

Excessive Hours and Unpaid Overtime: 2018 Update

By Troy Henderson and Tom Swann
Centre for Future Work at the Australia Institute

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Introduction and Summary

2018 marks the tenth annual **Go Home on Time Day** (GHOTD), an initiative of the Centre for Future Work at the Australia Institute that shines a spotlight on overwork among Australians, including excessive overtime that is often unpaid.

Over many years, the Centre for Future Work and the Australia Institute have commissioned regular annual opinion polls to investigate overwork, unpaid overtime, and other instances of “time theft” in Australia. This year’s poll of 1459 Australians was conducted between September 17-26, with a sample that was nationally representative according to gender, age and state or territory.

Of the 1459 respondents, 880 (or 60 percent) were currently in paid work. That sub-sample was then asked several questions regarding their hours of work, whether they wanted more work or less, and whether they worked unpaid overtime in their jobs.

This report summarises the results of that polling, and places it in the context of national labour force trends:

- There is growing evidence of a sharp polarisation in Australian employment patterns, between those with full-time, relatively secure jobs, and a growing portion working part-time, casual, temporary, or insecure positions.
- In the survey, 54 percent were employed in permanent full-time jobs, while 46 percent were employed as part-time, casual or self-employed workers. In other words, **almost half of the sample experienced one or more degrees of non-standard or insecure work** – broadly in line with the experience in the overall labour market.¹
- Compared with last year, **there was a significant increase in those wanting more paid hours** (from 34 percent to 40 percent) and a decrease in those wanting fewer paid hours (from 19 percent to 15 percent). We believe this shift reflects the high levels of underemployment in Australia’s labour force,² and the ongoing struggle of those in non-standard jobs to attain enough hours of work.

¹ For example, Carney and Stanford (2018) reported that workers in permanent full-time paid jobs with normal paid leave entitlements (for holidays, sickness, etc.) now constitute just under 50% of total employment in Australia.

² ABS data (Catalogue 6202.0, Table 22) report 9 percent of Australian workers are underemployed (that is, would prefer more hours of paid work), and over 20 percent of young workers.

- In the survey, 20 percent of full-time workers said they would prefer to work fewer hours, and 30 percent said they wanted more. 50 percent said their hours were about right.
- By contrast, those in part-time or casual positions work far fewer and more uncertain hours, and most would prefer to work more – 54 percent of part-time workers and 63 percent of casual workers. This highlights the problems of underemployment and inadequate incomes experienced by the growing proportion of Australian workers in insecure jobs. Only 7 percent of part-time employees and 2 percent of casuals wanted fewer paid hours.
- **At the same time as many Australian workers report they would prefer more hours of *paid* work, the incidence of *unpaid* overtime is also growing:** including coming in early, leaving late, working at home or on weekends, working through regular breaks and lunch hours, responding to calls or emails out of working hours, and more. Across all forms of employment, our respondents reported working **an average of 6.0 hours of unpaid labour per week** (up from an average of 5.1 hours in 2017 and 4.6 hours in 2016).
- This translates into an annual average of 312 hours of unpaid overtime per worker per year across all forms of employment. Based on a standard 38-hour workweek, this is equivalent to **more than 8 weeks (or 2 months) of unpaid work per worker per year.**
- Full-time workers reported the greatest incidence of unpaid overtime: on average 7.1 hours per week. This was a substantial increase from a reported 6 hours per week in last year’s survey.
- Part-time workers worked on average 4.2 hours per week unpaid, while even casual workers worked on average 2.8 hours unpaid.
- The aggregate value of this “time theft” is substantial. Across the workforce, we estimate **the total value of unpaid overtime at \$106 billion in 2018.** This widespread non-payment for so much of Australians’ working time reduces family incomes, weakens consumer spending, and exacerbates the challenge of work-life balance.
- In an era of wage stagnation, underemployment, insecure work and significant cost of living pressures, Australian workers cannot afford to give their time away to employers for free.

Hours of Work

Table 1 summarises the employment status and normal hours of work reported by respondents to the survey. 60 percent of respondents were employed. This figure is consistent with the average employment rate reported by the ABS in its monthly labour force survey.³

Of those employed, 54.1 percent worked in standard full-time positions, while the remainder worked in part-time (22.2 percent), casual (13.2 percent) or self-employed (10.6 percent) positions. In our sample, therefore, almost half of employed Australians reported experiencing one or more dimensions of non-standard or insecure employment – also broadly consistent with overall labour market averages.⁴

Table 1. Employment Status of Sample

	Employed	Not Employed		
Percent of Total Sample	60.0%	40.0%		
	Full-Time	Part-Time	Casual	Self-Employed
Percent of Employed	45.9%	22.2%	13.2%	10.6%
Average Hours/Week	39.6	22.8	16.7	32.0

Source: Survey results as described in text.

Full-time workers in the sample reported working an average of just under 40 hours per week. Regular part-time workers worked an average of 22.8 hours per week, compared to 16.7 hours per week for casual workers and 32.0 hours per week for the self-employed.

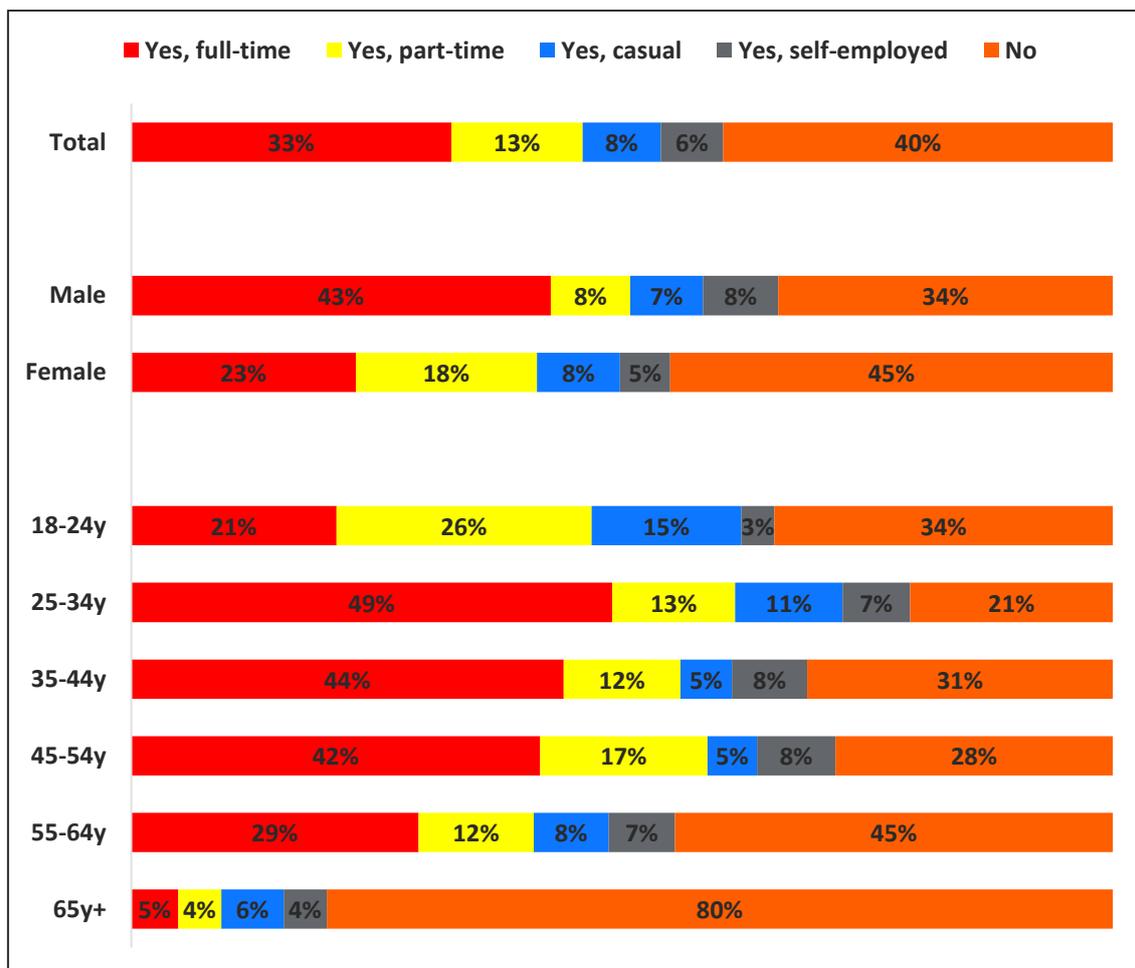
Hours for self-employed workers were about the same as in the 2017 survey. However average hours worked by full-time and part-time workers were slightly lower than in 2017 (down from 40.3 hours and 23.3 hours respectively), and hours worked by casual workers were substantially lower (down from 21.6 hours). Again, this is consistent with aggregate labour market data indicating a decline in average working hours, driven primarily by growing underemployment (especially for workers in precarious jobs).

³ The employment to population ratio was 62.3 percent in October 2018; see ABS Catalogue 6202.0.

⁴ Carney and Stanford (2018) report that in 2017 slightly over half of all employed Australians experienced part-time, casual, or self-employment. The size of these specific categories of non-standard work vary in our sample from overall labour market averages (likely because workers who are both part-time and casual identified themselves in our survey as part-time workers not casual workers); but the overall incidence of non-standard work in our sample is reasonably accurate.

Figure 1 describes employment status by gender and age. Women were far more likely to work in part-time or casual roles (26 percent) than men (15 percent). Those aged 18-24 were the most likely to be in part-time or casual work (41 percent), compared to less than 24 percent for all other age cohorts.

Figure 1. Employment Status by Gender and Age Cohort



Source: Survey results as described in text.

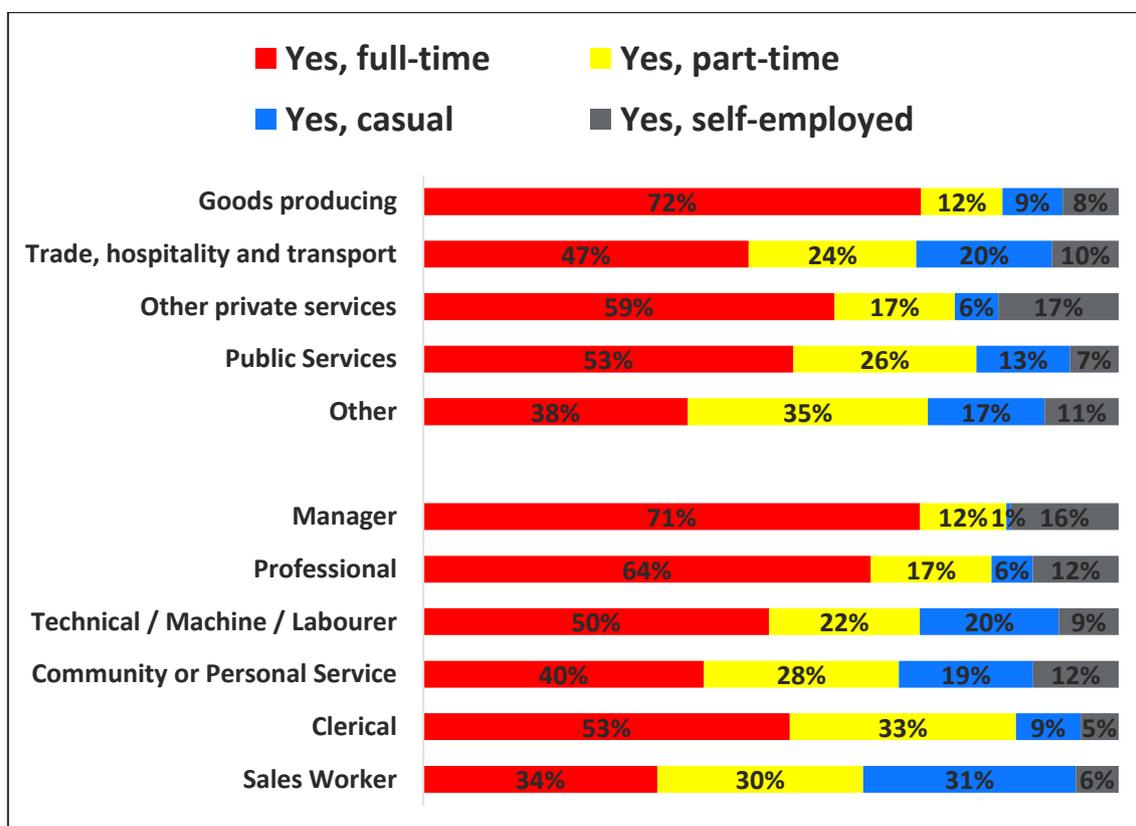
Figure 2 illustrates the breakdown of employment status by industry. There are stark differences between different sectors of the Australian economy in relation to employment status, reflecting the polarisation of working conditions across the labour force.

Goods-producing industries like mining, manufacturing, utilities, construction and agriculture were the most likely to have workers in full-time work (72 percent). In contrast, fewer than half of workers in Trade, Hospitality and Transport were in full-time work (47 percent), with a similar proportion (44 percent) in casual or part-time

work. Public services, like health, education and administration, were only slightly more likely to be full-time (53 percent).⁵

Figure 2 also illustrates the incidence of full-time work across different occupations. Managers and Professional staff were most likely to be in full-time work (71 percent and 64 percent respectively), but less than half of Sales Workers (34 percent) and Community and Professional Service workers (40 percent) worked full-time. Most Sales Workers (61 percent) were in casual or part-time work, and more Community and Professional Service workers were in casual or part-time work (47 percent).

Figure 2. Employment Status by Industry and Occupation
(percentage of employed persons)



Source: Survey results as described in text.

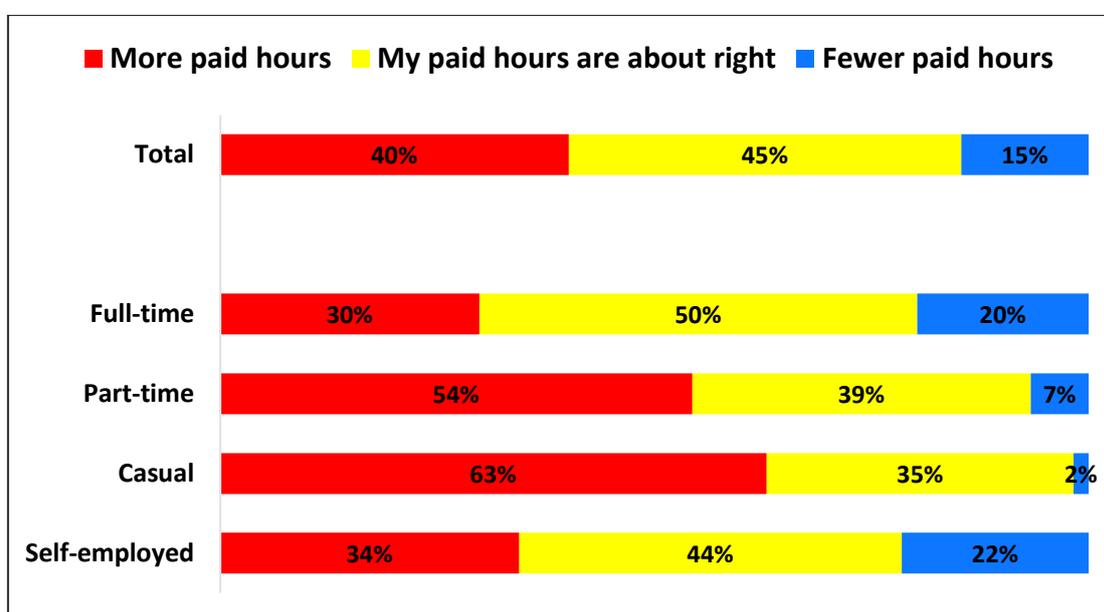
⁵ Our survey data also includes a significant proportion of responses which indicated they worked in a catch-all “Other” category, other than the first 4 groupings. Most of these respondents likely did not know how to precisely categorise the industry where they work, and hence this category likely includes workers from across all the other sectors.

Polarisation of Working Hours

Slightly under half of all employed workers in our survey indicated that their hours of work were “about right.” A small share preferred to work fewer paid hours (15 percent), while a larger share wanted more paid hours (40 percent).

Not surprisingly, there were major variations in attitudes toward working hours depending on how many hours respondents are currently working, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Hours of Paid Work Preferences

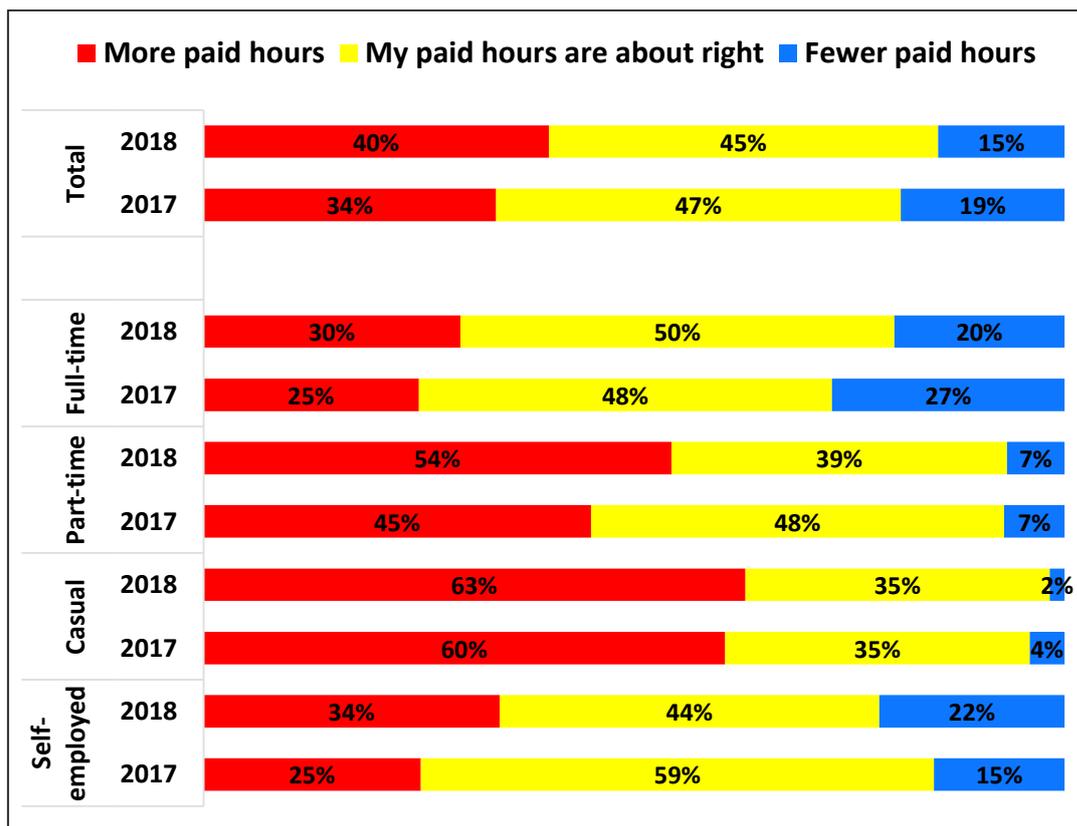


Source: Survey results as described in text.

People in full-time work were far more likely to say they preferred to work fewer paid hours (20 percent) compared to part-time (7 percent) and casual (2 percent). On the other hand, most people in part-time (54 percent) and casual (63 percent) work wanted more paid hours, compared with minorities of full-time (30 percent) and self-employed (34 percent) workers. These results confirm the problem of underemployment, experienced particularly by those in casual and part-time work. Already facing chronic insecurity in hours of work and hence incomes – exacerbated by low wages in most part-time and casual jobs – these workers indicate a strong preference for more paid work.

There were some significant changes in attitudes to hours of work, compared with previous Go Home on Time Day surveys. Compared with 2017, a larger proportion of respondents indicated a preference for more paid hours, while fewer wanted to reduce their hours of work. As illustrated in Figure 4, this shift was experienced across most categories of employment status.

Figure 4. Preferences for More or Less Hours of Paid Work



Source: Poll results as described in text and Swann and Henderson (2017).

Workers overall wanting *more* paid hours increased from 34 percent in 2017 to 40 percent in 2018. At the same time, workers wanting *fewer* paid hours decreased from 19 percent to 15 percent.

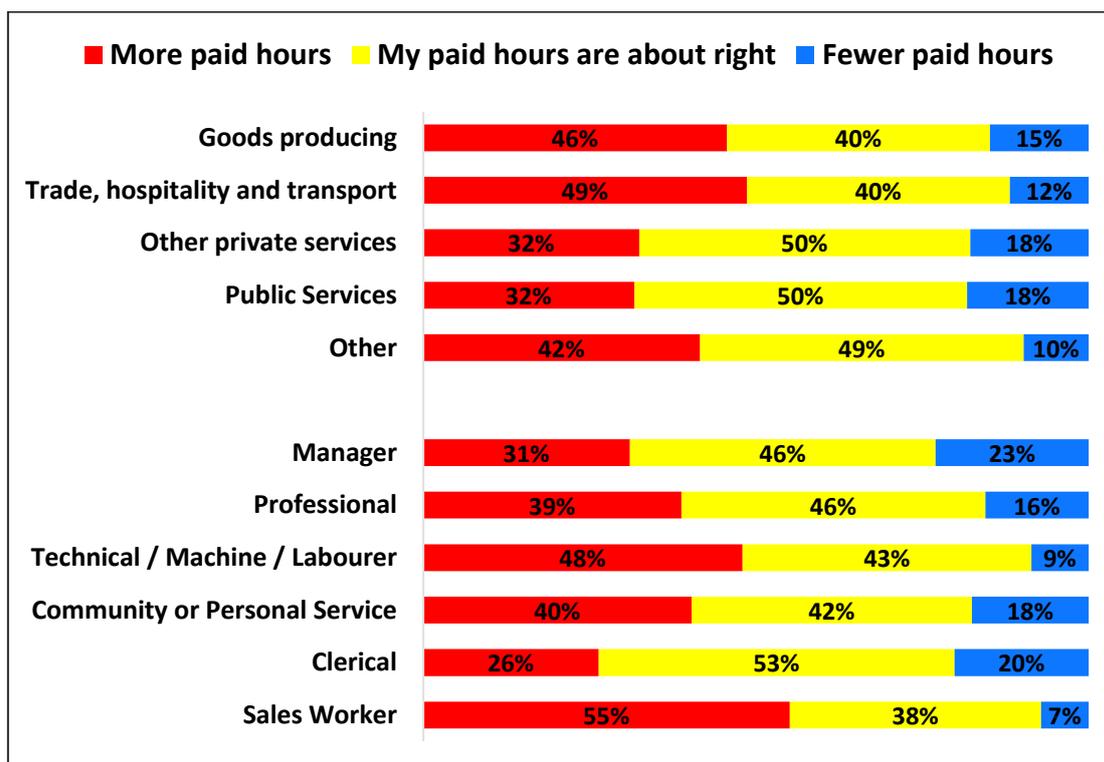
Workers in every kind of work arrangement wanted more hours than workers in last year’s survey. The most dramatic increase was amongst part-time workers (45 percent up to 54 percent) and self-employed workers (25 percent up to 34 percent). Full-time workers were also less likely to want fewer hours (27 percent down to 20 percent). Only amongst self-employed workers was there an increase in the numbers who wanted fewer paid hours (15 percent up to 22 percent).

There are also substantial differences in attitudes toward working hours across industry and occupation groupings (illustrated in Figure 5). Workers in Goods-Producing industries (46 percent), and Trade, Hospitality and Transport were most likely to want more hours (49 percent), while those in Public Services (education, health and public administration) were least likely (32 percent).

In terms of occupational attitudes, Sales Workers were most likely to want more work (55 percent), followed by Technicians, Machine Operators and Labourers (48 percent). Managers were most likely to want less paid work (23 percent), followed by Clerical workers (20 percent).

The differences between industries were less pronounced than between occupations. This is probably because occupations are likely to be more closely correlated with variations in the incidence of full-time, part-time or casual work, and hence correlated with attitudes to to working time.

Figure 5. Preferences for More or Less Hours of Paid Work by Industry and Occupational Category



Source: Survey results as described in text.

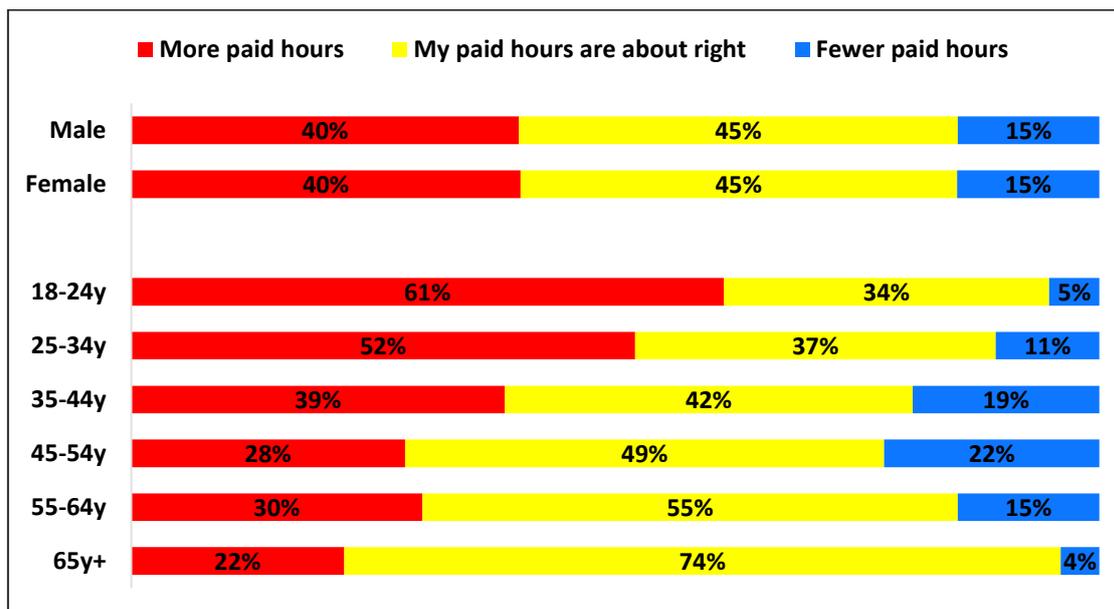
Perhaps surprisingly, there is little variation in attitudes toward working hours by gender, with men and women equally likely to prefer more or fewer hours. This is surprising given that men are more likely to be in full-time work, and (as noted above)

full-time workers are the most likely to be satisfied with their current hours. This suggests that to some degree the higher incidence of part-time work among women reflects a preference for shorter working hours – likely reflecting the difficulties of balancing paid work and caring responsibilities (given Australia’s inadequate early child education and other family-supporting services).

More expectedly, younger workers are much more likely to want more paid hours. Fully 61 percent of workers under 24 would prefer more hours, as would over half of those aged 25-34. The desire for more hours then declines steadily with age, with less than 30 percent of workers over 45 preferring more hours. Since younger people are much more likely to be in casual and part-time work, their desire for more hours is not surprising.

Workers between 35 and 54 years old were most likely to prefer fewer hours (around 20 percent). Again, this desire for shorter working hours has declined since our 2017 survey. Figure 6 illustrates the breakdown by gender and age cohorts.

Figure 6. Hours of Paid Work Preferences by Gender and Age



Source: Survey results as described in text.

In summary, younger people and those in casual and part-time work express a strong preference for more hours of paid work. A substantial proportion of those in full-time employment reported a desire for shorter working hours. These findings confirm that the simultaneous and seemingly inconsistent problems of overwork and under-employment remain persistent features of Australia’s labour market.

Ironically, many Australians would prefer to work less paid hours, while many more would prefer to work more paid hours. It would thus be a mutually beneficial outcome to shift paid work from those with too many hours, to those with too few. However, the staffing strategies of employers are preventing this seemingly logical redistribution of work. The polarisation of working hours reflects the dichotomy in employer strategies: they utilise a precarious, “just-in-time” workforce strategy for many jobs (which shifts the burden of fluctuations in demand and schedules onto the shoulders of part-time, casual, and contingent labour), while also demanding very long hours (including large amounts of unpaid overtime) from a separate group of core, largely full-time workers. This polarisation in working hours has been visible in our previous Go Home on Time Day surveys, but this year’s results indicate the problem is getting worse. And even among full-time workers there has been an increase in the numbers of Australians preferring more hours, likely reflecting the financial pressures on households arising from wage stagnation and rising living costs.

Unpaid Overtime

Survey respondents were also asked about the number of hours they worked unpaid for their employer in the past seven days. This could include arriving at work early, staying late, working through breaks (such as tea or lunch breaks), working from home in the evenings and on weekends, taking calls or e-mails out of working hours, and other forms of unpaid labour.

Across all forms of employment, our respondents worked an average of 6.00 hours of unpaid labour for their employers in the preceding week. That represents the second straight increase in reported unpaid overtime, up from 5.10 in our 2017 survey and 4.64 unpaid hours in 2016).⁶

There are significant differences in the incidence of unpaid overtime across workers in different forms of employment. Unpaid overtime is more severe for full-time workers, who report an average of 7.07 hours per week. Self-employed workers also reported heavy unpaid overtime: 8.39 hours per week.⁷ But even among part-time and casual workers, who are highly anxious to attain more *paid* work (as reported above), unpaid overtime is endemic: over 4 hours per week average unpaid overtime for part-time workers, and almost 3 hours per week for casual workers.

	Full-Time	Part-Time	Casual	Self-Employed	Total
Unpaid Overtime per Week 2018	7.07	4.15	2.83	8.39	6.00
Share of Paid Hours Worked	17.9%	18.2%	17.0%	26.2%	18.8%
Unpaid Overtime per Week 2017	5.98	3.29	3.32	6.31	5.10

Source: Survey results as described in text, and Swann and Henderson (2017).

The trend towards increased hours of unpaid overtime is visible across three of the four major employment categories (see Table 2). This increase in unpaid overtime is

⁶ For previous years' results see Swann and Henderson (2017), and Swann and Stanford (2016).

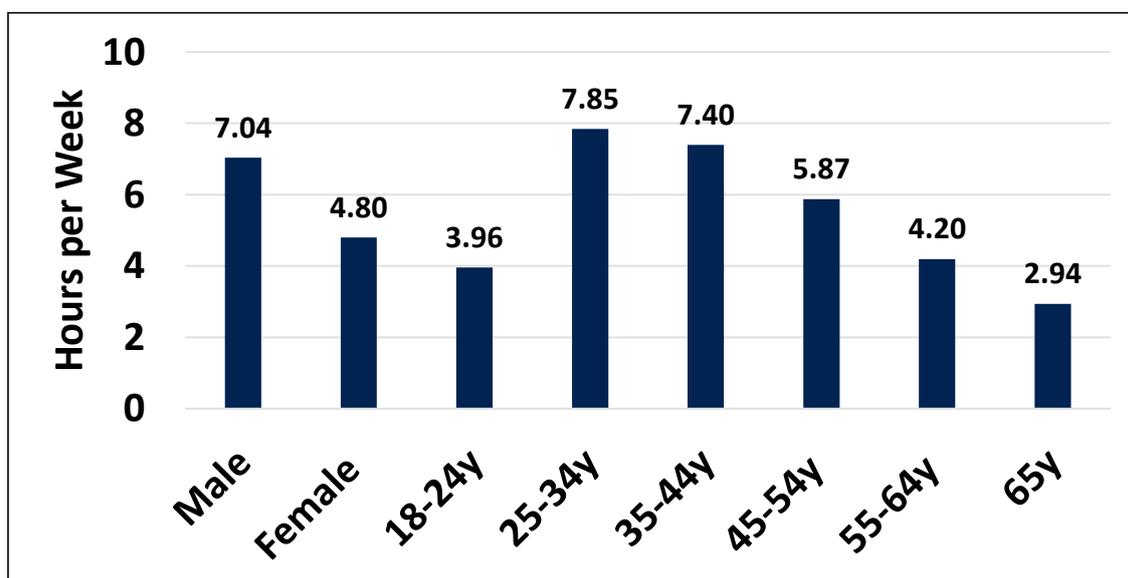
⁷ The concept of "unpaid overtime" is somewhat imprecise for self-employed workers, who in addition to any formal wage or salary payment from their businesses are also compensated through the business's profits.

particularly concerning during a period of low wage growth, high underemployment and record levels of insecure work.⁸ For all categories of paid employees (that is, excluding self-employed workers), unpaid overtime represents 17-18 percent of total paid work time. For the self-employed, unpaid overtime exceeded one-quarter of paid work time.

On an annualised basis (assuming a constant rate of unpaid overtime throughout the year), this translates into an annual average of 312 hours of unpaid overtime per worker per year across all forms of employment. Based on a standard 38-hour workweek, this is equivalent to more than 8 weeks (or 2 months) of unpaid work per worker per year. Extrapolated across Australia’s workforce as a whole, this implies total unpaid overtime worked of some 3.25 billion hours per year.

Figure 7 illustrates average unpaid overtime per week by gender and age cohort. Men reported an average of 7.04 hours of unpaid overtime per week, compared to 4.80 hours for women.⁹ Those aged 25-34 (7.85 hours) and 35-44 year-olds (7.40 hours) perform significantly more unpaid overtime than the average of 6.00 hours for all employees in the sample.

Figure 7. Unpaid Overtime by Gender and Age



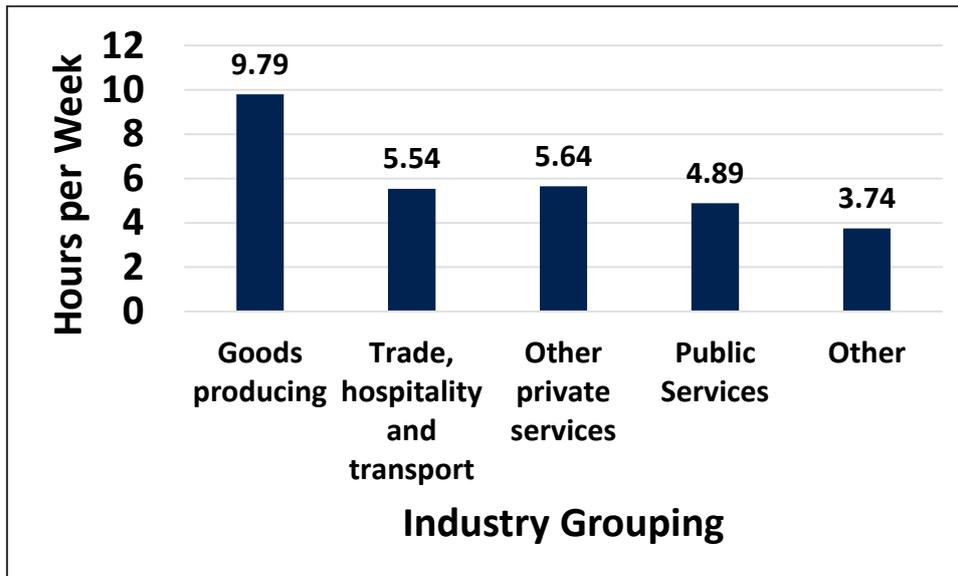
Source: Survey results as described in text.

⁸ Carney and Stanford (2018).

⁹ Of course, these figures are not including hours of unpaid caring and household work, a disproportionate share of which is performed by women.

Figure 8 reports the average amount of unpaid work by industry grouping. Workers in Goods-Producing industries (Agriculture, Mining, Manufacturing, Utilities and Construction) report the highest levels of unpaid overtime, at 9.79 hours per week. Workers in private services industries¹⁰ worked in excess of 5.5 hours unpaid overtime per week, while Public Services workers (in Education, Healthcare & Social Assistance, Public Administration) worked 4.89 hours per week.

Figure 8. Unpaid Overtime by Industry

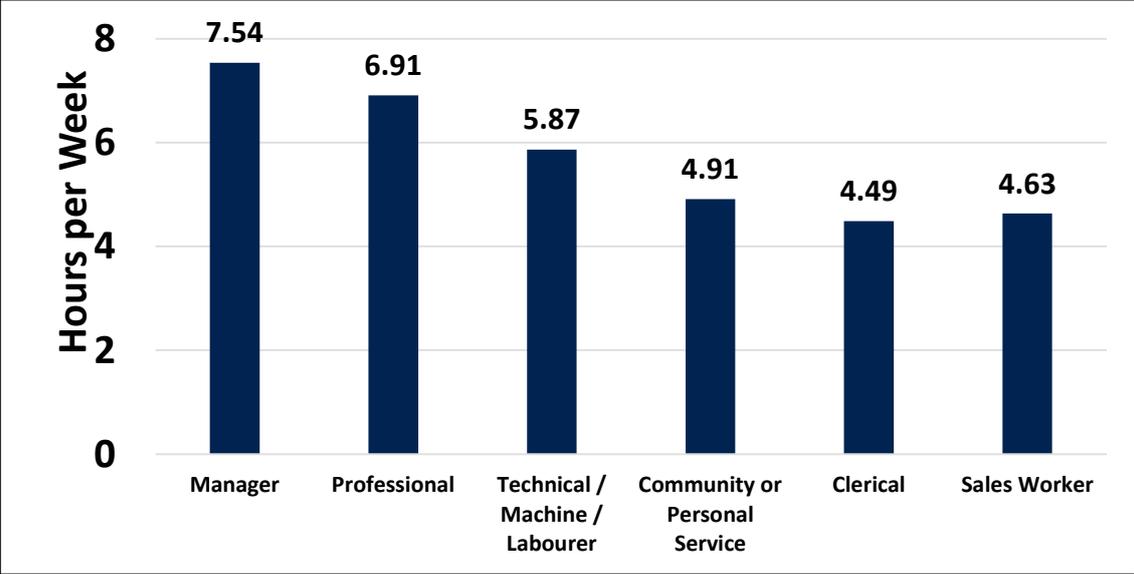


Source: Survey results as described in text.

Finally, Figure 9 breaks down average unpaid overtime by occupational category. Managers (7.54) and Professionals (6.91) report the highest levels of unpaid overtime. Technicians, Machinery Operators and Labourers work unpaid overtime (5.87) slightly below the average for all workers. Community and Personal Service, Clerical, and Sales workers reported the least unpaid overtime – less than 5 hours per week.

¹⁰ Our results include two amalgamated private services categories: Trade, Hospitality and Transportation; and Other Private Services. Both categories recorded similar levels of unpaid overtime.

Figure 9. Unpaid Overtime by Occupational Category



Source: Survey results as described in text.

The Costs of “Time Theft”

Our survey results paint a seemingly contradictory picture of overwork for many workers, inadequate paid hours for other workers, and demands for unpaid overtime imposed on all types of workers. This combination of time pressures imposes significant negative consequences on Australia’s economy and society. The frequent incidence of unpaid overtime described above means that Australian workers are losing substantial amounts of income. This is particularly concerning when workers’ share of national income has fallen to record lows,¹¹ and wage growth has decelerated to the slowest sustained pace in Australia’s postwar economic history. Australian workers can hardly afford not being paid by employers for such a significant proportion of their total working time.

The phenomenon of time theft (through endemic unpaid overtime) also compounds the more general experience of time pressure and work-life balance experienced by so many Australian households.¹²

Table 3 quantifies the aggregate value of unpaid overtime in Australia, by estimating the income that would have been received by workers if their unpaid overtime had in fact been compensated. Recall that our survey results indicate that employed workers perform an average of 6.0 hours of unpaid overtime per week (across all classes of employment). This varied from an average of 7.07 hours on average for full-time workers, to 4.15 hours for part-time employees, and 2.83 for casual workers.

Published ABS data reports the total number of Australian employees working in each of those three main categories of waged employment.¹³ The ABS also reports median hourly earnings for each category of waged worker. Therefore, we can calculate an estimate of the aggregate income lost to workers by the failure of employers to compensate workers for unpaid overtime worked. This calculation assumes that overtime hours would have been paid at the same rate as median earnings;¹⁴ we also include a 9.5 percent margin reflecting the minimum superannuation contributions which should accrue to workers for this time. As indicated in Table 3, **this suggests that**

¹¹ Stanford (2017).

¹² See, for example, Wade (2018).

¹³ We exclude self-employed workers from our calculation of the value of unpaid overtime and “time theft,” given the dual nature of self-employed workers’ relationship to their businesses.

¹⁴ In practice, most overtime work should incur a higher hourly rate, so this assumption is very conservative.

unpaid overtime represents a collective theft from Australian workers of some \$106 billion in 2018.

Table 3. Aggregate Value of Unpaid Overtime, 2018

Job Status	Number Employed (million)	Median Wage (\$/hr)	Avg. Unpaid Overtime (hrs/wk)	Total Value (\$billion)
Full-Time	6.312	\$33.68	7.07	\$85.6
Part-Time	1.513	\$29.32	4.15	\$10.5
Casual	2.606	\$25.01	2.83	\$10.5
Total	10.432	\$30.00	6.00	\$106.6

Source: Authors' calculations from ABS Catalogue 6291.0.55.003 - EQ04 - Employed persons by Hours actually worked in all jobs, Sex and Status in employment of main job, February 1991 onwards, September 2018, and ABS Catalogue 6333.0 - Characteristics of Employment, Australia, Table 7, August 2017.

To put this figure in perspective, \$106 billion is equivalent to 22 percent of the projected expenditure (\$488 billion) in the Federal Budget for the financial year 2018-2019. It is higher than the Commonwealth's total projected expenditure on healthcare (\$79 billion), and around ten times the budget for unemployment assistance (including Newstart).¹⁵

From the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia to the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the calls for Australian workers to get a pay rise are getting louder. In a labour market that is marked by unprecedented wage stagnation, underemployment, insecure work and cost of living pressures, the loss to working families from billions of hours of unpaid overtime per year is not sustainable.

¹⁵ Kesper, Elvery and Spraggon. (2018).

Conclusion

This tenth annual **Go Home on Time Day** report has once again highlighted the persistent and simultaneous problems of unpaid overtime, inadequate hours, and overwork in Australia. A high proportion of workers in part-time and casual jobs want more hours of paid work, reflecting the increasingly insecure nature of work and stagnant wages. This problem is compounded by the increase in unpaid overtime that is stolen from workers, rising to 6 hours per worker per week. This equates to around 3.25 billion hours of unpaid work each year, with an aggregate value of \$106 billion.

Given the evidence presented in this and previous reports, the need for change is clear and pressing. Employers and government must respect the needs of workers – in the workplace, and outside of paid work. This means converting precarious jobs into regular secure jobs, and providing more hours of paid work to underemployed Australian workers. To end the epidemic of “time theft,” regulators must enforce existing rules regarding maximum hours of work on a more consistent basis. Finally, workers (individually and through their unions) must demand that employers respect their right to leisure time – for their own benefit, and for the good of Australian society.

Appendix A - Survey Questions

Q. Are you currently in paid work?

1. Yes, full-time
2. Yes, part-time
3. Yes, casual
4. Yes, self-employed [SKIP TO Q39]
5. No [SKIP TO Q39]

Q. How many hours a week do you generally work (e.g. the number of paid hours of employment)?
[NUMBER Open answer] __hours

Q. Would you like to work....?

1. more paid hours
2. fewer paid hours
3. my paid hours are about right

Unpaid work may include things like arriving early, staying late, working through lunch or breaks, working at home, and so on.

Q. How many unpaid hours of work did you perform for your employer in the last 7 days (i.e. unpaid overtime)?

[NUMBER Open answer]__hours

Q. What best describes the industry you work in?

1. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
2. Mining
3. Manufacturing
4. Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services
5. Construction
6. Wholesale Trade
7. Retail Trade
8. Accommodation and Food Services
9. Transport, Postal and Warehousing
10. Information Media and Telecommunications
11. Financial and Insurance Services
12. Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services
13. Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
14. Administrative and Support Services
15. Public Administration and Safety
16. Education and Training
17. Health Care and Social Assistance
18. Arts and Recreation Services
19. Other Services
20. Don't know / not sure

Q. Which of the following best describes the kind of work you do?

1. *Manager*
2. *Professional*
3. *Technician or Trades Worker*
4. *Community or Personal Service Worker*
5. *Clerical or Administrative Worker*
6. *Sales Worker*
7. *Machinery Operator and Driver*
8. *Labourer*
9. *Don't know / not sure*

Appendix B - Sample Distribution

	N=	% sample
Total Employed:	880	
Male	472	54%
Female	408	46%
Age:		
18-24 years	116	13%
25-34 years	196	22%
35-44 years	197	22%
45-54 years	198	23%
55-64 years	123	14%
65 years or older	50	6%
Employment Status:		
Yes, full-time	476	54%
Yes, part-time	195	22%
Yes, casual	116	13%
Yes, self employed	93	11%
Occupation		
Manager	161	18%
Professional	219	25%
Technician or Trades / Machine / Labourer	175	20%
Community or Personal Service Worker	57	6%
Clerical or Administrative Worker	129	15%
Sales Worker	98	11%
Industry		
Goods producing (agriculture, mining, construction, manufacturing, utilities)	162	18%
Trade, Hospitality, Transport	220	25%
Other Private Services (professional, IT, financial, rental, administration, arts)	191	22%
Public services (health, education, admin and safety)	186	21%
Other	113	13%

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