights for workers to share in decision making about staffing levels to ensure enough resources are allocated to get a good completed on time and at an adequate quality (eg allow overtime hours worked to be banked and then taken off during quiet period. If all workers in a work group have more than 100 hours banked each, then additional staff should automatically be recruited)
- require rosters/work schedules to be drawn up as far as possible in advance to allow people to plan other parts of their lives with certainty
- regulate the minimum and maximum hours that can be worked over a week, month or a year
- set clear rights to negotiate rostered time on and off, and rights to vary schedules once they are set (provided adequate notice or suitable, alternative labour is found)

- set clear appeal rights for those aggrieved by the design and/or operation of a schedule (these could be based on established grievance procedures contained in awards and agreements or by developing supplementary procedures designed especially for working time issues)
- generally, there needs to be basic rights to information, notice and to negotiate the design and functioning of work scheduling systems for all workers in a work group or workplace affected by a rostering system. Such general rights would provide a good safeguard on the operation of the other principles noted above.

5. EDUCATION AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR EMPLOYERS

The Karpin Report into the quality of Australian management in the mid 1990s argued that the quality of Australian management needed to be raised dramatically. (Industry Taskforce on Leadership and Management Skills, 1995) This applied to its capacity to handle the challenges of work and family issue as much as to any other area of management such as operations or marketing. Reforms such as employee choice rostering would throw up significant challenges for many managers. It is important that they be provided with training in the skills needed to manage such arrangements. The support should also extend to structures of advice. In the initial stages of implementing a new approach to work and family life policy the level of training support required is likely to be extensive. Over time, however, we would anticipate that demand for such services would subside as managers eventually learned how to manage in a 'family friendly' way on the basis of the new disciplines inscribed in new working time rights for workers.

6. BETTER INTEGRATION OF ALL THE DIFFERENT POLICY AREAS ASSOCIATED WITH WORK AND FAMILY ISSUES

In the 1980s and 1990s special sub-committees of Cabinet were established to achieve key government priorities of the day: ie the Expenditure Review Committee (ERC) and the Structural Adjustment Committee (SAC). Given the crisis in work and family life and the need for concerted action on the topic it is vital that co-ordination of this policy area become an active concern of Cabinet. The formation of a 'work and family' cabinet sub-committee would send a clear signal, and provide an effective means of achieving the integration of policy necessary to achieve effective reform.

7. PROVISION OF BETTER INFORMATION ON WORK AND FAMILY ISSUES.

This report has had to rely on a very patchy set of data sources to derive its findings. It is unfortunate that the Howard Government has not yet undertaken a subsequent Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey to gather information on workplace practices and employee preferences. Reform on work and family issues in places like Holland have been propelled by powerful data on workers' preferences and how poorly they have been met by reliance on market mechanisms. The systematic collection of data on preferences and practices would potentially play a vital role in monitoring and informing further policy development in this area.

5.3 Thinking Through Possible Futures: Three Scenarios

5.3.1 DEFINING THREE SCENARIOS

To help draw our findings together and provide a focal point for discussion on where work and family policy should go next, we have identified a number of scenarios of how events could unfold in the future. A scenario is defined as ‘an imagined sequence of future events’.

On the basis of our research, we believe there are three possible scenarios.

- Scenario A is a continuation of current trends. Accordingly, the work/family imbalance would intensify in forthcoming years, increasing the challenges that families face and the dissonance between public policy and employer strategy on the one hand, and family preferences on the other;
- Scenario B represents our projections of a potentially emerging trend based on greater reliance on best practice at enterprise level. This would include the spread of innovative family-friendly practices through both human resource management policy and industrial relations instruments such as awards and agreements;
- Scenario C is based on strategies to increase the choices available to working parents as to the parenting pathway – and household model – they may adopt. We refer to this scenario as the Lifestyle Choice Scenario, directed to making realistic, a range of lifestyle choices for working parents.

These scenarios are simplified projections of possible developments. The future is likely to be far more complex than any of the scenarios implies. However, we see the consideration of possible scenarios as a useful way of exploring the very different implications that future developments may have for the work/family balance.

5.3.2 SCENARIO A. CONTINUATION OF CURRENT TRENDS

The changing nature of work and changing patterns of workforce participation are making it harder to balance work and family life in terms of reconciling time pressures, caring and parenting responsibilities, intimate and close relations, and health and well-being. In 1995, one quarter of employees believed that their work/family balance was deteriorating. Since then, signs of improvements have emerged in several areas, including award provisions for part-time work, carer’s leave, unpaid maternity/ paternity leave and the adoption of family-friendly employment provisions by some employers. However, strategic human resource initiatives in the work and family area vary considerably by firm, are often subject to the criticism that practice fails to match espoused policy, and are essentially a voluntary exercise for employers. Public policy and industrial relations developments, while significant, have been limited in scope and still fail to adequately address some of the major work/family challenges that working parents and their children face. These include the full range of child care needs, support structures that enable working parents to choose employment arrangements that match their parenting needs without penalty, practical support for fathers to spend time with their families, and measures to facilitate transitions between parenting pathways, and between non-employment and employment.

Most of the problems documented in this report arose from policies and practices associated with current trends consequently, we can predict that *Scenario A* would result in few concrete improvements to work/ family balance. In all likelihood, the challenges that working parents face would continue to intensify as their work/family balancing act speeds towards a tragic collision.

5.3.3 *SCENARIO B. BEST PRACTICE MODEL*

This scenario has many features of the previous one, given that the best practice initiatives of employers do not directly affect public policy. What is significant about this scenario is that, on a wide basis, employers respond constructively to employees' needs for an improved work/family balance. In this scenario, current trends among leading edge employers to provide family-friendly conditions and benefits to employees would multiply within and among organisations. Employers, generally, would recognise not only the challenges that their current working arrangements pose for employees trying to balance work and family responsibilities, but also the value to the organisation of facilitating and improving this balance. Employer strategies would include flexible working hours provisions, a variety of leave arrangements, protection of entitlements and support for the career prospects of staff who avail themselves of family-friendly options, and other innovations in such areas as child care, home-to-work transitional arrangements, keep-in-touch schemes, parenting seminars and so on.

The overall result is likely to be a more attractive working environment for those employees benefiting from such schemes, and improved work/family balance. However, the benefits of *Scenario B* are limited by the following factors:

- (i) Benefits are not universal, they are confined to those organisations that offer them. Accordingly, benefits will vary considerably by organisation.
- (ii) There can be a wide gap between policy and practice in organisations. In all organisations there is a marked difference between espoused and actual policy – and research suggests that the presence of family-friendly employment provisions does not necessarily translate into effective provisions for working parents. For the provisions to be effective, there must also be management support and commitment, employee knowledge of available provisions, and confidence that career prospects and other benefits will be protected if use is made of these entitlements.
- (iii) The best practice scenario is an employer-based strategy and will not address many of the current problems that working parents face in relation to such factors as: child care, maternity/paternity leave, the unequal burden of domestic labour, labour market transitions, and the growing problem of finding leisure time to spend with the family.
- (iv) In the long run it is likely to reach major limits as opportunist employers prey on the gains delivered by their more ethical colleagues.

5.3.4 SCENARIO C. 'LIFESTYLE CHOICE' MODEL

This scenario has been devised in an effort to identify a possible future that avoids the pitfalls of Scenarios A and B. At the core of Scenario C is an integrated set of policies and practices that gives to employees a real choice concerning parenting pathways. It enables employees to shift between household models according to parenting phase (related to age of children) and other needs. Scenario C would involve:

- a co-ordinated set of complementary public policy initiatives across portfolios;
- entitlements based on the child, rather than on household model;
- entitlements that relieve the work/family burden in concrete ways that make it possible for mothers and fathers to undertake their preferred parenting pathway.

Scenario C would include policy initiatives in the following areas:

- improved parental leave (pre/post natal and beyond);
- improved access to child care, flexibility of child care facilities, and range of options to meet needs for irregular, unpredictable and non-standard hours care;
- better organisation and management of part-time work, including such issues as portability of benefits;
- real access to flexible employment arrangements such as job sharing, employee-choice rostering schemes, career breaks etc;
- better support for single parents – working and non-working – to facilitate transitions to the labour market, and ameliorate their higher levels of work/family conflict;
- encouragement/support for men to increase their involvement in family responsibilities.

To be effective, Scenario C would require innovative policies that directly target key underlying dilemmas of the work/family balancing act – the pressure to find *time* for family, the *costs* of meeting family demands, and the *unpredictability* of childrens' and employers' needs. The policies would be universal in their basic application, but also address specific needs of parents and children, which vary by household model. Moreover, the policies must be non-discriminatory against those involved in dual-income household models. Two policy initiatives in particular would be vital for making choices real: effective employee choice rostering and a better network of home help arrangements. Such arrangements would need to move beyond the piloting stage and become fully integrated support networks. Equally support for employers would need to become real. The success of this proposed approach to reform would arise from the formation of institutions that increased choices for all and did not rely on good will of the parties that can rapidly disappear when economic times turn bad, key individuals leave or when a firm is taken over by less 'family friendly' owner.

The implications of the three scenarios will vary for each parenting pathway. Table 8 charts the likely outcomes that a continuation of current trends, the best practice model, and the lifestyle choice scenario would have for parents in each of the four pathways or household models which we identified earlier in this paper.

Table 8: Future Scenarios And Their Implications For Parenting Pathways

PARENT PATHWAY	SCENARIO A: Current Trends Continue	SCENARIO B: Best Practice Model	SCENARIO C: Lifestyle Choice Model
Traditional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key benefits and problems remain; • Fathers’ absence from home grows; • Opportunities and choice for mothers to gradually return to work declines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key benefits and problems remain; • Breadwinner regains some involvement in family life for critical events; • Employers provide some work flexibility to meet family needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breadwinner is available for family events and has some work flexibility to meet family demands; • Supports exist for ‘homemakers’ to make transition to labour market; • Child care relief is accessible and affordable; • Mothers have return-to-work options; • Fathers have real options for paternity leave, career breaks and part-time wk.
One plus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fathers’ absence from home grows; • Family friendly provisions limited and variable; • Sharing of domestic labour becomes more problematic as working hours pressures rise; • Pressure for flexible child care rises as more families adopt model. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Father regains some involvement in family life for critical events; • Employers provide some work flexibility to meet family responsibilities; • Key benefits and problems remain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Father is available for family events and has some work flexibility to meet family demands; • Affordable, accessible child care is available at the hours needed, at short notice, and to meet special needs; • Parents have <u>real</u> options for part-time work and other flexible arrangements, and forms of leave, to meet family duties (incl. protection of entitlements and career prospects).
Career Couple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents’ absence from home grows; • Growing pressure on domestic labour front as working hours change etc; • Rising demand for emergency, sick and vacation child care; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both parents regain some involvement in family life for critical events; • Employers provide some work flexibility to facilitate work/ family balance; • Key benefits and problems remain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both parents are available for critical events and have some work flexibility to meet family demands; • Affordable, accessible child care is available at the hours needed, at short notice, and to meet special needs; • Parents have real options for part-time work and other flexible arrangements, and forms of leave, to meet family duties (incl. protection of entitlements and career prospects).
Single Parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work/family imbalance reaches critical state. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent gains flexibility in some work arrangements to meet family responsibilities; • Key problems remain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent is available for critical events and has some work flexibility to meet family demands; • Child care is affordable, accessible and available at hours needed, at short notice, and to meet special needs – for working parent and for parent seeking to make transition to labour market; • Parent has real options for part-time work and other flexible arrangements, and forms of leave, to meet family demands; • Assistance is available to help single parent meet double burden of domestic responsibilities and to reduce the higher work/ family conflict.

6. Conclusion: Increasing choices by raising standards

It is clear that many people are dissatisfied with the balance in their work and parenting lives and the situation is deteriorating. A major source of the problem is the 'enterprise as island' mindset. With apologies to John Donne: no enterprise is an island. Wider economic conditions profoundly shape and constrain enterprise behaviour. Wider social conditions, especially those in households, shape their labour supply. To date work and family policy has focussed on ad hoc initiatives that are based on a 'best practice' model of change that has failed to deliver any widespread positive change. Clearly problems in households with working parents require responses that are systemic in nature.

Our key finding is that new standards and support structures are needed to expand the range of choices available to individuals and households. The key initiatives needed are:

- a comprehensive system of paid maternity leave paid by government but financed, at least in part by employers
- a comprehensive, quality child care system in which issues of quality and access are predominant and not compromised by a preoccupation with profit maximisation
- employee choice rostering arrangements buttressed by award, and if necessary, legislative specification of rights and obligations to give individuals greater capacity to fit work around their family lives
- experimentation with new support structures at neighbourhood level to help provide assistance on a regular basis for all households with dependents and especially those with sick children
- development of new training and support arrangements to help employers run their businesses in a way that is compatible with proposed new obligations to improve the quality of balance in the work and family lives of their workers
- formation of a cabinet sub-committee on work and family issues to oversee better integration of initiatives that affect the quality of balance between work and family life
- better collection of data and monitoring of preferences and policy impacts.

In the 1980s and 1990s Australia rapidly restructured key institutions to meet the challenges of increased internationalisation of the economy. It is now clear that these changes came at a significant social cost. It is imperative that in the coming decade Australia introduces positive changes in the social realm. This is not simply to improve the quality of life for ordinary Australians – important though this objective is. It is also vital to ensure that one of the key underpinnings of our society and economy (ie the family) flourishes and is not treated as something which should simply 'adjust' to remorseless 'market forces.'

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