

Long Work Hours and the Wellbeing of Fathers and their Families

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Abstract

The average hours worked by full-time employees in Australia have increased since the late 1970s. This, combined with increases in female labour force participation, has led to concerns about the impact of long work hours on family life. This paper explores the relationship between fathers' work hours, their own wellbeing and that of their families using data from the HILDA survey. Overall, satisfaction with work hours decreases as the number of hours worked increases beyond the standard working week. However, long hours are not necessarily, or even on average associated with pervasively lower wellbeing. Work hours are negatively related to only two of the thirteen measures of wellbeing examined. For fathers working very long hours, their satisfaction with their work hours is found to be very important to the relationship between work hours and wellbeing.

1. Introduction

The majority of Australian fathers work full-time and many work long hours. Although concerns about possible damaging repercussions of long work hours have a long history, in recent decades changes in the makeup of the Australian workforce and growing awareness of the importance of fathers in the lives of children have added fuel to modern day debates on this issue.

The 20th century saw considerable change in the 'standard' working week for full-time workers. The working week gradually shortened from around 49 hours in the early 1900s to 35–38 hours in many industries by the 1980s

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(ABS, 1995). However, the proportion of employees working more than 48 hours a week increased from 13.6 to 20.6 per cent between 1978 and 1994, and has remained fairly stable since (Wooden and Loundes, 2002).¹ Over this period, the proportion of all employees working 41 to 48 hours has been constant (12 to 13 per cent).

For most of the 20th century, concerns about long work hours tended to focus on the workers themselves – including their need for adequate rest and leisure to achieve a reasonable quality of life and to do their jobs effectively. These concerns were behind the introduction of the *Eight Hour Day*, first negotiated by stonemasons in Victoria in 1856. In more recent times, debates about long hours have expanded to cover the impact of long hours on family life. Such concerns have been fuelled by the dramatic increase in the employment rates of mothers that has occurred over the last few decades – a development that has had a profound effect on family life and made issues of managing family and work increasingly complicated.

While there is general agreement about trends in work hours, there is less agreement about the implications of long work hours for the wellbeing of workers and their families. Much of the empirical research into the impact of long work hours has focused on personal wellbeing and there has been relatively little Australian research on the effects of long hours *per se* on family wellbeing.² In addition, much of the Australian literature on the impact of long work hours on wellbeing has been based on studies of specific occupations or is qualitative in nature and is thus difficult to generalize. Further, although long work hours may have some positive effects on wellbeing, most of the literature focuses on potential negative effects. Indeed, Barnett (1998, p. 126), in her review of the literature on work and family, concludes that: 'there is an almost exclusive focus on conflict, both at the individual and at the corporate level'.

Concern about the impact of long work hours has resulted in the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) running a Reasonable Hours Campaign. As part of this campaign the ACTU brought forward the Reasonable Hours Test case which asked the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) to establish 'reasonable' hours of work. Central to the ACTU case is the argument that long hours can be detrimental for personal wellbeing and family and community life. The AIRC rejected most of the ACTU's claim in its reasonable hours test case decision, but gave workers an award right to refuse overtime hours because of family and other responsibilities. In terms of the evidence presented to it on the effects of working hours on family life, the AIRC concludes that:

¹ A variety of definitions of what constitutes long hours have been used in the literature. The 'standard' full-time working week has variously been defined as 35 to 40 hours (Wooden and Warren, 2003) or 35 to 44 hours (Dawson, McCulloch and Baker, 2001; Healy, 2000). Long hours have variously been considered to be 45 or more hours (Dawson, McCulloch and Baker, 2001) and 49 or more hours (Wooden and Loundes, 2002).

² Recent Australian research has been undertaken by Pocock, Van Wanrooy, Strazzari and Bridge (2001), Probert, Whiting and Ewer (2000), and Wooden (2003). Wooden (2003) extends the present analysis, based on the same data. Unlike the present study, he focuses on the work hours of lone parents and the combined work hour regimes of couples with dependent children, and does not restrict attention to those working full-time hours.

'The relationship between working hours and family and community life is complex. In some cases, earnings from longer working hours relieve the stress resulting from financial difficulties. In other cases, long working hours have negative consequences. Whether negative consequences occur often depends on a range of factors such as the extent of an employee's family responsibilities and his or her engagement in community activities.' (AIRC, 2002; Print PR072002, p. 56).

This study aims to extend the Australian literature on the relationship between fathers' work hours, their own wellbeing and that of their families. A wide range of measures of wellbeing are examined, including: personal health and life satisfaction; relationships with their partners and children; and perceptions of work and family balance. The effect of fathers' satisfaction with the hours they work on the relationship between work hours and wellbeing is also explored.

The analysis is based upon the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey. The HILDA survey has a number of advantages for studying the impact of work hours on families. These advantages relate to the wide range of measures of wellbeing, the size and national representativeness of the sample, and the household nature of the survey.

The following section discusses mechanisms by which long hours may affect wellbeing and briefly reviews the empirical literature. The third section describes the HILDA survey and the measures of wellbeing used in this paper. In the fourth section, the characteristics of fathers by work hours are outlined. The fifth section explores how satisfaction with hours worked and preferred hours vary according to the number of hours worked. The relationship between work hours and wellbeing is considered in Section 6 and the effects of satisfaction with work hours on the relationship between hours and wellbeing are analysed in Section 7. Concluding comments are made in the final section.

2. Literature on Long Work Hours and Wellbeing

A number of approaches have been used to measure wellbeing. Traditionally, assessment of personal wellbeing focused on the absence of signs of illbeing, but over the last few decades indicators of positive wellbeing have also been emphasised. Personal wellbeing has sometimes been measured in terms of the extent to which individuals have access to a set of resources prejudged as necessary for meeting basic needs for healthy functioning, for handling life's problems, or for achieving 'a good life'. It has also been measured in terms of people's subjective experiences or inner sense of wellness or happiness (Allardt, 1993; Campbell, 1981; Deci and Ryan, 2000; Veenhoven, 1996). Other studies have focused on the wellbeing of social systems, including families (see, Zubrick, *et al.*, 2000). Common indicators of family wellbeing include family members' satisfaction with relationships with each other, indicators of parenting styles and the quality of 'family functioning' (Zubrick, *et al.*, 2000).

Long Hours and Wellbeing

Long work hours may impact upon both personal and family wellbeing in several ways. In relation to potential negative outcomes for workers

themselves, Spurgeon, Harrington and Cooper (1997) suggest that long work hours may impair personal health and jeopardise safety both directly and indirectly. Long hours may operate as a direct stressor in that workers need to continue performing adequately despite fatigue. In addition, long work hours may increase stress indirectly by prolonging workers' exposure to other sources of job stress.

Increased hours spent at work necessarily reduces the amount of time available to spend on non-working activities, raising concerns about the ability of workers to have enough time to 'unwind' when away from work, nurture family relationships and parent effectively.

On the other hand, long work hours may also have some positive effects if they are enjoyable and enable the achievement of key personal goals (for example, helping others, or receipt of recognition of skills and achievements). The extra hours worked may also provide some workers with 'quality time' when interruptions are at a minimum and intrinsically satisfying work is completed, and enable avoidance of the 'rush hour' when traffic congestion is at its peak. In addition, long work hours may be associated with higher earnings and faster rate of career progression, which in turn may have some positive effects on personal wellbeing and family wellbeing. Indeed, some workers may be less inclined to see their work hours as conflicting with family time than to interpret work hours as time devoted to fulfilling their family role of provider (Milkie and Peltola, 1999).

To some extent, the impact of long work hours on wellbeing is likely to vary according to the reason why the person is working the hours and the way they view their hours. For instance, negative personal repercussions seem particularly likely for those who are reluctantly putting in extra hours through coercion or because they feel overwhelmed by an unwanted heavy workload. Positive repercussions are likely to apply for those who have adopted long hours through choice rather than coercion, who find their work intrinsically rewarding and who have the support of their spouses in working long hours.

Empirical Studies of the Relationship between Long Work Hours on Wellbeing

The empirical literature has primarily focused on employees' physical health and psychological wellbeing (including their experience of fatigue or 'burnout', happiness or distress, cardiovascular disease), as well as workers' sense of work-family imbalance, and perceived quality of relationships with other family members (Dawson, McCulloch and Baker, 2001; Spurgeon, Harrington and Cooper, 1997).

Several studies have supported the view that long hours are detrimental to personal and family wellbeing (Cooper, 2000; Charlesworth, *et al.*, 2002; Dawson, McCulloch and Baker, 2001; Pocock, 2003; Glezer and Wolcott, 1999). However, as Spurgeon, Harrington and Cooper (1997) note, much of the research fails to differentiate between long hours and shift work, which can be very disruptive, and between long hours and work overload, which may be both highly stressful and a central reason for long work hours. Barnett (1998) comes to similar conclusions in her review of the literature. She concludes that there is some evidence that negative impacts of long work hours on wellbeing may be restricted to very long hours.

Other studies have failed to find an inverse relationship between work hours and the aspects of wellbeing examined, and some studies have suggested a positive relationship (for reviews see, Barnett, 1998; Ganster and Bates, 2003; Spurgeon, Harrington and Cooper, 1997). A study by Kelley (2001) using Australian data finds that long work hours do not adversely affect men's satisfaction with their marriages or with their children (net of the effects of age, education and occupational status).

The mixed findings are hardly surprising given differences in research methodologies adopted, definition of long hours and measures of wellbeing used. There are also differences in the extent to which mediating and moderating factors are controlled for. Moderating factors include gender, work schedule of spouse, level of autonomy required and preferred in the job, and family circumstances. Examples of mediating factors include views of spouses about the long hours and whether domestic tasks are outsourced.

Much of the empirical research has used cross-sectional data to examine the correlation between work hours and wellbeing (as does the present study), and has not been able to test whether there is a causal relationship between long hours and wellbeing. A further consequence of the cross-sectional nature of much of the research is that it is difficult to separate out short from longer-run effects.

In part, the impact of long work hours on some aspects of personal and family wellbeing will be determined by the reasons people work those hours. Possible reasons include financial necessity, fear of job loss if they do not work the long hours, or personal commitment to an entrenched corporate culture. At the other end of the spectrum, the intrinsic enjoyment of their jobs leads some workers to put in long hours.

In summary, both the theoretical and empirical literature suggests that working long hours may have both positive and negative effects on wellbeing. The effect of long hours is likely to be determined by the nature of the job, family circumstances and psychological factors.

3. HILDA Survey and Measures of Wellbeing

The first wave of the HILDA survey was carried out in 2001 and involved face-to-face interviews with nearly 14,000 respondents aged 15 or more years from 7,682 households across Australia. The survey involves the use of several data collection instruments. After establishing contact with a member of the household, an interview was conducted with at least one member of the household to obtain household level information. Face-to-face interviews were then pursued with each household member aged 15 years and over. Finally, household members were asked to respond to a self-completion questionnaire.

The HILDA survey contains a range of measures of wellbeing, including: personal mental and physical health and levels of energy, satisfaction with various domains of life and with life in general, perceptions of work-family balance, and stress relating to parenting. The household nature of the HILDA

survey, allows us to compare fathers' responses to questions on their satisfaction with their relationships with their partners and their children, and their partners' views about the quality of these relationships.

The analysis is restricted to employed fathers who lived with a partner in a household containing at least one child under the age of 15. Given our focus on the impact of longer work hours on wellbeing, we restrict the analysis to fathers whose usual work hours are full-time (that is, 35 hours or more per week).

Respondents in paid employment were asked to indicate the number of hours per week they *usually* work in all their jobs (including paid or unpaid overtime). We used fathers' answers to this question to classify them into the following four work-hour groups: 35 to 40 hours per week (termed in this paper 'standard' full-time hours); 41 to 48 hours; 49 to 59 hours; and 60 hours or more.

Respondents in paid employment were asked for their views on several aspects of their work. Employed respondents were asked to indicate the number of hours per week they would prefer to work, taking into account the effect of any change in hours on their earnings. They were also asked to rate their satisfaction with work hours on a scale ranging from 0 for 'totally dissatisfied' to 10 for 'totally satisfied'.

The HILDA survey contains a wide range of measures of personal and family wellbeing and work-family balance. Parents were asked to rate their satisfaction with their relationships with each other and with their own and their partner's relationship with their children, using the rating scale ranging from 0 'completely dissatisfied' to 10 'completely satisfied'. In this analysis, attention is directed to each partner's satisfaction with their relationships with each other and with the father's relationship with their children.³ All other measures were based on fathers' reports.

All respondents were asked to use the 11 point satisfaction rating scale described above to answer the question 'All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life?'. Those in paid work were also asked to use this scale to answer the question 'All things considered, how satisfied are you with your job?'.

The HILDA survey contains 13 of the items in Marshall and Barnett's (1992) *Work-Family Strains and Gains Scale*. Based upon fathers' responses to these questions, three sub-scales of work and family life balance were constructed. These scales give each item equal weight and were constructed by summing

³ The HILDA survey asks about satisfaction with personal relationships with 'your children', 'your step-children' and with 'your partner's relationship with your children'. It seems reasonable to assume that most respondents would interpret these questions to refer to all biological children and stepchildren, regardless of whether or not they were living with the respondent. We have not used the question on their relationship with their stepchildren. This means that 71 stepfathers with no biological child in the household are excluded from the analysis for this measure.

the individual items.⁴ We label these measures: 'negative effect of work on family'; 'positive effect of work on family'; and 'positive effect of work on self'. Details of the variables used in the construction of these scales are presented in appendix A.

One of the most direct mechanisms through which long work hours may affect family and in particular children's wellbeing is through increasing parenting stress. We construct a variable measuring parenting stress that is derived from four items tapping the feelings that parenting is harder than expected, often very tiring, more work than pleasure, and that parenting responsibilities create a sense of entrapment.⁵ Details of the construction of this measure are presented in Appendix A.

Three aspects of health are measured, using questions from the widely used SF-36 Scale. These consisted of: *General Health* (higher scores indicate better health); *Vitality* (low scores indicate feeling tired and 'worn out' and high scores indicate feeling full of life and lot of energy); and *Mental Health* (lower scores tap feeling nervous and unhappy and high scores tap a sense of peace and happiness).

Of course, some fathers may not be aware of a negative impact of their work on themselves and their families and others may be unwilling to acknowledge any negative impacts. In part, this issue is addressed by the use of the partners' reports of their satisfaction with spousal relationships and with the fathers' relationships with the children. Although respondents in the household were asked to answer the self-completion questionnaire in private, some may have consulted each other and felt reluctant to provide answers that differed.

4. Work Hours and Fathers' Characteristics

As discussed the impact of long hours is likely to be related to the father's characteristics and those of his family as well as the nature of his job. In this section we present information on the human capital, demographic and job characteristics of fathers and their partners according to the fathers' usual work hours.

⁴ The summing of items to construct a scale requires the assumption that the rating scale is cardinal. It is conventional in much of the literature to make this assumption. The main reason for the combining of individual items into a composite scale is that it can improve the ability of the measure to capture the underlying concept in which we are interested. The alpha scores for the scales we use indicate that the items combined together are reliable and unidimensional. See, de Vaus (1995, p. 250-254) for a discussion of the issues involved in constructing scales based on a number of individual items.

⁵ As in all surveys, if non-response to particular questions is non-random then the results may be biased. Non-response rates on the questions about satisfaction with job overall and satisfaction with life as a whole were one per cent or less. For measures of relationship with partners, non-response rate was six per cent. Non-response rate on measures of relationship with father's relationship with children was eight per cent. Non-response rates for parenting stress and measures of work and family balance were between 11 and 14 per cent. Non-response rate for the health measures (general health, vitality and mental health) was six per cent. In light of the fact that non-response rate was relatively high on some measures (parenting stress and measures of work and family balance), we examined the non-response rates on these measures by work hours and found non-response rates were similar across the categories of work hours.

Overall, 33.2 per cent of the full-time employed fathers work 35 to 40 hours ('standard' hours), 21.8 per cent work 41 to 48 hours, 23.6 per cent work 49 to 59 hours, and 21.4 per cent usually work 60 hours or more. The HILDA survey produces higher estimates of average hours worked than the ABS *Labour Force Survey* (Wooden, 2003, p. 4). Wooden (2003) finds that this is mainly because the HILDA survey over-enumerates persons working very long hours. He notes that, while the reasons for this are not entirely clear, the questions on number of hours worked differ in the two surveys. For example, the HILDA survey prompts respondents to include both paid and unpaid overtime.

There are no statistically significant differences in the number of children or age of the youngest child by fathers' work hours (table 1). The proportion of fathers with pre-school aged children ranges from 46.2 per cent for those working 60 or more hours to 49.2 per cent for those working 41 to 48 hours.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, there is no clear pattern between the work hours of fathers and their partner's employment statuses. Over 60 per cent of fathers in each work-hours group have partners who are employed. There is also no clear relationship between fathers' working hours and the number of hours their partners works if they are employed.

However, fathers' educational attainment differs across hours categories. Fathers working 35 to 40 hours per week are the least likely to have a post-secondary qualification followed by those working 60 or more hours.

As work hours increase, the proportion of fathers who are Australian-born increases. Furthermore, fathers who work 35 to 40 hours are almost twice as likely to have been born in a non-English speaking country as fathers working longer hours. This pattern is reflected in English language proficiency. A higher proportion of fathers working longer hours (more than 40 hours a week) speak only English than fathers working 35 to 40 hours. There is little difference in the proportion of fathers who do not speak English well or not at all according to hours worked.

As the number of hours worked increases, the proportion employed in upper white-collar occupations increases (from 40.8 per cent of those working 35 to 40 hours to 59.6 per cent of those working 60 or more hours). Correspondingly, fathers who worked 35–40 hours are the most likely to have a blue-collar occupation. These figures indicate that many of those working long hours probably have jobs that offer substantially different conditions from those working shorter hours, including enhanced task variety and self-direction. Such factors have been found to be very important in determining the impact of jobs on personal and family wellbeing (see, Barnett, 1998; Ganster and Bates, 2003).

There are striking differences in the proportions of fathers who are self-employed according to hours worked.⁶ Nearly half (47.3 per cent) of the

⁶ We classify all respondents who have their own business as being self-employed. This differs from the approach used by the ABS. We define type of employment contract according to whether the respondent saw themselves as being employed on a casual basis or on a permanent or ongoing basis. This differs from the ABS approach in which type of employment is identified using information on whether the respondent receives paid holiday or paid sick leave. See, Wooden and Warren (2003) for a discussion of these approaches.

fathers who are working 60 or more hours are self-employed, compared with 29.8 of those working 49–59 hours, 11.9 per cent of those working 41 to 48 hours, and only 14.6 per cent of those working 35 to 40 hours. Fathers working 35 to 40 hours are more likely to be employed on a casual basis (7.9 per cent) than fathers working 41 to 48 hours (2.4 per cent), 49 to 59 hours (2.8 per cent), or 60 or more hours (4.8 per cent).

Average gross annual earnings increase substantially with work hours (from \$43,800 for fathers working 35 to 40 hours to \$55,500 for fathers working 60 or more hours).

Table 1 Characteristics by Fathers' Usual Work Hours, Full-time Employed

	<i>Hours (per week)</i>			
	<i>35 to 40</i>	<i>41 to 48</i>	<i>49 to 59</i>	<i>60+</i>
	<i>Per cent</i>			
<i>Age of youngest child</i>				
0-4 years	47.6	49.2	46.8	46.2
5-9 years	27.6	28.9	28.5	28.5
10-14 years	24.8	23.0	24.7	25.3
<i>Average number of children under 15</i>	1.9	1.9	2.0	2.0
<i>Female partner's employment status</i>				
Employed full-time (35+ hrs)	22.9	23.4	21.5	22.2
Employed part-time (<35 hrs)	39.7	41.0	47.6	43.8
Not employed	37.4	35.6	30.9	33.9
<i>Educational attainment</i>				
Degree or higher	22.6	26.9	33.6	21.6 ***
Other post-school qualifications	44.4	53.5	44.3	49.6
No post-school qualifications	32.9	19.6	22.2	28.8
<i>Country of birth</i>				
Australia	70.0	73.1	74.8	79.0 ***
Other English-speaking country	9.6	13.6	13.8	8.3
Non-English speaking country	22.5	13.4	11.5	12.7
<i>Language spoken at home and English proficiency</i>				
English only	78.7	88.9	90.9	88.2 ***
Speaks English well or very well	17.4	10.6	8.2	10.6
Speaks English not well or not at all	3.9	0.5	1.0	1.2
<i>Age in years</i>	38.7	38.4	39.2	39.5
<i>Occupational status</i>				
Upper white collar	40.8	51.1	57.9	59.6 ***
Lower white collar	13.7	11.9	6.5	5.5
Blue collar	45.6	37.0	35.6	34.9
<i>Type of employment</i>				
Self-employed	14.6	11.9	29.8	47.3 ***
Employed on a fixed-term contract	6.9	6.6	7.2	5.4
Employed on a casual basis	7.9	2.4	2.8	4.8
Employed on a permanent basis	70.6	79.2	60.3	42.5
<i>Average gross annual earnings (current job(s))</i>	\$43,800	\$51,500	\$53,200	\$55,500 **
Number of observations	491	323	349	316

Notes: For continuous variables, an ANOVA technique is used to test whether the means are significantly different. For categorical variables, a chi-squared test was used. *, **, and *** indicate significance at the 5, 1 and 0.1 per cent levels respectively. The data have been weighted and the calculation of the test statistics takes account of the survey design, which involves stratification and clustering. Details of the method used to take account of the sample design can be found in Johnson and Elliott (1998).

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 1 (2001).

5. Satisfaction with Work Hours

In this section we document the relationship between number of hours worked and two measures of fathers' views about their work hours: satisfaction with work hours (measured on an eleven point scale) and work hours preferences.⁷

We first consider satisfaction with work hours. Over 70 per cent of full-time employed fathers with dependent children reported ratings above the mid-point of the scale. This is consistent with the bulk of research into satisfaction with personal life domains which finds that people are inclined to indicate moderate to high satisfaction with most aspects of their lives – a situation that seems to reflect a tendency to adjust to life's circumstances and maintain a positive outlook (Cummins and Nistico, 2002).

As the number of hours worked increases, the proportion of fathers reporting a 'high' satisfaction rating (8 to 10) falls. High satisfaction is indicated by 63.2 per cent of fathers working 35 to 40 hours, 48.5 of those working 41 to 48 hours, 30.5 per cent of those working 49 to 59 hours, and just 25.3 per cent of the fathers working 60 or more hours (table 2). The relationship between satisfaction with work hours and number of hours worked is statistically significant.

At the other extreme, the proportion of fathers reporting 'very low' satisfaction with their hours increases sharply as the number of hours worked increases (ratings of 0 to 3). Very low satisfaction is indicated by just 2.5 per cent of the fathers working 35 to 40 hours and by 19.0 per cent of the fathers working 60 hours or more.

Table 2 Satisfaction with Work Hours and Preferences by Usual Hours Worked

	<i>Hours (per week)</i>			
	<i>35 to 40</i>	<i>41 to 48</i>	<i>49 to 59</i>	<i>60+</i>
	<i>Per cent</i>			
<i>Satisfaction with work hours</i>				
0-3 (very low)	2.5	9.9	15.8	19.0 ***
4-5 (moderately low)	9.4	14.4	22.8	26.0
6-7 (moderate)	24.9	27.3	31.0	29.8
8-10 (high)	63.2	48.5	30.5	25.3
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>Work hours preferences</i>				
Fewer hours	15.8	32.8	52.1	58.1 ***
About the same	66.7	58.8	44.2	41.3
More hours	17.5	8.4	3.7	0.6
Total	100	100	100	100
Number of observations	491	323	349	316

Notes: The significance tests reported are chi-square tests of association that are used to test whether there are statistically significant differences in rating of satisfaction with work hours and preferred work hours according to the number of hours worked. *** indicates a statistically significant difference at the 0.1 per cent confidence level. The data have been weighted and the calculation of the test statistics takes account of the survey design, which involves stratification and clustering. Source: HILDA Survey Wave 1 (2001).

⁷ There is an extensive literature on the validity and reliability of job satisfaction measures (Spector, 1997).

As discussed above, an alternative measure of happiness with work hours is whether respondents would prefer to change their work hours if they could choose their hours, taking into account the impact of a change in work hours on their incomes. Two-thirds of fathers working 35 to 40 hours per week say they would not change their work hours if given the choice, taking into account the impact on their incomes. Only 15.8 per cent of these fathers say they would work fewer hours and 17.5 per cent indicate a preference for more hours (table 2). As the number of hours worked increases, the proportion of fathers who say they would prefer to work fewer hours increases. Of fathers working 41 to 48 hours, 32.8 per cent say they would work fewer hours and just 8.4 per cent indicate a preference for more hours.

Over half of the fathers working more than 48 hours per week report that they would prefer to work fewer hours, with very few reporting that they would like to increase their work hours (3.7 per cent of those working 49 to 59 hours per week and 0.6 per cent of those working 60 hours or more per week). Nevertheless, 44.2 per cent of those working 49 to 59 hours and 41.3 per cent of those working 60 or more hours indicate that they would not change their work hours.

Some fathers, who may be unhappy about their long hours, perhaps because of the impact on family life, may nevertheless prefer not to change their hours because it would lead to a reduction in income. Similarly, some fathers may prefer to work fewer hours with a corresponding drop in salary, but decide against doing so if this strategy implies loss of other job related rewards.

6. Wellbeing and Work Hours

This section presents information on the relationship between the number of hours worked and personal and family wellbeing. Given that the characteristics of fathers vary according to work hours, it is important to control for these differences in order to identify the underlying relationship between work hours and wellbeing. In this paper differences in the characteristics of fathers are controlled for using least squares means.⁸ The characteristics adjusted for are: educational attainment; country of birth; English language use at home and proficiency; number of children under 15; age of youngest child; occupational status; employment classification; partner's employment status and hours of work; father's age; and earned income.

Table 3 shows that, for all but three of the thirteen measures of wellbeing, there are no statistically significant differences between fathers working 35–40 hours and those working longer hours. Fathers working more than

⁸ The construction of the least square means involves two steps. First linear regression models with the measure of wellbeing as the dependent variables are estimated. Explanatory variables include the characteristics that are being controlled. The model is estimated using the sample of full-time employed fathers. Second, the resulting coefficients are used to calculate the predicted value of the measure of wellbeing while setting each continuous variable to its sample mean and each discrete variable equal to the proportion in each category of that variable.

40 hours indicated a stronger negative impact of work on family than fathers working 35 to 40 hours. Fathers working more than 48 hours reported lower personal vitality than fathers working 35 to 40 hours. On the other hand, fathers working 60 or more hours indicate marginally higher satisfaction with their relationship with their partners.

It is interesting that there is no relationship apparent for general health given the occupational health and safety literature which suggests that shift work, sleep deprivation and fatigue are associated with an increased accident rate (Dawson, McCulloch and Baker, 2001). Given that accident rates are quite low, it is possible that the HILDA sample is not large enough to pick up any increased accident rate amongst those working long hours. Differing findings may emerge for specific occupations, such as truck driving.

Table 3 Measures of Wellbeing by Works Hours (Adjusted Means)

	<i>Number of Work Hours</i>			
	<i>35 to 40</i>	<i>41 to 48</i>	<i>49 to 59</i>	<i>60+</i>
<i>Satisfaction with job overall</i>	7.5 (0.13)	7.2 (0.18)	7.3 (0.16)	7.4 (0.16)
<i>Satisfaction with relationship with partner</i>				
Self-report	8.5 (0.14)	8.5 (0.15)	8.7 (0.16)	8.8* (0.14)
Partner's report	8.3 (0.17)	8.4 (0.18)	8.5 (0.18)	8.4 (0.17)
<i>Satisfaction with father's relationship with children</i>				
Self-report	8.6 (0.10)	8.8 (0.12)	8.7 (0.13)	8.8 (0.14)
Partner's report	8.5 (0.14)	8.6 (0.15)	8.7 (0.13)	8.6 (0.15)
<i>Satisfaction with life as a whole</i>	7.7 (0.12)	7.7 (0.13)	7.8 (0.13)	7.6 (0.13)
Parenting stress	13.8 (0.35)	13.2 (0.42)	13.1 (0.40)	13.4 (0.41)
<i>Work and family balance</i>				
Negative effect of work on family	14.9 (0.42)	15.9* (0.52)	17.2*** (0.49)	18.8*** (0.52)
Positive effect of work on family	14.0 (0.32)	13.7 (0.34)	13.9 (0.36)	13.9 (0.32)
Positive effect of work on self	16.0 (0.25)	16.5 (0.28)	16.2 (0.29)	16.2 (0.30)
<i>Health</i>				
General health	73.2 (1.27)	74.1 (1.42)	73.1 (1.37)	71.5 (1.62)
Vitality	68.2 (1.23)	66.6 (1.50)	65.2* (1.38)	62.7*** (1.58)
Mental health	76.8 (1.22)	76.9 (1.39)	75.9 (1.35)	75.1 (1.43)

Notes: Standard errors are shown in brackets. The significance tests are for the comparison with fathers working 35 to 40 hours. The significance levels reported in the table are for the underlying coefficients in the regression model used to construct the least squares means. Significance levels are: * 5 per cent confidence level; ** 1 per cent confidence level; *** 0.1 per cent confidence level. The data have been weighted and the calculation of the test statistics takes account of the survey design, which involves stratification and clustering.

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 1 (2001).

7. Satisfaction with Work Hours and Wellbeing

While in part due to characteristics of the work itself, personal appraisal of the hours worked is also likely to be a crucial determinant of whether the long hours have adverse effects on personal and family wellbeing. In this section we examine whether wellbeing differs according to the fathers' satisfaction with their hours and number of hours worked. We choose to use satisfaction with work hours rather than preferred hours since a respondent can feel dissatisfied with working long hours while preferring to retain these hours rather than have a reduced income (as discussed in section 5).

We make two broad sets of comparisons. First, we compare the wellbeing of those expressing 'low', 'moderate' and 'high' levels of satisfaction but working the same number of hours.⁹ Second we compare the wellbeing of those working 35 to 40 hours who express 'low satisfaction' with these hours and fathers who report low satisfaction with working 60 or more hours. Similarly, the wellbeing of those working 35 to 40 hours who express 'high satisfaction' with these hours are compared with fathers who report high satisfaction with working 60 or more hours.¹⁰ As in the previous section, the wellbeing measures have been adjusted for differences in the characteristics using least squares means.¹¹

For fathers working 35 to 40 hours per week (table 4), there are no significant differences in the wellbeing of fathers expressing low versus moderate satisfaction. However, significant differences are found between those indicating low versus high satisfaction for five measures of wellbeing: overall job satisfaction; overall life satisfaction; negative effects of work on family life; positive effects of work on family life; and sense of vitality. In each case, the group expressing high satisfaction indicates higher wellbeing (or lower illbeing).

The relationship between satisfaction with work hours and wellbeing is much stronger for fathers working 60 or more hours per week than for fathers working 35 to 40 hours. Fathers who are moderately satisfied with working 60 or more hours per week differed significantly from those indicating low satisfaction with such hours on 5 of the 13 measures (job and life satisfaction, negative effect of work on family life and general health and vitality). In each case, the moderately satisfied group indicates higher wellbeing (or lower illbeing).

⁹ Those previously classified as indicating 'very low satisfaction' or 'moderately low satisfaction' are combined for this analysis. The other classifications ('moderate satisfaction' and 'high satisfaction') are retained.

¹⁰ Similar comparisons for fathers working 41 to 48 hours and 49–59 hours have been conducted. Statistically significant differences between fathers who indicate high or low satisfaction with their work hours emerge for 9 and 7 of the 13 dimensions respectively. In each of these cases, those who are highly satisfied with their work hours have higher wellbeing scores. However, the largest differences are for fathers working 60 or more hours.

¹¹ The linear regression models used in the construction of the least square means include all the control variables used in the construction of least square means in table 3 and a set of 12 dummy variables for work hours (four categories) interacted with satisfaction with work hours (three categories).

Fathers who are highly satisfied with working 60 or more hours have significantly higher mean wellbeing scores (or lower illbeing scores) than those who express low satisfaction with such hours. The only exceptions are for 'general health' and for the positive effect of work on the self. While mean scores on these measures are higher for those expressing high rather than low satisfaction with work hours, the differences are not statistically significant.

The fact that the relationship between satisfaction with work hours and wellbeing is stronger for fathers working long hours than for those working 'standard' hours implies that the association between satisfaction with work hours and wellbeing cannot be entirely explained by an underlying happy or unhappy disposition, which shapes both views about work hours and wellbeing.

We now turn to the comparisons of fathers working 35 to 40 hours with those working 60 or more hours who express the same level of satisfaction with their respective working hours. Of the fathers who indicate low satisfaction with their work hours, those working 60 or more hours differed from those working 35–40 hours on two dimensions only: the former group report a greater negative effect of work on family life and lower levels of vitality.

On the other hand, the wellbeing of fathers who work very long work hours and have high satisfaction with these hours is higher than for fathers with high satisfaction working standard hours. Compared with those who indicate high satisfaction with 'standard hours', those who indicate high satisfaction with working 60 or more hours perceive a more positive effect of work on family life and indicate higher satisfaction with their jobs and with their relationships with their partner and children. In addition, the partners' of men with high satisfaction with working 60 or more hours express significantly higher satisfaction father-partner and father-children relationships than do the partners' of men with high satisfaction with working 'standard hours'.

These results suggest that the personal and family wellbeing differences between those with high as opposed to low satisfaction with long work hours can not be explained by any markedly pervasive low wellbeing experienced by those with low satisfaction with such hours. Nor could the difference be entirely explained by any markedly pervasive high wellbeing experienced by fathers who are very satisfied with working such long hours. However, the latter group does seem to be better off than those with high satisfaction with 'standard hours' on a number of wellbeing dimensions. There is no evidence that fathers who indicate high satisfaction with very long hours have poorer family relationships than fathers with high satisfaction working standard hours. Indeed the partners of fathers indicating high satisfaction with very long hours seem particularly happy with spousal relationships. One possible explanation for these patterns is that they reflect differences in the personalities of those who enjoy working hard. It is also possible that there are other benefits that accrue to partners, such as interesting work stories, work events and reflected glory from their partner having a high status job.

Table 4 Measures of Wellbeing by Satisfaction with Work Hours (Adjusted Means)

	35 to 40 hours			60 + hours		
	Low (0-5)	Moderate (6-7)	High (8-10)	Low (0-5)	Moderate (6-7)	High (8-10)
<i>Satisfaction with job overall</i>	6.8 (0.28)	7.1 (0.16)	7.8*** (0.13)	6.4 (0.21)	7.7*** (0.21)	8.9*** (0.16)
<i>Satisfaction with relationship with partner</i>						
Self-report	8.1 (0.32)	8.4 (0.19)	8.6 (0.16)	8.6 (0.18)	8.9 (0.19)	9.1* (0.19)
Partner's report	8.1 (0.36)	8.2 (0.23)	8.4 (0.19)	8.1 (0.24)	8.5 (0.24)	8.9** (0.21)
<i>Satisfaction with relationship with children</i>						
Self-report	8.6 (0.20)	8.5 (0.18)	8.6 (0.13)	8.5 (0.18)	8.9 (0.20)	9.1** (0.19)
Partner's report	8.5 (0.26)	8.5 (0.18)	8.5 (0.16)	8.4 (0.20)	8.6 (0.23)	9.1** (0.19)
<i>Satisfaction with life overall</i>	7.2 (0.23)	7.6 (0.13)	7.9*** (0.14)	7.1 (0.17)	7.7** (0.17)	8.2*** (0.19)
Parenting stress	14.3 (0.71)	13.8 (0.54)	13.8 (0.41)	14.2 (0.51)	13.6 (0.56)	12.2** (0.67)
<i>Work and family balance</i>						
Negative effect of work on family	16.5 (0.79)	15.7 (0.64)	14.4* (0.48)	20.7 (0.64)	18.9* (0.67)	15.4*** (0.86)
Positive effect of work on family	12.8 (0.64)	13.8 (0.42)	14.2* (0.36)	13.3 (0.43)	13.6 (0.55)	15.2*** (0.42)
Positive effect of work on self	15.3 (0.60)	15.6 (0.33)	16.4 (0.30)	15.6 (0.41)	16.6 (0.43)	16.7 (0.48)
<i>Health</i>						
General health	69.7 (2.51)	71.0 (1.60)	74.7 (1.55)	68.1 (2.06)	74.8* (2.37)	73.1 (2.85)
Vitality	64.9 (2.10)	65.4 (1.65)	69.7* (1.45)	56.8 (2.09)	64.4* (2.52)	70.4*** (2.16)
Mental health	74.2 (2.13)	74.7 (1.63)	78.0 (1.45)	71.6 (1.62)	75.5 (2.24)	80.4*** (1.99)

Notes: Standard errors are shown in brackets. For each work hours group the significance tests are for the comparison with fathers with low satisfaction. The significance levels reported in the table are for the underlying coefficients in the regression model used to construct the least squares means. Significance levels are: * 5 per cent confidence level; ** 1 per cent confidence level, *** 0.1 per cent confidence level. The data have been weighted and the calculation of the test statistics takes account of the survey design, which involves stratification and clustering. Source: HILDA Survey Wave 1 (2001).

8. Concluding Comments

The average hours worked by full-time employees in Australia have increased since the late 1970s. This trend, combined with increases in female labour force participation, has led to growing concerns about the impact of long hours on family life. Much of the public debate on the desirability or otherwise of long work hours has focused on the possible negative consequences for the wellbeing of workers and their families. This paper has provided some empirical evidence on the relationship between work hours and wellbeing for fathers working 35 to 40 hours, 41 to 48 hours, 49 to 59 hours and 60 or more hours per week.

Overall, fathers' satisfaction with their work hours decreases as the number of hours worked increases beyond the standard working week.

Furthermore, the proportion of fathers who would prefer to work fewer hours (taking into account the impact on income) increases with the number hours worked. However, for the majority of measures, wellbeing does not decline as the number of hours worked increases. There are two exceptions. Fathers working in excess of 48 hours a week report a lower sense of 'vitality' and report more negative effects of work on family life than fathers working 35 to 40 hours per week. On the other hand, fathers working 60 or more hours indicate marginally higher satisfaction with their relationships with their partners compared with those working 'standard hours'.

Although satisfaction with work hours declines sharply with increases in work hours, there is considerable variability in satisfaction ratings. For example, one-quarter of fathers working 60 or more hours report a high level of satisfaction with these hours. These fathers have higher levels of wellbeing for virtually all measures as compared with the larger group (45 per cent) of fathers who indicate low satisfaction. On the other hand, for fathers working 35 to 40 hours, there are much smaller differences in wellbeing between those who have high satisfaction as opposed to low satisfaction with their work hours.

While these findings paint a fairly clear picture, there are several limitations to the study. First, work hours represent just one dimension of work that may impact upon wellbeing. Other factors which may be associated with long work hours such as shift work should be also examined. Second, we do not distinguish between short and longer run effects of long hours. Third, while attempts have been made to control for observable characteristics such as occupation, income and spouses employment status there are a host of other personal, family, job and workplace characteristics which are not controlled for and hence it is not possible to determine whether there are any causal relationships between fathers' work hours and wellbeing.

Several of the limitations of the analysis in this paper are the result of the cross-sectional nature of our analysis. As additional waves of the HILDA survey become available it will be possible to distinguish between the short and longer run effects of long hours. It will also be possible to much better control relevant (observable and unobservable) differences between those working standard hours and those working long hours.

In broad terms, the findings presented in this paper support the notion that satisfaction with work hours declines as the number of hours worked increases. However, even amongst fathers with a low satisfaction with working very long hours, there is no clear evidence of lower levels of wellbeing. A significant minority of fathers working very long hours have high satisfaction with their work hours. These fathers report particularly high levels of wellbeing. The findings support the notion that there are 'horses for courses'. Finding the right match between workers and their jobs is a central challenge for workers themselves and their places of employment. The 'right match' is likely to be changeable as workers' goals and family responsibilities change.

Appendix A

Measures of Wellbeing

The measure 'Negative effect of work on family' is constructed using the following four items (Alpha reliability is 0.83):

- (i) *'Because of the requirements of my job, I miss out on home activities or family activities that I would prefer to participate in';*
- (ii) *'Because of the requirement of my job, my family time is less enjoyable and more pressured';*
- (iii) *'Working leaves me with too little time or energy to be the kind of parent I want to be';*
- and (iv) *'Working causes me to miss out on some of the rewarding aspects of being a parent.'*

The measure 'Positive effect of work and family' is constructed from the following three items (Alpha reliability is 0.59):

- (i) *'My work has a positive effect on my children';*
- (ii) *'Working helps me to better appreciate the time I spend with my children';*
- and (iii) *'The fact that I am working makes me a better parent'.*

The measure 'Positive effect of work on self' is constructed using the following three items (Alpha reliability is 0.82):

- (i) *'Having both work and family responsibilities makes me a more well-rounded person';*
- (ii) *'Managing work and family responsibilities as well as I do makes me feel competent';*
- and (iii) *'Having both work and family responsibilities gives my life more variety'.*

The measure 'Parenting stress' is constructed using the following four items (Alpha reliability is 0.72):

- (i) *'Being a parent is harder than I thought it would be';*
- (ii) *'I often feel tired, worn out, or exhausted from meeting the needs of my children';*
- (iii) *'I feel trapped by my responsibilities as a parent';*
- and (iv) *'I find that taking care of my child/children is much more work than pleasure'.*

All the items described in this appendix are based on ratings from 1 'strongly disagree' to 7 'strongly agree'.

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