

CHAPTER 8 Supervisors in manufacturing

Long hours and 'averaged hours' agreements

Four employees in a large manufacturing site were interviewed along with three of their partners. These employees are supervisors or middle managers in manufacturing. Their experience is shaped by working in a workplace that has seen several large waves of restructuring that have reduced the size of the workforce, which continues to work under tight deadlines and considerable time pressure. That pressure has resulted in very long hours of work for many, especially the staff employees in our interview group most of whom are on a six monthly hours agreement where their normal hours are 40 per week plus 'reasonable overtime'. If they work more than an average of 50 hours per week over the six months, they receive a financial bonus that they describe as 'small'.

This averaged hours concept, with its financial bonus in the event that very long hours are worked, resulted in 'out of control' hours for many employees, and the cost is evident in family relationships, personal health, and long term effects on social and non-work life generally. Like many others working long hours, these hours are associated with 'pressure' creating a double impact on individuals, families and their communities. Health effects included: fatigue, depression, "turns", collapse, sleeplessness, dreams about work, constantly thinking about work, panic attacks, anger, depression and mood swings. The combination of pressure at work (in view of tight timelines) and long hours meant that employees were very strained, and their personal lives were deeply affected.

Several workers had a sense that they could not do their jobs even in extended hours. A sense of worthlessness appears to develop amongst workers who blamed themselves for not being able to complete their tasks.

Several of those interviewed had worked very long hours (more than 60 a week) for extended periods historically. Their experience of this meant that they now resisted working over 45 hours despite pressures and threats from their employers. They became aware that the stress and fatigue meant they were having no life outside work: they fell asleep or had no motivation, were angry and emotional, had no time to spend with their children, and left their wives to deal with the household and children on their own. Comments were made that those workers without children did not have the same concerns, or that those who had children and still worked weekends, had an impoverished life, one they didn't want to be forced to have. Several had changed jobs, leaving behind skills and tasks that they enjoyed, in order to avoid working long hours of overtime.

You work the long hours 'to do the right thing' – and keep your job

Monty has recently been transferred to a new section:

Yesterday I was informed that I was no longer required in the [x] department and they'd be moving me to [y]. And I believe it was due to the fact that I wasn't available Saturday due to family commitments, and had a lot to do with the back injury I sustained four weeks ago.

Patterns of work around Monty reflect the penalties that people believe will flow from refusing long hours. In his new area, one person is currently working 60 hours a week: 'He hasn't been there that long and they've only just moved him from the production side of things to staff and he just feels he needs to keep his position so he's trying to do the right hours'. He's also doing the Saturday: 'He is single and doesn't mind putting in the extra time'. A couple of employees are doing 55 hours and working weekends and he says this is because 'they have virtually been threatened into it because they didn't want to risk their position'. He had been told that if he refused to work the Saturday he may well be made redundant. So there is only one person in the group who is not working the 6 days a week and he will soon be moving across with them. 'They retrenched another person last Friday saying it was because of medical reasons, but he had refused to work the Saturdays and he couldn't start any earlier than 7.30 and they wanted him to start at 7am'.

Monty no longer wanted to work Saturdays:

If those 45 hours keep them happy, well [that's OK]. When you know you're there the extra hour every day, or whatever it may take, it doesn't really hurt as much as another full day out of your week. When you look at leaving yourself one day to ...live your family life. It's a bit much. It's certainly not something I'm ready to give up.

Monty's children have Guides, art and dog training and competition and he wants to be there and be involved with his three children.

But it was not always easy to refuse the Saturday work, as one of his co-workers discovered:

One of the guys who stood up to [working on Saturdays] all the way, he had the same thing, family commitments and so forth, he ended up resigning 'cause, they took him all the way. He asked for a transfer and he said 'if...I have to work the Saturdays, transfer me to another department where I don't have to work Saturday' and they said 'well there is no position available'. So he ended up resigning and left. That was probably three weeks ago and he was the most experienced in that department. And they came down on me and asked me to work the Saturdays. And I still refused because I said the same thing: because I had family commitments. And that's when the back injury came in. And I think they didn't feel they could touch me because I was [injured] so they transferred me instead, yet this transfer wasn't available for the other bloke...

What long hours do to families of supervisors and skilled workers

Larry works long hours in order to be there to supervise a large team of workers. He described a range of health effects that had affected him personally, including fatigue:

We'd basically be flat out all day. We'd be running around chasing items and it was very physical, climbing ladders.

He found that the health effects spilled over into home life:

I couldn't sleep. I'd be thinking about the job all night. And that's where the fatigue comes into it too. And I just wasn't happy with it. I felt worn out and run down.

I wasn't spending much time with the family. Basically spending an hour with them a night and on Sundays and it basically wasn't enough for me... I've got three kids I like to spend time with them...The job I was doing was very frustrating. You'd be beating your head up against a brick wall most of the day trying to get things done and I'd basically come home and I'd still be shitty from the day and I'd be very angry at night and probably take it out on them at night...Just easy things, like there was a mess from the kids when I came home and I'd fly off the handle for nothing. It just happened too much.

Larry shares a short fuse with other co-workers who describe very similar effects. A number of interviewees mentioned specific health effects arising from long hours. For example, Gerry who was working between 50 and 56 hours a week:

The reason I was doing that was because... there was a lot of pressure [to get the job done]. I actually had a 'turn' if you like. I collapsed in one of the toilets and they had to take me to hospital and I had a week off. And it was obviously just the body rejecting what I was doing... I was worn out...the hours I was doing obviously contributed to what transpired...

But I think that what happened there was that working those long hours, as you'd appreciate, you come home, and when you've got three children, and they want to play and you would like to, but you're that tired, you go and have your dinner and sit on the lounge and you fall asleep. So I think for the three and a half years I worked in [that job], was probably the hardest three years I've ever worked... No one actually makes you work those hours, but with the structure of the way the place is, it was a matter of having to do it because you were just getting further and further behind and we were always asking for more support in that particular area. Well it never really came. I was doing that particular job on my own. So it got to a stage after three years that I just asked for a change to another area, 'cause I just felt that not only that it affected my health, but most importantly it was affecting my home life.

The subtle pressure to work long hours: 'I had a commitment'

Now Gerry is working 47 to 48 hours a week. He believes that it was his commitment to doing a good job – to getting through the work – that led him to overwork and his eventual collapse.

No one asked me to do that. It was just I felt the need to, because if you went back to work the next day there was a bundle of work that had to be done before you actually did the work for the next day...I used to get in at 6 o'clock and do a fair bit of work for the first hour when no one else was there and you get no remuneration for that... I had a commitment to the people I was working for to get that happening. But in retrospect looking back now at what's happening now, I wish I was a bit more thoughtful and hadn't have put myself in that situation.

Social life

Larry misses a social and home life. He has 3 children less than 8 years. While he doesn't feel that it is unreasonable to 'put in' at work, he thinks it should be 'within reason':

I didn't have a social life. I came home on 4 o'clock, or 5 o'clock on a Saturday, and 6,7 o'clock during the week so I didn't really have a social life... Now I've got time to do things. We've just moved into the house, three years ago, and you know there's a few things I wanted to do and I just didn't have time before. There's only a certain amount of hours in the day you can do things, and if you spend most of your time at work, which is fair enough, you're being paid to do a job, you do the job, but within reason.

I don't live to work, I work to live.

Larry decided the only way he could get reduced hours was by changing jobs. He has moved to a new role and works 45 hour a week, has weekends off, and knocks off at 4 o'clock. His quality of life has improved:

I'm happy with what I'm doing... And I'm happy going into work... In a way the company did look after me in changing my roles because the hours were ridiculous that I was working... I'm spending a lot of time with my family which I'm a big fan of. Basically we do a lot of [racing] and a lot of sports with my kids. I spend a lot more time at home. Going out on the weekends, going away...I'm enjoying the role that I'm doing... It's rewarding..."

Interviewer: It sounds as though you're enjoying when you're home more?

Oh definitely. That's what I live for. That's why I go to work to... I don't live to work, I work to live.

But he is concerned that the company is understaffed and believes that his hours and responsibility may be increased in the future.

In Larry's view:

No one likes to live at work. I like to live at home and spend time with my family. If you spend most of your life working... it doesn't really mean anything, does it? ... You don't get much time with your family or catch back up on sleep. See, in my role I've got three kids, one at school, and by the time I come home, help with homework, have showers and baths, you know, I'm just about ready to collapse.

Larry is also concerned about fatigue, since he knows people who have had car accidents on the way home, 'OHS wouldn't be so much of a problem in the workplace' he says if people worked more reasonable hours: personally he would consider 8 to 9 hours a day, 5 days a week reasonable working hours.

Larry's wife Anne has noticed a big difference with his hours. His old long hours 'just weren't working for us', and they affected his moods, energy and eventually their relationship:

[There was] less family time. Less time for him, like the kids have different things going like there's karate and calisthenics and different things like that. He had no time to take them to participate in any of their sports or their interests. And then he had no time for his own interests either. Probably more stress, more up tight, you could tell he was under pressure. Just very snappy and not really having a good time at all.

He sometimes missed seeing the children before they went to bed:

They'd always say, 'where's dad?' ... It was going into the evening and nearly bedtime and, well, dad wasn't there and they didn't see dad til maybe the next day if they were lucky, if they hadn't already gone to bed... He wasn't around a lot and he wasn't always there to take them to their sporting or social activities.

This also affected Anne, and Larry could not always leave work at work, given his hours. Her efforts to fit work around Larry's hours meant that when one clocked in at home, the other clocked out:

Of course it [affects me], because I don't have anyone to look after the kids or to leave them with or anything because they're too young... Just coping with that, I 'spose when they came back [from work], really wound up from that sort of stuff too, you know it's

the pressure of it all, it's sometimes difficult to leave it at the door. And sometimes I'd say to Larry, 'Just leave it at work, work's work', but when you put so much time into work it - some of it does come through the door at home of an evening... At the time I was working night shift to fit in work. So he would basically come home Saturday afternoon and I'd go off and do a night shift, because I was just exhausted as well, 'cause that little bit of money helps with things... So there was less time for us as well. There was one in the door and the other out again. And then Sunday would come and before we knew it Sunday was over and we were back to Monday again. It was just like, well very limited family life.

Gerry points out that you can load people up only so far in terms of hours:

You've got to realise people have commitments outside work hours with families and so forth, and they've got to have some sort of compromise that work is work and you do that while you're here obviously, but you can't expect people to work - and I know some staff did - work in excess of 60 hours per week. You can load a camel so far and you just pack in so much.

The effect on relationships: 'It's not worth our marriage, it's not worth what it's doing to us'

Larry and his wife felt they had to choose between his hours and their marriage:

I said to him, 'It's not worth our marriage, it's not worth what it's doing to us, just go and speak to someone,' because I said, 'you can't keep this up'. So he did.

It had got to the stage where they were hardly seeing each other, or together as a family, there was a lot of fighting and arguments because both of them were stressed. There was nobody to help with the childcare. Anne is really happy Larry is now in a different job, as the hours he is currently doing means they can now plan time together.

We decided that wasn't the way we wanted it to go, 'cause like my father and Larry's father both worked two jobs or three jobs and we never saw our dads and we said, 'no we don't want that for our kids. Money's not that important if you haven't got a relationship or a marriage that is workable.

'Why don't you show us as much attention as you do to your work?'

Gerry's situation was very similar. He points to staffing reductions as creating pressure on hours – and how his family pulled him up, along with his collapse at work:

I've always been someone who is pretty committed to whatever role I play and I think the... straw that broke the camels back when I did collapse and went into hospital, my hours, and I must say the manager did come up and say to me, 'you just want to ease up a bit'... There's a lot of people in the same boat. It's a very pressurised situation and I think it's getting worse with the reduction in numbers... It was very easy for people working around you to say, 'oh look, I don't know why you bother', but if you didn't bother at that particular time when everyone's gone home, it just meant you had more and more work and like I said you put up with it... When you come home and you're wife and kids say, 'well why don't you show us as much attention as you do to your work', and I think that puts you back in the reality of the whole process... The collapse I had and the hospital trip I had... maybe woke me up to what I should have woken up to initially.

Gerry regularly left home in the dark and arrived home at dark. He became irritable and argumentative at home like others in this industry who worked long hours:

I know I was the guilty party. It just got that any minor thing that that my wife or kids had, you'd take it out on them by maybe not talking to them or isolating yourself... Maybe I'm one of the lucky ones that woke up to the reality of what the important ingredient is and it's not work, it's the people that you're home with... When I was in hospital she come in that particular night [after I had collapsed] and she said to me, 'look you either get something that doesn't take the hours, or you leave the job you're doing' and like she said, 'it has affected the marriage, it has affected the children, and you're obligated not only to yourself, but to us, to look after you're health'. I think it was mainly the collapse I had and the hospitalisation that brought it to a head.

Gerry and his wife had discussed the long hours he had put in: 'Foolishly I used to laugh it off. I'd say, 'look, it's something I have to do'... and she said to me on a number of occasions, 'Look, work's not everything, if you've got to work those hours, maybe look for something else.' While he was able to realise the importance of his family in time to do something about it, he doesn't feel everyone is so lucky:

We got a guy who unfortunately he's parted company [with his wife] and... he said, 'it's not just that [long hours], but that's part of the process of why it happened' and I think that when you each start to contemplate it or start to think it... I think in anyone's sacrifice when you do believe that there is some chance, because of the hours you work... I don't think anyone can afford for that to happen.

Bronwyn who had been a full-time teacher prior to having children, described feeling lonely when her partner's hours increased and remaining long for extended periods:

With a young one back then, a little one, it's lonely. And being the first [child], it's hard. I had to do a lot of the things on my own. It's lonely. It's waiting – especially those 6.30, quarter to 7 nights... but you get to do things around the house. You keep yourself busy... and making sure dinner was prepared and things around the house were done. So it was lonely, he'd ring up and I'd say, 'when are you coming home?'

Her husband's long hours were bad for him, her and for the children. When he was working the much longer hours, even when he was home he was too tired and unmotivated to play with the children:

He was just too tired to sit there and even think about pushing the car along the ground. He couldn't do it. He wasn't interested. Whereas now he'll go and play and roll around on the floor and do things with the kids that they need to have done with them.

Their relationship had also become more difficult, and Bronwyn was aware this was because of the pressure and tiredness he was feeling:

He was just always on edge. So he'd be very quick to – he's never been abusive in anyway during this time - but he'd be very quick to lose his temper, not in a bad way, just short-tempered. Unlike himself. Very forgetful... I was constantly reminding him to do things... It was very frustrating... Work was stressing him out so he was coming home and forgetting certain things and that meant it put more pressure on me. I was carrying the workload and doing a lot more and that did affect the relationship... I remember him coming home one night. ...His dinner had been in the oven for god knows how long. I think it was 8.30 when he came in and [eldest son] was already in bed... and he did say he hated his job because the little one had gone to sleep and he hadn't seen him. He'd left home in the morning and [eldest son] was asleep. And he came home and [eldest son] was asleep...

She feels that a recent reduction in her husband's hours has had a beneficial effect on the family and organising her life:

Much easier, because you know there are set hours and you can organise your time... It is more consistent - the hours - and we are able to plan around things. And knowing the weekends are off makes it easier. We can do things with the kids. Like I organised something for the boys to do something on a Saturday and I knew he would be home so he could go with us and was able to enjoy doing things with the kids on the weekends as well

What would help?

These workers felt that their 'average hours' contract left them very vulnerable to long hours. As one put it, employees needed specific rules about time and hours, and averaging contracts and vague discussion of 'reasonable' hours gave little protection:

I think you should know that you're expected to do x amount of hours a day and after that, be that 40 or 45... you can actually say, 'no, I'm not coming in. I've done my quota of hours and you can't be forced to come in'. And if you do come in past those hours, you should be rewarded for them correctly. And you need to be very black and white about that. You should know exactly what is expected of you. And they should also know what you're willing to give. In our case that's a very, very grey area and no one ever gives you a straight answer... If you're entering a contract and your contract says 40 hours a week plus a reasonable amount of overtime. Well, 40-hour week is an 8-hour day. And reasonable amount of hours. What's that? 4, 5 hours a week?

This supervisor was not alone in feeling that the contract should specify the amount of overtime is expected - that the weekend should be left free: 'Okay you know that you've got to work 9 hours a day and I've still got my weekends off. To have a break. To unwind.' These workers also placed a high value on getting a break from work, and on fair recognition of extra hours worked.

CHAPTER 9 Public Service

Seven public service workers were interviewed. Four of these were partners to each other, and a further 4 partners were interviewed, totaling 11 interviews. The workers undertook a range of different jobs mostly at more senior levels. All worked long hours (over 48 a week). Two were in the Senior Executive Service (SES) and the remainder were mostly at EL1 or EL2 level – that is, at senior levels just below the SES. One was single without children, a further couple had children who had left home, and the remainder lived in households with young children. Four interviewees were Canberra based; the remainder were spread around Australia. One interviewee who worked in a technical supervisory position in the media, worked shifts. This brought particular disruption to his life.

A culture of long hours emerges from these accounts. This culture is becoming more intense: the demand for longer hours is stepping up. The ‘good’ worker works them, unencumbered by family or community – out of commitment, wish for progression, frequently without being paid for them, and - in the process - creates new long hours standards for managers and those with responsibility in the organisations – which all must meet. Failure to meet them means taking the ‘mummy-’ or ‘daddy-track’, marginalisation and acceptance that one’s career will need rehabilitation in the future if it is to get back ‘on track’.

Interestingly, more than half of these families were considering significant changes in their collective hours of work. Bob and Abby were in the middle of trying to make a difficult decision: they realised that probably one of them would have to choose between having a full-time, expanding career and spending more time with their family. Leena had realised that work had almost eliminated her personal life and was looking forward to changing jobs and eventually retirement; work had made it hard for her to look after her aging mother and she felt – as a worker without children - she sometimes picked up when worker-parents went home. Sonya had made the choice to give up full-time work to spend more time with the family, realising that the consequences of being part-time are that she would be considered to be less committed to her career. Tricia had given up her demanding job entirely in order to be at home with the children and support Abe in *his* demanding job. Paul and Mary’s marriage was seriously affected by the combination of long hours and shift work. Together these cases create strong evidence of the non-sustainability of long hours for workers ‘encumbered’ by family – or perhaps more accurately – wanting to have a life.

The long hours of public service

Average hours of 50-60 were common in the group. Pat, for example regularly works 10 hours paid overtime in her job where apart from her own tasks she is something of a ‘trouble

shooter' and her skills and job-tenure pull her into this regular overtime which has been going on, most recently for 12 months. She is level APS3 (acting 4) who is always paid for her overtime. Sonya's hours and situation illustrate several common aspects of the jobs of public service workers. Until recently Sonya had worked full-time, managing several programs. She has young children, and had decided to go part-time. When working full-time she averaged about 65 hours per week. She would come into the office at about 9am (after dropping her kids off at school) and then work to 6.30/7.30pm. After having dinner at home she would then do about 1.5-3 hours of computer work or reading, 'unless I had made the conscious decision "I'm not doing it tonight"'. She often worked for 3-4 hours every Saturday and then also did some work at home on Sunday evening:

It was a fairly large workload and I had been doing it for several years, which is why I went part-time. I decided that that was enough and the only way I saw out of it was to say... I'll go part-time.

A breaking point had eventually arrived and Sonya was ready to go part-time:

So I had all those [hours] and I was working weekends, I was working evenings and if I didn't work weekends I would be so stressed on Monday morning that I could just feel the tension rising on Sunday night. I would make a decision: 'I'm not working this weekend. I'm going to go out with my family and we are going to do these things' and then by Sunday night I was so tense because I was thinking about the workload that was facing me during the week that it was counterproductive. It was actually better for me to do the work and at least have a modicum of relaxation. So yeah I did actually say I can't do this anymore.

In another example, Leena is an EL2 working in a policy area. Leena is not on flextime, but she does try to write her hours down in a diary. She starts work anywhere from 7.30-9am and leaves 6-8pm and frequently misses lunch. Leena said that she works a 10-hour day on average and occasionally a 12-hour day. She takes work home and usually does half a day on the weekend, sometimes longer, 'I feel guilty if I don't'. She is single without children. In the senior executive service the hours ranged between long and extremely long. While even though senior officers like Bob and Abby who had children regularly worked very long hours, they thoroughly enjoyed aspects of their jobs: 'They're both fabulously interesting jobs'.

A number of these workers also travel for their jobs and this eats into their non-work hours. This affects their hours. Abe for example, with several young children, loses his Sunday on average every 3 weeks for travel interstate. He has been working 45-50 hours per week for 18 months as an EL1 and under his agreement he does not have any flextime. His supervisor who is 'very good' told him to take a day off recently after a long bout of travel. He really

enjoyed the days off but the work is all there to greet him when he comes back '110 emails when I walked back in!'. Abe supervises a range of workers who also work long hours because of under-staffing but who 'understate the hours they work on a daily basis so they don't have me hassling them! - so that they don't get too far over on their flextime...It comes down to availability of enough people, and the number of people that have been lost, and the corporate knowledge that went with them. All those things place stress on an organisation'. One of the reasons Abe's wife chose to live 90 minutes from his job was 'so that he couldn't go to work on weekends'.

A number of workers describe the intensity of their work, and point to the impact of electronic document transfer and communication as increasing workloads. Tricia describes her partner's end of day response:

I will ask him how his day went, and he will say 'Intense'. Rather than busy. That, coupled with the fact that he has lost relaxation skills, means that there is no down time, even mental downtime. The long term effects of that must be unhealthy.

Tricia left her own senior public service job to raise their children. She plans to never go back to it: 'Now I have my chickens. They are easier to manage than staff'. And they don't ask for long hours.

Why work long hours?

Public service workers pointed to three main reasons for working long hours. Inadequate staffing levels were seen as pivotal. Each interviewee identified in one form or another the effects of culture of long hours as creating a demand that they work them: this culture created an entrenched expectation that long hours were 'good', that 'good' workers and managers worked them, and that employment recognition flowed from working them. Finally each interviewee wanted to get their job done and drew satisfaction from their contribution. Pat for example observed that her organisation had a charter of service that it simply could not honour with current staffing levels without overtime: 'the job just can't get done'. For many, work was enjoyable, and provided a sense of satisfaction and pleasure. Pat, who was paid for her overtime - unusually in this group - said that it was 'equally my need for the money [her partner was out of work] and the customers' need an answer. We shouldn't put that off just because we are behind'.

At the same time, several interviewees identified, repetitively, several key problems that arose from long hours, including for individuals, couple relationships, children and extra-curricula activities in the community.

Staffing levels are crucial

In terms of the factors that have led to the extended working hours, the dominant cause in the view of public service workers – regardless of the service they do or in what state - is staffing levels. This is ‘a fundamental issue’. Several interviewees named resourcing as the main problem along with inadequate benchmarking of the resources required to do a particular job. People were loaded to their limit and beyond to test the resourcing capacities. For example, in Sonya’s experience, she has found that to get a project going, managers start off using less than adequate resources; once they see that employees are coping they are not given adequate resourcing and if anything are expected to do more.

[if you ask for more] you get portrayed as a bit of a whinger. You’re always saying ‘I need more resources. I need more resources’. ... You just see if they can cope, yes they do, you throw more work their way, they keep coping, throw a bit more their way and eventually they start to crumble.

This is known in the literature of work organisation as ‘management by stress’ (Slaughter and Parker). It has most commonly been named in relation to factory line work, where the line speed is set at a level that works employees to their stress levels – and beyond. The speed of work is set according to just sustainable levels of employees’ stress.

You are always expected to do more with less and that’s just become a way of managing things and you just step over the bodies that collapse along the way...It’s the infamous bottom line, that you’ve just got to be always cutting back without any real recognition of what is involved... there is no awareness... well there is lip-service paid to it, but there is no practical awareness of the toll it takes on staff and the resources required to deal with the issues.

Public service workers with management tasks say that hours will not be reduced until there is more staffing:

It’s more a question of how I would like to see resources organized and I’d like to see sufficient resources there so people can work a normal day.

Several managers said that in busy times they would tell their staff to take some time off later but that in many cases staff could not find the time to do so.

The Personal Impact of Long Working Hours

Sonya was feeling the strain on herself personally as well as her family and decided to go part-time which would 'force' a reduction in hours. Sonya now works slightly more than half-time. She tries to make sure that she only works her assigned paid hours, though it is a struggle to contain them.

Sonya has found management's response to the change in her working patterns to be:

incredibly good, very flexible, willing to assist. I mean it's a quid pro quo. They know I'll do the work and produce the goods, so they are quite willing for me to be flexible and I'm fairly conscientious, that I'm making sure that if I do get in late that I'll make up the hours somewhere else.

Sonya said that the result of her long hours is:

Your stress levels are enormously high. If I wasn't at work or doing work at home, I was thinking about work and what needed to be done. And I got to the stage where I couldn't see a light at the end of the tunnel.

Sonya said she had lost interest in running the household; she stopped housework and cooking, due to her long hours: 'I just lowered my standards!' They were eating take away food most nights, which she regretted: 'that impacts on your nutrition'. She was also less physically active, and no longer going for walks.

Sonya said that she never hated her job but 'I did often come into work just with a sense of doom hanging over me, because there would just be one crisis after another'. But she found she no longer got excited about her job, she was beginning to think "I'm so over it".

The personal impact of long hours extended beyond those with children. Like Sonya, Leena had tried to cut her hours since she had decided against letting it 'kill' her:

I think I'm trying a whole lot harder to not put in the hours and I'm feeling less driven to put in the hours than I used to...Now I just figure I still do have a contribution to make, but it's not going to kill me...I think the area I'm in has a burn-out factor.

Other factors have also played a part such as caring for her mother. She is aware that some of her staff would not like to be in her position because of the hours she works:

Some of the junior staff have said to me ... 'Why would I want your job? Why would I want to get any more senior than I currently am because if I have to work the way you work it's not worth it' And what can you say? ... A very good attitude to have!

The long hours at work have made Leena feel tired all the time and that she has no room for other interests, for example, just simple things like reading a book or the paper or watching the news. Her friendships have also been constrained:

I am conscious that I am increasingly pushing myself. It feels like I am increasingly pushing myself and that I am tired. I feel tired a lot of the time...Apart from that, there has been a greater fallout, which is being far less involvement with friends and structured outside interests. It's been juggling - which is my priority? Do I stay and work rather than catch up with people and probably until relatively recently I would have stayed and worked.

Leena said that it got to the stage where her friends would say "Oh, so you've got to work" and then they'd stop asking. Or they keep in touch less frequently and then I get guilty'.

Leena can envision what life would be like if she worked more reasonable hours:

I'd be able to get home at a reasonable hour, sit down with a cup of coffee and go through the paper or water the garden or go for a walk. Have my dinner out of the way at a reasonable hour and then do something leisurely after dinner. Instead of feeling as I currently do, I come home, there's nothing defrosted, I throw something together at

half past 8 at night, bolt it down, go to bed with indigestion, get up the next morning start all over again!

Leena said that if she was living the former scenario 'I'd probably be a lot easier to get on with. ... I feel like I have been irritable and that my fuse has been shorter. I may be managing it OK but it's probably costing me more to manage it'.

Pat had been working long regular hours of overtime (as had her partner) when in 1999 she took a year off 'because I was about to crack – because of general stress and pressures and hubby was in the same position, so we decided not to have a heart attack but to have a year off'. The combination of long hours and poor management and inadequate technology meant that Pat was placed under a lot of stress: 'I didn't have time for my family and to do the stuff that I needed to do. Didn't have time for me...I was mentally tired. I suppose I got a bit snappy from time to time. My husband was exactly the same [working 12 hours a day as a supervisor pipe fitter]. We just went home and vegetated.' For Pat a critical part of her overtime work was control over when she worked so that you can 'balance work and home. If one of the children said there is something coming up, I need you, then you can be there. I have seen people not have control and it creates devastating pressures'.

Paul described 'walking around in a daze' as a result of his long hours and shift work: 'I'm buggared' whether he was at home, or at work. He managed the shift roster in his workplace and described how workers often did double shifts or extended shifts which 'led to poor diet' and irregular eating as well as exhaustion and a lack of safety, for example driving home. His wife worried about him driving home after long shifts. Mary felt that Paul was mentally

near exhaustion. It worries me, him driving at home late at night. And I don't think he switches off. It is more of a 24-hour job. Mentally he is still there... Any physically he doesn't get regular good meals. He can't be in the cricket club and things like that.

Abe finds his long hours tiring:

I get pretty tired. It is busy at home (with 3 children) and at work. Plus I live an hour and 10 minutes from work, so I add another 3 hours of travel time..so I am up at 6am, walk back in the front door at ten past 7. The kids are already bathed and sitting up. I only see the kids for half an hour a day.

Abe feels that if he worked more reasonable hours he would be more creative, have 'more bounce in my step' and be healthier all round. He thinks his wife is concerned 'that he doesn't run himself ragged'. He is right; his wife is worried:

My primary concern is about the long term effects on his health. He eats really late. We rarely sit down to a family meal. [That] is really missing. I eat with the children so he doesn't eat til 8-9pm, he rarely eats breakfast, and he has lost his relaxation skills...he is constantly stressed. He has physically aged, he has put on weight. If he doesn't take lunch with him, he doesn't normally have lunch, and even then he doesn't break – he eats at the desk. I mean, we have spoken about all these things and I guess I am pretty hard on him in that I hammer him and say you know nobody else can change this but you...you should take lunch, it is part of your award. (Tricia)

Tricia is concerned that all Abe's energy goes into work. This also has effects on their relationship:

We argue. It does affect us sometimes, sometimes it doesn't, depending on how long it has gone on for...Long hours have affected it. He often says all he does is get up, go to work, come home and eat and then start again and the weekends he catches up on sleep. That's when the arguments come up, and he doesn't have any energy, doesn't want to do anything. And the long term effects of that concern me. It is a very insular life. It's not productive in terms of a life: it is only productive in terms of a cog in a wheel. The kids get ticked off on the weekend - even the 4 year old will complain about how much dad sleeps on the weekend.

Impact on family: 'Please don't go to work on Sunday Mum'

Sonya describes her experience before going part-time:

It made me feel guilty because of my relationship with my family, which, you know, I felt it was suffering. I'd get notes from my daughter saying, 'Please don't go to work on Sunday Mum' which just rips your heartstrings out. I felt guilty about the pressure I was putting on my partner. (Sonya)

The impact on her children of cutting back hours is obvious to her:

I didn't give the children the attention I thought I should be giving them. And I've just noticed this year, [being part-time], they just love having me around, it's lovely. I was always rushing through things with them... never getting out and just playing games with them. The stress was starting to tell on all of them.

Sonya feels that the kids felt stressed because she was always rushing, maintaining a momentum of always being rushed and stressed. As a result, her youngest child, in particular, was displaying naughty and attention seeking behaviour while the older children also showed signs of reaction. "With the older ones they get introspective I think. ... So they just love it, now, the current [lower hours] regime".

Her kids have told Sonya that they really like having her home, 'they notice the difference'.

Sonya's experience and analysis is in accord with the larger research evidence which shows that what children dislike most about their parents work is its effect in creating stressed, tired parents. What is more, Sonya's sense that long hours and parent's lack of 'hang around' time affects children is also borne out in the literature (Galinsky 1999, Pocock 2001).

Sonya's partner Gerard agreed that their children did notice that Sonya was putting in long hours at work, although he doesn't think it was a "huge deal" for them because they were still fairly young. He thinks they are OK as long as there is one parent there for them. When Sonya was working long hours the children would ask where she was, 'particularly if they were going to bed and she wasn't there to say goodnight. They would have a bit of a grumble' (Gerard). Now that Sonya is working part-time he believes they have a much more relaxed household and Sonya is able to take on more activities with the kids, such as sport and music lessons 'they were things that we couldn't always do before'.

Other parents agreed: Abby and Bob felt that their hours caused strain on their relationship with their kids.

Yeah... yeah I think it does. Because generally speaking, as you can tell from those hours [that we are working], is that we only see them for about 2 and a half hours a day and not good times of the day - we are getting them up, getting them going or putting them to bed. (Abby)

What's that term? It was in an article - children growing up now are called the 'hurry up generation' and it's true! Because we spend a whole morning rushing them... getting

dressed and so on. We spend most of the day saying 'Hurry up! Hurry up!' And that's what we spend a little bit of the nighttime saying. We're basically saying 'Hurry up, tie your shoes. Hurry up, brush your teeth' and so it's - pretty much - stress right through. Which again is something that you become so habituated to, you actually don't notice after a while. (Bob)

Abe doesn't think his three children 4-10 years mind his hours. On reflection he says that his children have said they would like him to come to school events and 'When I've been away they clamour for attention, but they don't verbalise dissatisfaction to me'. Tricia, Abe's partner held a job more senior than his until she resigned a few years earlier. When they both worked long hours she says:

We didn't know any different. We just managed. Now I don't do that, I don't think our family could go back to it, I don't think either Abe or I would cope or the children...I'm here all the time now. The children get a parent representative at school activities, the two little ones get what the older ones never got, like mother's little helper. I mean, in those old days things did go wrong. I forgot to pick them up from day care a couple of times and - it sounds horrible doesn't it! – but none of that happens now. And now quiet literally Abe can go to work. He doesn't do anything but go to work. And the kids are doing out of school activities that they have never done before – tennis, music – and they just don't happen when you are in daycare. They are not in holiday care. They have more contact with extended family, they see friends more.

Tricia sees that the new arrangement has strengthened the extended family with more contact with grandparents. She also sees personal benefits for herself:

I'm a lot calmer. [When I had a job] we used to have a cleaner, and ironing lady, the weekends were there for leisure and we were lucky that we had the income to pay for those things...We paid for overnight care so I could go into hospital and have a baby. We were very organised.' When the kids want to do reading I'm more inclined to say 'Yes, I can' rather than 'yeah-yeah-yeah-in-a-minute!'

Tricia feels that the kids miss out on Abe's attention: 'they vie for his attention. They squabble over it when he walks in the door and he has to deal with it...He'd be hard pushed to tell you his actual birthday...He's missing out on their childhood'.

Interestingly, Pat who did not work until her six children were in their late teens, saw some benefits for her older children through her work: it encouraged them to be 'a bit independent – they had been spoiled so it was probably a good thing'. Pat chose being at home with her

children throughout their school years. She observed that parents tended to take more carers leave when they worked long hours:

Thankfully we are a fairly professional team, and we don't let it get to us, but I have noticed one person say that it's a bit of a joke that they work overtime and then they take an equal amount of sick leave or carers leave later. It can be a bit of a sore point.

Effect on Relationships

Long hours of work had various effects on the relationships of public sector workers. For some, these hours turned the parent at home into a single parent. For others, long hours caused stress for intimate couple relationships.

Paul, who works long hours in conjunction with shift work, found that his shift work meant that he could sometimes be there for his children's school 'things' because he had a day off during the week. He valued this highly but he missed seeing his children on a regular basis: 'I kiss them goodnight when I drop them off at school'. However, he felt that this created a very big load for his wife:

My wife becomes a single parent. It affects her career. She has to be available to look after the children 24 hours a day. Because [my hours] are not predictable. Because you can't predict. She has to refuse work to look after everything.

She agreed, and found it a heavy load. Paul's long hours and unpredictable shifts had imposed a large price on their relationship.

It adds a lot of stress to the family. It's very difficult to understand unless you live it... We live as a single parent family. While Paul is a very caring and loving father, he cannot be relied upon, through no fault of his own, to be at any particular function or event... It adds to my stress level. It adds to stress on our marriage and I think obviously it adds to stress for the children. It has built a very strong bond between the kids and myself, and I think that the bond between Paul and the kids could be nonexistent except that he works very hard at it. So the stress doesn't roll onto him as well. I am the sole decision maker in a lot of decisions, even financial decisions. He comes home late. He falls asleep on the lounge and he might be back at work again in 8 hours, and by the time he has eaten and slept there is no time to discuss things. It adds a lot of stress, decision-making stress, financial stress.

Paul's hours had contributed to a crisis in their marriage recently:

12 months ago we went through quite a difficult period of time where we could have easily separated except that we decided to sit down and talk about it and evaluate what was happening to us. That was at a time when Paul was away a lot as well...so yeah it has [affected our relationship]. It is a lot of hard work...we could have easily separated. The incidence of marriage breakups is extremely high in the industry

Interviewer: Do you think that is partly a result of the long hours?

Yes definitely. It's because of the type of people [in the industry] but you can't socialise together, you find it difficult to sit down and have a conversation for any length of time.

Mary felt particular types of women were more likely to 'last' as partners of long hours workers: 'They have to be independent, to be strong'. Further, that Paul's hours had affected the children's 'bond with him': 'They ask him to attend functions, even family functions, and frequently he can't'.

Even going out to dinner socially is hard. Friends don't understand. The girls appear to accept it – they have known nothing different. To have people around for dinner, planning six weeks in advance. It impacts on family and social outings. [If he worked more regular hours] he would see more of the kids things, and we would have more of a social life, join clubs.

Mary has completely restructured her work after children to meet the demands of Paul's job:

I've gone from an income of \$35,000 to a job that is irregular, earning \$6-7000 a year solely because of Paul's job.

Domestic work: the one at home does more

Pat describes being married to ‘the second least most domesticated man on earth’ who had to be taught everything when he became unemployed and she went back to long hours. Now, Charles does most of the housework while she works. Similarly, Tricia says that Abe ‘does nothing except go to work’; Abe’s long hours and travel are a barrier to anything but ‘visiting the hardware shop on the weekend’ and gardening. Mary described herself as a single parent, given Paul’s long hours and unpredictable shifts ‘Paul actually asks me ‘well what are we doing today?’ He fits into our routines. The domestic side is all done by me. He helps with the garden.’

Impact on partners: their support is essential to the survival and maintenance of the long hours worker

For many public service workers, their partner’s support is critical to their ability to work long and intense working hours. For example, Sonya says if it hadn’t been for her partner ‘she wouldn’t have survived in the job’. Sonya says she has a very equal relationship that has helped.

In terms of her relationship with her partner, Sonya thinks the main thing that suffered was communication because they didn’t have much time to talk. Even though they made the conscious effort to have their lunch breaks together when she was at work full-time, these were often filled with Sonya offloading her stresses from work:

I used to be so revved up about work that I spent a lot of the time debriefing or dumping on him about what was going on, so we didn’t have a lot of time to discuss family issues or personal issues. My partner is incredibly supportive.

Partners were clear casualties of their public service partner’s long hours – and they observed costs for children and for the workers themselves. For example, Gerard said his partner’s very long hours put him under pressure as well because he found it hard to do his normal hours of work. Even when Sonya did come home she would be doing work at the computer. ‘It did impact a lot on the family life. The kids were really noticing it, saying ‘Why does Mum have to work so much?’ Gerard said that during this time he was worried for Sonya as he saw how much stress she was under. ‘She never had a breakdown or anything but there were times when I thought she was a bit overwhelmed by it all’.

Pat’s spouse works in the construction industry and, in her words, in their relationship ‘We just get on with it. Unfortunately your relationship might suffer for the sake of work but then we organise time out later to catch up...We make time to do that. And that has been important’. She calls these her ‘rest and recovery’ strategies that help keep her relationships

intact. Her partner Charles who spent 38 years in the construction industry was very clear about what long hours did to marriage:

Well working in the construction industry, the hours can vary from anything from 10 hrs a day to 16hrs a day. Having spent 38yrs in construction I didn't know what a 40 hr week was. You could work seven days a week, year in year out. It was a large contributor to the break up of my first marriage.

While he and Pat used 'rest and recovery' strategies to be together despite her long hours, and while he is accustomed to long hours from his own experience, all was not easy for him:

As a result of the long hours that I have spent away from home in the construction industry I can cope very well with the situation, although it can be frustrating at times especially the late nights that Pat has to work.

He also sees Pat's long hours as 'definitely detrimental as regards to the kids and the grandkids...For the grandkids it's 'why is grandma working all the time?'. He also sees some effect on the 6 grownup children 'None of the kids are at home any longer but they do miss her if they come around and Pat isn't there'.

Charles is currently unemployed and sees important community benefit from sharing the work around: 'The ideal hours for us would be 36-40. We could cope [on that income]. The ideal situation would be to get half of the workforce that are not in employment into the workforce and share the load of the section of industry that is overworked'.

Abe didn't think that his long hours had a negative affect on his partner:

I think sometimes if I return home after a few days, she won't actually want to talk to me again when I come home. I think it is just an adaption. She is from a navy background and she is used to the men being away for long periods.

His wife agrees 'I don't mind if he isn't here. It's harder on the children.'

Effects on grandparents and grandchildren

Pat clearly states the effects she notices for her grandchildren of her regular overtime:

If I worked 38 hours I would have more time for the grandchildren [She has 6]. My grandson is at the age - he is 4 - he'll pick me up from the train sometimes with granddad and he will say 'I waited to see you cos I haven't seen you for such a long time because you've been at work again!'. I'd definitely like to see a lot more of them. I'd like to have a day just for the grandchildren. My kids say we need to see more of you...grandparents are an essential part of the child's growing up because they can have a relationship with the child that it can't have with you parents and you lose out a lot by not having grandparents. I took my children away from their grandparents when they were 6, 8, and 10 and it did impact on them dramatically. My 8 year old admitted later that she hated me for the first two years after we moved because I took her away from her nanny and granddad. And from the reactions I am getting from my grandchildren they need their grandparents just as much as the grandparents need them.

Effects on spending patterns

Pat also points to the effect of overtime on spending patterns:

They buy takeaways because they are too tired to do what they normally would do.

She also pointed to her new desire for a dishwasher that arises from her overtime. She points out that it doesn't always pay to be in paid work and doing extra hours:

We had a couple who both worked full-time...who did a budget and found that if she stopped working they could sell the second car, give up take-aways and childcare and she ended up working half a day a week and they were earning \$12 a week less...People don't think, don't do the sums. Another breast-feeding mum [at work] found it was cheaper to work 4 days a week rather than 5. People get a bit hooked on overtime.

While their income situation is quite different to Pat's, Abby and Bob also talk about their income behaviour where they go out and spend when...

Long hours and social participation

Most of the public service workers who worked long hours were not able to take on 'extra things'. Their fitness and recreational activities suffered, as did their participation in non-work organisations, and community activities. When Sonya went part-time and reduced hours she saw that some of the benefits were 'just catching up on things, just not feeling so stressed and pressured at home ... stepping back a bit and winding down a bit'. Sonya has also been able to take part in school activities. Participating in activities related to her children was something she was unable to do before.

Going part-time: pleasures and the price

Going part-time brings real relief to previously long hours workers – with benefits for the individual and children:

Working part-time is great! It's just such a change and so relaxing, especially when I have time off and it's all to me, all to myself and I don't have any children hanging off me or anything! It just gives you a different perspective on life. I think everyone should just pull back for a little while and see how enjoyable it is. In terms of my family, yeah it would be good if I could have that time to pick them up from school and not put them under such pressure. Because it puts children under a lot of pressure to have to go straight from school to care, it's quite exhausting.

However, when managers go part-time, the work is not always set at part-time levels; instead part-time managers can avoid long hours. However, what Sonya gets when she goes part-time – apart from a halving of salary – is some protection from long hours. She believes that her new job is really work for a full-time position. As a result home becomes work:

I'm actually doing a full-time job... and I'm conscious of that and I don't want to impact on my team by them having to pick up the workload when I'm not here, even though to a certain extent they are very obliging about it... But there are things I will do at home. I do have a home computer, with the work network so I will log on and do my e-mails and catch up on a few briefs etc but not to a great extent. I am very careful now, not to do that anymore.

Now that Sonya is being paid to work part-time, her partner wants to see her stick to those hours. He knows from his own experience as he has worked part-time himself, and found that even though he was only working a 4 day week ‘in practice no one ever said “Ok you’ve got a reduced workload”... It was sort of like you’ve got to work out how to deal with your workload within those 4 days’. Gerard was still dealing with the same workload. He said that everyone he knows that has worked part-time has complained that the workload just intensifies, rather than actually being reduced? ‘You have to put up with that because you are getting something that you want’. Observing his partner, he concedes that she will work extra unpaid hours ‘for her own peace of mind’.

This problem extends to those who might try to go to a 9-day fortnight: Leena has seriously considered working part-time or a 9-day fortnight but realised ‘I would be kidding myself. I would be putting in the hours just to get the day off. Rather than a managed process of working a 9-day fortnight.’ Like those who go part-time when swimming in a culture of long hours – one that workers have themselves internalised – it is very difficult to actually work less.

The Family Tag: the ‘mummy’ track, the ‘daddy’ track

Sonya describes her feeling of being ‘compartmentalised’ for having cut back her hours, and the need to go back to long hours to get her career ‘back on track’:

Having gone part-time, made the statement ... that I couldn’t keep working that way, that now it’s like I’m in a certain compartment. ... But there is certainly a change towards me ... ‘she’s focused on her family and not her career’ ... I’m aware that if I wanted to get my career back on track I’d have to go full-time again. There’s absolutely no way around that.

Interestingly, she understands this attitude and believes she would probably have a similar one herself, as someone who goes part-time has basically stated that their family is their main preoccupation. Gerard (Sonya’s partner who also works in the public sector but at a less senior level and with access to flextime arrangements) has a very similar assessment of the price he has paid for being ‘family’ or taking the ‘daddy track’:

I have had bosses say to me 'You're a family person'. I've got a tag, yeah. It certainly affects me. When I was thinking of applying for an overseas posting the Branch Head said to me 'Well you know you couldn't be a family person like you are now'.

Gerard believes that the 'family tag' has negative connotations:

It's tolerated because I mean, we do have family policies and things like that in our certified agreement. ... I think if I decided now that I did want to get a promotion or go for a posting or anything like that, I'd have to put in some serious time trying to reverse my image.

Gerard believes that there is a culture of long hours in his department and that 'it is more important to be seen at your desk at 5.30-6-6.30pm than to be there early in the morning'.

Bob, now a senior officer in his department describes his experience of flirting with part-time work and the 'dangers' he felt it posed in terms of organisational perception that he thus might become one of the 'stuck' employees, rather than a winner. The father of young children and partner of another senior officer, he was playing with the idea of becoming part-time and then:

I got an offer for a job – and so that really forced the question about would I go to a full-time job or could I go part-time? When I went for the initial discussion and when they described it as a full-time job I said, 'Look, I'm not entirely certain about this and I'd be quite interested in balancing things – [maybe] dropping down a level and going virtually part-time'. And it was very interesting. It was as if it didn't compute, they just brushed it aside and they said 'Ah... well yes... OK' and ploughed on with the description of this full-time position...It put me in a fairly difficult position where there was a sense that I needed to be actually very, very delicate and discrete if I was going to keep open the option of this full-time - but also potentially a part-time position. I ended up winning the position and saying would they be interested in taking me on as a part-time [equivalent] and the reaction was very cool, very cool and – well, first of all there was a sense of confusion about well 'why would you want to do that?' it got them thinking it was a very strange option to take.

In the end Bob decided not to pursue part-time work because of the reaction it created. This confirmed Bob's belief that people who move 'downward' or go part-time are perceived negatively:

I think that anyone who who thinks of dropping a level...there's a sense of danger about them, a sense of question marks about their competency...There's a culture of people move up – so there's people who move up or there are people who are stuck where they are, and that can have implications – sometimes a bad thing. But the idea of someone going down [sends] alarm bells.

He also felt as a manager that being part-time created constraints upon managers who could not simply expect employees to work through til a job was done: it created exit points in terms of hours, which is of course the basis of its attraction to people like Sonya. Certainly at management level it was seen as not possible to work part-time in almost all cases, and any sign of a limitation on time commitment was read as a bad sign. This difficulty creates a barrier for couples like Bob and Abby, where either or both would like to work less hours, but neither feels they can do good rewarding jobs that maintain seniority *and* come with family-friendly conditions.

It's hard to be family friendly when your job needs more

When Sonya had first started her full-time position several years ago, she took on the position on the basis of flexible hours so that she could pick her kids up from school, so they didn't have to go to after-school care as often. She did this for a while but felt so stressed because the workload was very large. She ended up coming into work around 7-7.30am because of her early finishing times. So she reverted back to normal working times. But the encroachment of longer and longer hours had made it unsustainable:

I've always been a firm believer... that we should have a life and your family deserves a life too but it just became gradually harder to do that.

The impact of long hours on those without children: 'I'm doing yours!'

The effect of conflict between long hours and family extends beyond those in conventional families. Certainly the conflict affects those looking after elderly relatives like Leena. But Leena, a single woman without children, observed that she sometimes felt under pressure to do the work that those with families to go home to, were excused from:

I think that some of our management are very good and strong on 'oh well he or she has a family so that's fine'. [For me, without children] I wrestle with that in terms of, is it my perception [that I'm being asked to do more]? ...But I think there is sort of a subtle expectation because often it is directed at those of us who don't have children or family ... we're the ones that are relied on.

'Fitting in' around long hours partners

In many cases through this study the female partners of long hours workers fit in around their work patterns. Their own decisions, control over time and personal autonomy become subservient to their partners. In many cases this reinforces and cements women's traditional dependence on men. However, there were exceptions to this gender pattern with some male partners of long hours workers facing the same 'fitting in' constraint.

For example, Gerard reports the relationship of his work with Sonya's:

When I returned to work in 1999 I was thinking at the time that I wanted to make an impact into the new area of work and, you know, maybe go for a promotion. But I quickly abandoned that because Sonya was working such long hours, that really, it had to be me when the kids were sick or when she couldn't get away from work.

Mary is not sure she would have married Paul if she had known what his long hours meant for her:

It restricts me a lot. It certainly is a big ask and it certainly has curtailed my activities and my life in a big way...He gets a lot out of the job. He loves it. He gets a high out of it. But I think a lot of the things he does at work, suffer because of the long hours they work, the sickness is higher, they aren't eating properly He certainly enjoys his work. He is getting his interaction at work. But when you are at home, you don't have that interaction, you don't get stimulation...the wife and children stay at home. He gets the buzz, but you get to cope.

Long hours are part of being a manager

Public service managers feel that being a manager means doing more.

If you are in a management job there has to be some acceptance about the level of extra responsibility and the fact that you do need to be across things a bit more. You just can't walk out 5 o'clock and you know that when you go into that sort of job. (Sonya)

These managers also feel responsible for the workload and pressure placed on their staff:

I think that sort of adds to your pressure as a manager, you know your team is doing it – staying back and working hard. So you don't delegate as much as you would because you don't want to put more pressure on them, so you keep that back your self.

The culture of long hours: a badge of honor

A culture of long hours is pervasive in the public service: as one put it 'it almost becomes the norm':

There is an expectation [from management], that other people, if they're not doing the same sort of hours then they aren't putting in. There is no awareness anymore of having a standard working week as it was. ... I've had comments made to me about my staff - and I say they are very good and they've been working hard - but [more senior managers] say 'Oh but I don't see them after hours, when I leave at 7.30pm they're not there' ... So it just becomes entrenched. And yet if you challenged them on it they be like 'oh no no no'. (Sonya)

In this workplace, long hours are 'worn like a badge of honor...if you leave before 6-6.30pm, well, really you've gone early'. (Leena)

The long hours culture was intrinsic – indeed essential – to getting on:

[Senior people] they don't know what sort of hours people on the ground are doing. But they are doing them themselves so they would probably think - it's just what has to be done. But these [senior people] are people who have made career choices - whether they have families or not, they've obviously made choices about how they are going to deal with their career versus their family... The expectation – subtle, probably unstated

and if challenged they'd deny it – but I think it just becomes expected that you have to make the same sort of sacrifices if you're going to get on ... you're naive if you expect anything else. (Sonya)

Public service workers would prefer to be judged on 'the quality of their work' as one put it, rather than their acquiescence within a culture of excessive hours.

These pervasive cultures were widely recognised as forcing many who work long hours to make a choice against having a family:

If you look at the profile of a lot of people in senior management, they've made sacrifices along the way, they either don't have a family or either a partner in some instances and if they have had a family then they've left a lot the burden of caring for the family on their partner. (Sonya)

Others they felt were choosing not only against family – but against *life*:

If you look around, you do see that people have made a choice between work and life, not necessarily work and family. (Sonya)

When such a culture takes hold, what managers said in terms of containing work hours, meant little against what they did, and what was expected in unwritten codes. For example, Leena's management sends mixed messages about working hours:

Our management will say 'we don't expect you to put in 12 hours days' ...Having said that there are other occasions when somebody has gone at 5 o'clock or half past 5: 'Well, where are they?!' So there are mixed messages and I think the reality is that we are expected to put in these hours. We're given PCs are home. I was told I had to have one.

Not surprisingly, Leena has found like many other interviewees, that having a computer at home has increased her hours.

Bob referred directly to the long hours, high commitment culture:

Yeah that's right, it's a kind of culture. It's culture but the expectations are generally sent by people who - by either men who have families but who have a partner who does the majority of caring or, very commonly actually - increasingly common, by women who are childless and who are highly focused. It's not always the case - the last two Division Heads had children and they also gave 110% - but it's common.

Productivity

Abby comments that her long hours, and the hours she perceives around her, affect productivity ('I do...my job better if I'm not exhausted'), but that the potential benefits of arrangement like job sharing that might bring more alert, fresher people into the workplace, are not recognised. Indeed they are resisted:

Because everyone else is equally rooted in...a person being around...not frivolously off having a life 2 days a week or something. Even if in the end if you actually brought more to the workplace... I mean one of the biggest problems is that you never have enough time to really know the issues properly so you're skating along all the time, very reliant on people who do know the issues better. ... But you know you just want more time, and the only time you can do that is in your own time basically.

Pat also pointed to productivity outcomes of long hours:

When you've worked overtime for 3 months sickies trebble. Easily. People are not as thorough as they would normally be...They make mistakes...You miss obvious steps, get frustrated.

Abe felt that he tended to be more abrupt with co-workers when he was working long hours 'Good relationships in the workplace save a lot of time in the long run'. He finds that the workers he supervises in contract management make mistakes when they are tired, 'and the consequences can be quite big'. He also points to a loss of creativity and difficulties setting priorities as workers get tired from working long stints of long hours:

You tend to adopt a hard more cynical approach to work and you spend a lot of time actually fending off work rather than getting work done. That's a survival mechanism in my view.

Interviewer: so there are sort of protective behaviours amongst those overworked workers?

Yes, protective of themselves. So as a manager of people working long hours it becomes really difficult when you want to promote creativity in the work environment or you want to grab a few people off line for a few days – 'go and look at this issue and come back and tell me about it', and it's really hard to do that...Therefore they are reluctant to participate because they are too busy protecting themselves, or they don't see doing something new or creative of value to them. What is of value to them is what they do on a daily basis.

Also people who do long hours also often have difficulty in prioritising because they are a bit tired and because they have a large number of things that they need to do and they can't see the wood for the trees.

Keeping up long hours: the boiled frog syndrome

Regimes of over 50-60 hours a week for couples with small children strike many as unworkable, but Abby describes the way in which families become acclimatised to discomfort:

It's what we like to refer to as the "boiled frog syndrome", which is you put a frog in cold water and gradually heat it up. It doesn't know it's being boiled but if you throw a frog into boiling hot water it tries to jump out. It's the idea that over time it's getting hotter and hotter but you know, it's happening gradually enough that you're not, in a sense, you become habituated to working long hours – spending part of every weekend at work – so that other people who don't work that think 'Urgh! How could you do that?!' because if they were to have to jump right into that situation it would be unpleasant and... you can tell... you can feel the stresses and strains but, yeah, but what we do is accommodate them rather than try and do something about them. But I guess what we've been trying to do in the last little while is to be conscious of them trying to, you know... be honest about them.

Of course the frog is, in the end, boiled either way, and Abby points out that accommodation to long hours does not eradicate discomfort about them. She and her partner, Bob, describe a range of personal and family effects of their combined hours at senior levels. Bob discusses his cumulative tiredness, and their joint decisions to give up anything ‘that is not compulsory’ such as friends and exercise, which they just let go in intensive work periods. ‘We sort of use the weekends to recover and it is actually enough to keep our lives going’. For Bob who works very intensively in some periods of the year ‘the current short term effects [of those intensive periods] are... things like I wake up at 4.30 or 5 o’clock – it makes me quite tired at nights and you just sort of feel the stress increasing. But the longer term effects actually when... the hours aren’t so bad and you just settle into a rhythm of things, gradually you forget what – what’s involved in that and forget the trade-offs that you make’. Even if he is not in an extreme period, however, Bob’s hours remain very long on average.

What would help

The case of public service and long hours, and the cultural norms in these workplaces in the presence of fairly strong family friendly policies and certified agreements that specify the terms and hours of employment raises important challenges to the task of hours reduction. Clearly, hours need to be reduced to break the increasingly entrenched model of ‘long hours good worker’ model, and to create more family friendly workplaces. Many of these workers felt that general statements about ‘reasonable hours’ would deliver little in a climate of externalised and internalised long hours expectations – where even another worker could be found to step into the long hours. Even extra leave would be problematic in these environments, several felt. Sonya reflected on her periods of frenzied work, and others made similar points:

I don’t know that I would have used [extra leave]. At the time I was caught up in a frenzied work area and realised if I had just said ‘That’s enough I can’t do it’ then that’s it - I would have been cast aside, someone else would have stepped into the role, I just would have been relegated to history [laughs]. So in the interest of doing that job and getting the satisfaction - I guess - out of it, I was prepared to do that.

The key ingredient in the minds of many was the insistence on its enforcement – and the extra staff needed to get the job done. Where would pressure for this arise from?

If this was enshrined in our award or agreement I think there would have to be a general insistence on applying it and that would be from employees themselves. ... People would have to be made aware of it and supported in insisting that they can

access it. So managers would have to get out there and say 'we know that it's there and this is why we put it in and we recognize that there's problems and we are prepared to stick with it and encourage employees to avail themselves of it.

People would also need confidence that they would not be victimised for adhering to new standards: 'It's also a matter of confidence on the part of the employee to say:

'Well I think that I'm a valued enough employee that if I stand up for my rights and I'm going to take this then it won't be held against me'. But there is a little chink of doubt in my mind - that yes it will be held against you somewhere along the line. You're talking about a fundamental shift in management culture. (Sonya)

This case suggests that new enforced statutory standards may be necessary to break the culture and entrenched management practice of reliance upon unpaid extra effort. As Gerard put it:

I'd just make the general observation that superficially most public service departments now have certified agreements that you would think gave you good rights to part-time work and family friendly sort of policies. But it still indicates that access is still regarded as a privilege rather than a right. We're made to feel that it's a privilege.

Abe agreed:

We need more than motherhood statements. It's got to be translated into something that's real. Specific arrangements to compensate for travel hours, for example. It's got to be specific otherwise it just doesn't translate into the reality of the workplace environment. Because at the end of the day, people are really committed to what they do. They want to get the job done. So you have to write it into specifics and change the culture of the team.

As the supervisor of a group of technically skilled workers on a 24 shift roster working long hours in the context of an agreement, Paul sees the need for strong statutory standards:

I need rules that as a supervisor I'm not allowed to break – so that we can put a break on things. It needs to be powerful and specific. Otherwise people just get around things, and there is no break on things.

Abby and Bob pointed to the certified agreements in their workplaces, where senior officers get a day a month in recognition that they work longer than standard hours:

I am not sure that very many people take it actually. I'm not even sure that a number of them know about it. I didn't know about it but now I'll take it from time to time...I think it comes back to a bit of a cultural thing. It's a bit of a thing about attitudes to work and demonstration of commitment and I don't even mean that in a particularly heroic sort of a way. But it's that you get to a certain level where you get a bit or you are supposed to sort of... 'I'll stay til I get things done'...But I have to say, as well, that in an employee survey that was done in our [workplace], it was the senior officers who were very unhappy with their hours they would do at work and it is something that they are trying to address. (Abby)

CHAPTER 10 Technicians in research facilities

We interviewed two specialist maintenance technicians in a 24-hour research facility, and one of their partners. Technicians with specialist maintenance skills in research facilities experienced sporadic extended periods of long hours of around 12 hours a day averaged over three months – for example when extended maintenance and equipment upgrades are underway. Their hours at work are frequently combined with travel of about an hour to and from work, with pickups of co-workers along the way, so that their days are frequently extended. In combination with unpredictable work over a 24 hour cycle and extended call ins to solve technical problems when things go wrong or special exercises are underway, this results in unreasonable hours for long stints in most years for such workers.

For example, a normal day for one worker involves leaving home at 7.15am and getting to work at 8am (including the pick-up of co-workers). He gets home at about 5.20pm. When driving home:

A lot of the time you can be pretty well had it, especially when you've been into the 12 hour shift cycle for a reasonable amount of time... Obviously your reactions are so much slower and it is definitely a potential hazard. (Casey).

The workplace is staffed 24 hours a day and there are shift workers who work 12-hour shifts. Casey has worked 24 hours in a row before, which made him feel:

pretty well stuffed. We're pseudo shift workers, I suppose. They turn us into shift workers when there are big jobs on. That is likely to happen more and more actually. ... The maintenance time is becoming less and less during daylight hours.

Casey will have to work weekends quite regularly in the near future, 'I'm not really impressed about it'. Casey appreciates the money he receives from overtime. However, he would also like some more time with his family, 'lots of times we have been called away from barbecues and football games'. He has a mobile phone that is not part of the job, but management use it to call him out to work: 'they certainly do rely on people's professionalism to support their equipment and they get that support without having to pay for it'. Casey puts this down to the importance of their jobs and workers' dedication.

Like those of many others working long hours, their wives worry. Increasingly, maintenance is done at any time in a 24-hour cycle, so that Casey describes himself as 'a pseudo shift worker'. A shortage of skilled workers and general staffing problems mean that his hours of work are becoming more demanding.

For example, Casey has found that his workload has become larger and more varied, due to fewer people in specialised jobs, which Casey and his colleagues now have to do themselves. For example, they no longer have a diesel fitter and several of the trades assistants have been retrenched. Before, part of the trade assistant's job was to carry the equipment around the facility; Casey now has to do this himself, 'by the time you get your gear up there, you're pretty well stuffed and so then you've got to do your job too'. Casey spends a lot of time working considerable heights above ground.

Casey attributes the long hours to the peak demand times when they don't have enough staff: 'It's only for the expertise that we have here, that we are able to keep up'. In common with many other sectors where long hours have grown, he considers a loss of expertise to be a potential problem, especially in relation to staffing levels.

Technicians: the price of professionalism

There appears to be some tension between the workers' dedication to the job and their own - and their partners' - resentment of the hours they are sometimes expected to work. There was a sense among these workers that they have an important job, which requires dedication and a 'professional' attitude to the hours that were asked of them.

Con attributed his hours to the fact that he thought he had a good work ethic and that he liked his job (even though he found management frustrating at times).

You want to get the job done. ... You're given a deadline and you'd like to think you can perform to that deadline... And you do get paid overtime rates for your trouble. Basically, you've got pride in your work and you want to make sure the job is done properly.

Con seems to get quite a bit of satisfaction from his job, as there is always something new to deal with, 'the nature of the work I find interesting'. However, Con said that he is now doing what were 3 person's jobs 10 years ago.

Both technicians talked about the value of the extra earnings with some households tending toward dependence on the overtime earnings for the weekly budget, and others attempting to see it 'as an extra'. One employee says he doesn't "hang out" for overtime because he doesn't budget around it, but he does enjoy the extra income 'I don't go out looking for it, but if it is there I'll take it'.

The effect on individual technicians

Although Con feels that he doesn't get stressed, he does find that work is always on his mind.

You think about it. When you wake up in the morning your alarm goes off and, bang, straight away you think 'What's happening today?' ... [I am] switched on as soon the alarm goes off. It shouldn't be.

When he gets phoned up in the middle of the night about a problem at work, he will suggest a way to fix the problem, 'and then you lie in bed for 2 hours thinking "I wonder if that worked?" ... You don't sort of wind down from when they ring you up ... You're back on the job when you're at home'. Con gets an hour's pay when he is phoned (although he gets the same amount if it is more than one phone call in the same hour).

The effect on couple relationships

Con sometimes gets calls at 2am in the morning and it causes strain at home:

Maggie hates it. On one occasion we had friends and everyone was having a good time with a few wines and then the phone rings, it's about midnight and I've got to take the call and that sort of kills the mood... party's over.

He feels it affects his wife: 'I think it impacts my wife because I come here to work and then she's got to run the kids around'. Con usually does the cooking at home, so when he is working overtime Maggie has to take over that 'as well as whatever she does'. Maggie works 2 part-time jobs, 5 days a week but 'It's not as bad now, the kids are getting older they can

look after themselves. When they were a little bit smaller, we'd have to get babysitters in. It's not as much as a problem now, as it was.'

However, Con thinks that his work sometimes affects his marriage 'when you're tired, you just come home and flop. ... I wasn't aware of it but Maggie says I'm a bit of a grump if I've done a night'. Maggie finds the extended periods of long shifts and the weekend shifts the hardest and that they affect his moods and her tiredness as well. She thinks it takes a lot of adjusting, for both Con and herself, to the nightshifts. When Con works back late at night, Maggie won't be able to sleep until he gets home; she often lies awake worrying about Con driving home at night on the country roads.

Casey thinks that his long work hours definitely does put a lot of strain on his relationship with his wife:

She resents a lot of it, there's no two ways about that and rightly so too. I'm not there to help out with all the domestic chores and duties and all of that sort of thing a lot of the time...By the time I get home, I basically have something to eat and go to bed and then I'm up again in the morning before everyone else and gone to work. Yeah that gets tiresome on the relationship.

Casey doesn't want to put up with this situation for an indefinite amount of time and will start looking for another job.

The effects on children-parent relationships, and on children

Casey finds the physical aspect of his job rather a strain:

We have to climb to the tops of the machines all the time. ... It buggers you, there's no two ways about that. It certainly wears you out. So when you have to get out of bed when the alarm clock goes off you find it pretty difficult.

This impacts on his family life, because it affects his energy and his capacity to get to events for his children, though he felt his kids 'understood', they 'get dirty' about it:

I certainly don't have as much energy now to run around with the kids and kick a football... that side of it definitely does annoy me.

The nine year old certainly gets upset when I'm not there to watch his football... a lot of the time when we are doing jobs I'll go to work before they're awake and I'll come home after they're in bed ... they do get dirty about it yep... There's a fair bit of explanation required that I've got to do these things. But I guess predominately they understand it too. Kids are very adaptable things.

In terms of Con's work impacting on his children, he says:

Some days you don't see them.... I haven't really, sort of, taken into much consideration how they feel about it. If they are doing something important then you think 'Ah geeze you missed that'. A routine school day - it's nice to sit down with them and say 'What did you at school today...' So you miss out on that.

He feels bad when he misses out on the 'big things' such as a sports carnival or a school performance. But basically he considers that there is nothing much he can do about it.

Con coaches his son's cricket team – when he can: 'On a couple of occasions... it's a mad ring around to tell the team not to come to practice because I've got to work'.

Being on call was a major issue for Con:

Basically, if you have the weekend off and you're sitting there happily having a beer or a barbecue or whatever and then all of a sudden the phone rings and your weekend is basically stuffed.

The children are very aware when Con is working long hours and they ask after him. Maggie said that they rely on him for things like homework, so when he does come home, they inundate him when they do see him and she thinks that Con finds this a bit annoying, especially after a long shift.

Maggie believes that the children end up being dependent on the parent who is around. If the kids want to do something on the weekend she has to do it with them and if it is the oldest child that wants to go somewhere, they all have to go, 'I'm the only one to take them here, there and everywhere'.

If Con didn't work weekends or long periods of overtime, things would be different for Maggie and the children because they would have the flexibility of having two parents available to do things. Maggie considers the other main difference would be that Con wouldn't suffer from tiredness.

What is 'reasonable overtime'?

At the moment the Award Casey is covered by states that the employer can require the worker to work 'reasonable overtime', but he suggests that this is too vague: 'But what actually constitutes reasonable overtime?' Casey considers 2 hours of overtime each day to be reasonable – but 8 hours in a normal day plus 2 hours overtime and 2 hours travel time, means a 12-hour work day for him.

Casey thinks that traveling time should be included in the definition of 'reasonable hours':

Certainly in our job I believe traveling time is a major component of it because, as I say, we are a remote locality, we're out of town, we pick up other members [of staff] and we are under the direction of the company, whether they want to admit that or not. They don't like to admit that because they don't want to pay us.

Casey believes not specifying exactly how many hours are unreasonable gives employers an opportunity to make the definition of 'unreasonable' hours of work:

a cloudy issue. One minute they can say 2 hours is reasonable and the next they can say 2 days overtime, ... working weekends is quite reasonable. So what actually does constitute 'reasonable'? ... It is a hard question but yeah I guess 2 hours a day overtime is reasonable... 10 hours overtime a week.

Casey would like to see a specific limit in awards:

I think we owe it to our kids to try and get these things into the Awards now so that workers aren't completely manipulated by the employers. I think it is reasonable to expect those sort of arrangements in our society today.

What would help?

In their new agreement, which is yet to be ratified, they have bargained for a 9-day fortnight. Casey is 'looking forward to that'. He considers the extra day off would be a 'huge bonus'. It will be on trial for the first 3 months, as management are concerned about the effects on staffing levels. Con is planning to play golf on his day off, as well as 'be there' for his kids in any school activities, such as watching them participate in sport carnivals. Con currently gets to play golf about twice a month. If Con got the 9-day fortnight he would consider his hours to be fairly ideal. 'I'd have more opportunity to see the kids doing what they do best'.

CHAPTER 11 Paramedics: long shifts, night work and unexpected shift extensions

We interviewed 7 paramedics and four partners. Three households had young children in residence while two had older children who had left home, one had his children to visit and one was a single person living alone.

Paramedic's duties include the treatment of highly complex medical situations, under emergency conditions. Frequently paramedics are working under very high pressure at the roadside and exercising high levels of clinical judgment in time critical and life threatening emergencies. They must often perform complex clinical procedures under very difficult circumstances. They frequently must drive at high speeds under emergency conditions. They are the first line of contact for dying and severely injured people, and administer complex drugs under emergency conditions. This work requires a high level of mental alertness and physical and mental function.

Paramedics work long hours, in shift rosters that include long shifts in each roster cycle (up to 14 hours paid, with some unpaid time quite regularly). Their working time was characterised by intermittent demands that were not predictable and frequently resulted in very long hours. As a result most reported difficulty keeping well rested and well fed. Several described unsafe or dangerous practices or events as a result of being either tired, hungry or both. Paramedics appear to love their jobs and find many rewards in helping people. However, changes in work organisation in recent years have intensified work in many locations, with non-emergency care contracted out in some locations, and a heavy load of high need emergency calls. This was especially the case in metropolitan settings, but other issues affected country paramedics including long drives near the end of long shifts that were not always safe.

The unreasonable aspect of paramedics hours lay especially in the unexpected extension of their shifts. These occurred when new calls came near the end of shifts and prolonged working time for several hours fairly regularly. Extra 'incidental overtime' of this kind was a regular occurrence. Amanda, for example, estimated that this happened approximately 50 per cent of the time. Lucy who had two young children and 'absolutely loves' her job, found that incidental overtime 'can make the shifts extremely long and make you emotionally tired'.

This incidental extra and unpredictable overtime occurs against the background of long shifts with intense work, the lack of regular predictable food breaks, and portions of unpaid hours (that occurred when coming into the workplace early for shifts to allow the previous shift to get home). Workers attempt to limit the unpredicted extension at the end of shifts by coming into work and taking over from the previous shift a little early, but even with this if a call is half an hour before the end of a shift, they could be working 12 hours instead of 10 and still

turning up to work at the scheduled time the next day. Several worksites observed a gentleman's agreement to come in early to protect the previous shift from late call outs:

It's just courtesy, a gentlemen's agreement. It's been there for years. Most good branches do it. I'll get to work tonight at a quarter to five, 20 to five, and if they're there they can go home, and same in the morning. Tend to turn up 20 to 7, some turn up earlier, it's just something you do.

Several paramedics and their partners mentioned the stressful nature of their jobs and the effects of difficult emergency call outs on their recovery time. The problems resulting from these issues included:

- Low blood sugar levels
- Poor decision making at emergencies
- Fatigue
- Falling asleep while driving the ambulance
- Bad moods while at work.

The workers saw a close link between their hours of work, their unexpected extension at the end of shifts, and its shift work nature. This combination is what primarily dictates their social life and family life arrangements, and affects their moods. They also have little flexibility in their shifts. Ambulance paramedics showed a high level of commitment to their work and to providing quality service. Several were engaged in ongoing education activities, while others were involved in unpaid public events including fundraising and education. Team managers particularly put in extra unpaid hours. One pointed to the 'love of the job' as an important contributor to their hours in his description of the previous night's work which had included a resuscitation attempt:

We were the least paid people in that whole room. Everyone else was being paid more than us per hour. [physician, senior nursing staff, theatre nursing staff] ... and here we are doing the work, doing the thinking. We're held responsible. Yet we're being paid the least out of the lot. And that's where it comes down, it is the job. We enjoy what we do...It's great, stimulating work. To be thinking on your feet like that...It's stressful, but that's the adrenalin buzz. [Management] know that they've got us. (Andrew)

Some interviewees also undertook supervisory duties, or conducted training or led teams. These interviewees tended to also take work home and complete it in unpaid time. As Andy, a team manager, described:

Like last night we did a job at a quarter past 4 which didn't knock us off until 6 o'clock when we were supposed to knock off at 5. I've got some paperwork I've got to do which I'm in the throws of doing now on my day off, before I go to work. On a semi-regular basis I do certain things at home that if I had more time in the office I could do them at my work.

He accepts that the work has to be done: 'It's a case where the job's got to be done so you do it. I don't think about it in any other light. There's no point harping on these things sometimes otherwise you just get bogged down with it. So just do it and get on with it.'

Current Hours: a typical pattern

Generally a 41-2 hour week is rostered over an 8 week cycle. This cycle includes shifts of:

- For the first 4 days – 2 x 10 hour days, a 14 hour night followed by a 7 hour night, 4 days off; do same shifts again;
- then 5 days on, 3 days off, 3 x 10 hour days, 14 hour night and a 7 hour night;
- 2 x 10 hour day, 2 x 14 hour nights and 1 x 7 hour night; and
- 2 x 10 hour day, 1 x 14 hour night and 2 x 7 hour night.

Of course, unexpected extensions of shift through late call-outs extend these hours unpredictably.

The effect on the individual

In some weeks paramedics were working 55 hours and in some weeks less.

The tendency for shift to lengthen with late call outs is a hazard that several mention:

You could turn that [12 hour shift worked in another system] into a 13-hour day easily, like we turn our 10-hour days into 11-hour days and our 14-hour nights into 15-hour nights. And driving around at 4 o'clock in the morning after you've worked all those hours... it can't be safe and I'm amazed more people don't crash into poles.

Amanda describes the effects of exhaustion on her:

In the 8 week cycle there's only one lot of two 14-hour night shifts followed by a half night and that's the most revolting period I find. Because you've got 10 or 8 hours in between two 14 hour nights. So you're just delirious. If you have two busy nights where you don't get any sleep you have to go back for another 7 hours and that's 3 or 4 days where you're out of action completely. It's like being out of society.

While these shift workers enjoyed having time off when others were at work they also found their exhaustion affected them at work:

Say it's your second night and its 4 or 5 am and you didn't get any sleep on your first night, and you've come home the next day and you didn't get any sleep - people banging next door or something - you don't sleep properly. So then, I don't know. I feel like I've hit a brick wall and I can't possibly [go on], it's almost dangerous to get in the car and drive. You're dizzy, hungry, and - I don't know why - your decision-making skills are at that point...Everybody agrees that at 6.30 in morning you'd like to tell the public not to get sick. [laugh] Because say you've just had 2 hours sleep... There have been times when I've been woken up and had a job at 6.30 in the morning and thought 'I can't, how can I possibly do it?' But you just go. (Amanda)

Adam describes the fatigue he observes and experiences. He knows the people in his branch very well:

Especially in our branch because we've got over a decade of being together really. We've got a really good core that's been together for a long time and so we've been single, and had the kids all together, and done all that and we've watched everyone. So you do see the effects because you know you're all going through the same thing. Somebody might come in and they didn't get any sleep. They've been fighting with their wife or their kids are sick...so you're constantly seeing, whoever's on the couch with

you, through that shift, you can see the effects all right. There's not many times when someone looks fresh and says, 'I feel great. I got a real good sleep', because life gets in the way, doesn't it? People always knock on the door... So sometimes people can be virtually unconscious between every job. Some people fall asleep at the traffic lights. Some people you can't wake up. And while you've got your fitness and you're relatively young you can just push on like that for a long time and because of the family thing and life being busy, it's hard to get that big recovery sleep. It doesn't happen very often.

While Adam likes being around at home more, he finds the tiredness affects his moods, and these in turn affect his family:

You're around a lot more. It's just some times you might be around physically, but you're not around mentally. 'Cause when you're getting up at a different time all the time, you're in different rhythms to people around you. [They say to me] 'What are you so grumpy for? You just got out of bed?'

He describes how on holidays he is 'a new person'.

Andrew works with a mobile intensive care unit that assists other units and finds that exhaustion is a serious problem:

We are chasing our tails all day. And you can get in the car and we can do 3-400 kilometres in day just going from job to job to job...and a lot of our time, being a critical care unit, we're responding with lights and sirens. So just the stress load and driving conditions as a metropolitan ambulance, doing that for 10 to 14 hours, going from job to job, emergency driving - these days no one giving way - you're absolutely exhausted, because you're just exhausted because you're not stopping... even though we're not seeing a patient a lot of the time.

He feels that being hungry and tired probably affects decisions and 'it can be a bit much'.

Emotional recovery

Several mentioned that the work could be emotionally taxing, and that this – in combination with very long hours and shift extensions - contributed to recovery times also:

You've got to deal with all sorts of emergencies. [gives some examples]. You've got to deal with the families. That's emotional for me. Dealing with kids. Seeing kids..in that situation. There's all that sort of stuff that you've got to switch off... You think about them a good hour after the end of the job... (Lucy)

Lucy's partner describes what he sees as the effects of long hours – and extensions to the end of ordinary shifts - on Lucy's ability to cope with emotionally upsetting events:

I really honestly think...when you're doing a 14-hour night shift and some of the jobs you do are quite upsetting - I think it can take its toll emotionally. I've seen Lucy come home some nights, or some mornings, and I've stayed home, I haven't gone to work because she's just too upset. Because I think you get to that fatigue, tired stage and then you start becoming emotionally upset. Now if you get to that stage earlier in the night because you're tired through shift work and you make an emotional decision, well it could be detrimental to someone's life or health... She did a job where [describes horrific accident involving children]. And that was overtime after night shift and she didn't get home til nearly 11 o'clock that day... She came home an emotional wreck. Now I don't think that anybody should be put through that. I can understand that you're going to come across these situations but if you hadn't already worked already 14 hours flat on your feet, you'd be emotionally stable and able to handle the situation.

Richard describes similar effects and the time it can take to recover:

If I've had a busy shift and we've had a few stressful jobs - a stressful job might be just a very sick child, it may have been, - there's any number of jobs I would consider stressful that other people may not and likewise they may have very stressful situations which I may sort of wade through easily. But you only need a few stressful jobs and you can bring them home and they can be with you for the next few days until you get over them. It's just a matter of how you deal with the stress of the situation. It's a part of my job. We're exposed to stressful situations. I don't think you can get away from it.

Health and safety

Recovery from shift hours is an issue for each of the interviewees: Lucy describes her first day off after two long night shifts as her 'Zombie day'. Others recounted falling asleep on the way home:

Myself and my [work] partner were driving back from the city after doing this long shift. He was so tired he was falling asleep at the wheel. We didn't have an accident. He wasn't exactly driving in a straight line. I volunteered to take over and as soon as I did I regretted it because I was driving, you know - I wasn't asleep - but I was so tired I was having a great deal of difficulty driving. I think that was a danger to both of us. Neither of us were in a fit state to drive a vehicle after what would have been an 18-hour shift...But there was no alternative. We had to get back to the branch to finish and go home and have our rest. (Richard)

Inner city paramedics were especially affected by long intensive shifts with last minute call outs and described how these hours affected their moods, and their decision making capacity.

Richard describes a similar lucky escape:

I remember years ago working in the country. We left [the town] with a patient. It was ... 2 and a half hours to Melbourne, we dropped patient off, jumped back in the car, back up to [the town], got up there, another job to Melbourne. Back down to Melbourne. And this was our second night shift. And driving back I fell asleep at the wheel and we just about ran off the road. Fortunately it was one of those noisy white lines and sort of 'oh, oh,' and back onto the road... You're tired, your eyes hurt. In winter, nighttime driving with the reflection off the road, you do get fatigued driving really quickly.

Ralph who has been in the industry for many years describes the effects on people who work extra overtime shifts:

They don't realise how tired they are getting... I've seen guys work the third night shift...and they'll be getting a cold, the flu and...then calling in sick for their first day on...Some guys try and hold down other jobs as well...and they get so tired they can't function... We've had to swap roles with people too tired to drive...toward the end of a shift. If you're driving back from a long case, you see your partner's nodding off at the wheel, you tend to suggest that they have a break and you'll drive for them or vice versa... We haven't actually sent anyone home in ages... I had a minor management role within the branch and I had a guy turn up to work with me and he was absolutely

shagged and he could not have worked the night to save himself and we sent him home...He was a danger to us and himself.

While extra overtime shifts are not compulsory, in reality, especially in smaller stations some reported considerable pressure to take extra shifts. Staffing shortfalls contribute to this pressure.

Sometimes the shift can be extremely busy and Ralph, like others, describes becoming tired and hungry if they haven't had a break:

When you do have a break you can get something really quickly and that is unhealthy, something at a service station.

Long hours in an emergency clinical setting hold particular dangers. Ralph finds that at the end of a shift 'you have to be extremely careful of what you are doing' and he feels that fatigue contributed to his being pierced by a used needle that had entered a patient's skin. Both he and his partner were 12 hours into a 14-hour shift and fatigue affected them 'especially lack of concentration, easily distracted, not following procedures that we follow all the time'.

Meal breaks: A window of opportunity?

Meal breaks were an issue for all paramedics:

We have a huge problem with getting meal breaks and getting your food. You'll have one mouthful and then have to go and then come back and eat again... Because the work's erratic, you can't have a set meal break obviously. They have what's called 'a window of opportunity'.

Paramedics were expected to eat in 'their window of opportunity'. Unfortunately this window was sometimes late to arrive and several described the effects on their bodies and capacities:

All of us get a little bit hypoglycemic and you get a bit dizzy if you haven't eaten... But you know, how effective am I going to be if I haven't eaten and I'm confused myself? I mean people call ambulances because their blood sugar's low [laugh] but we're out there treating them! I just think it's a bit dangerous... I've worked with guys, one guy in particular, who if it was really busy, just got really aggravated and really aggro and would be very aggressive on the road and so that would make me stressed out because he would be screaming at the cars and swearing, and I'd be thinking, 'oh, my god, I'm not going to get to this job alive, we're going to crash'...

Another described similar effects on himself:

The hours roll by... and you just get angry and mad because you're hungry. Because if you've got something in your tummy... personally if I've eaten and I'm satisfied with feeling I've eaten... It's when you can't get the food, or when you get the food and you get interrupted, which happens all the time. You know, you're in a shop trying to order something and [you get a call]. It's just frustrating... Food's something you just grab when you can. That becomes a priority.

The effect on the family

Like others working unreasonable hours, Lucy described how her family, which included two young children fitted in around her:

Well the family sort of works around my roster. Because that's the reason we've had to put them into full-time crèche... My husband takes them on one of my day shifts so they have a reasonably early start, or late finish on those days. But they know that mummy will be home when they come home.

Lucy stays at work longer between her night shifts because when she returned home just before they went to creche at 7.30am, it unsettled them to see her for such a brief period:

We find they are much more unsettled so we've had to work it where I might stay back at work an extra half hour – it sounds mean – so I don't see the kids and it doesn't upset them, so that for a 48 hour period I don't see the kids. And they know that, they know that is daddy's time and they're a lot more settled. They're in that routine... that's how we've managed to get it to work for us. So far. And it's subject to change as they get older.

Lucy describes her long stint away from the children:

He starts work at 7.30am. I finish work at 7.00am. Which means the kids are at crèche from approximately half past 7am til 4.30pm. So if I tried to get home before 7.30am - because we're only a 1 car family - I'd see the kids probably for five minutes and then they're off to crèche. I go to sleep, I've gone to work by 4.30pm which is the time they get home, again we may see each other for five minutes and that's it. Which is pretty mean on them... I feel so guilty. But I think it's a fact of life that you've got to work...I feel guilty. They feel guilty. Then, when I am home, all they want is mum. Buggar dad...

Lucy and Larry pay full-time childcare fees although on her days at home, she keeps the children with her generally. She describes the sense of time pressure in the household:

Both of us have noticed that we've got less and less time. The kids have the time. And when it comes to our time, like both kids are in bed by at least 8 o'clock. When it comes to our time, I'm just too tired. And all I want to do is curl up and go to sleep. It's an effort if you want to stay up and have a chat, or our time. We try to make it up on the days off... We don't get that quality time together.

You come home and you're just, physically, mentally everything, you're just so exhausted. I've slept all day. With the kids [4 and 3 years] here [laughs]. I've said 'don't talk to me, don't even look at me, I'm going to bed'. They're normal kids making a noise...I've woken up at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and I still feel really tired, really drained, you're not your normal self. You don't want to engage in any conversation. You've got less tolerance of the kids. And it makes it hard on them. They don't understand. Hard on hubby because by the end of the 4 days, he's sick of the kids [laugh]: 'They're yours. I want a break' [laughs] Come 7 o'clock that night, you're ready to go to bed again. And it takes that whole 4 days to recover. Only to start up again.

Larry felt that the effects of shift work and extensions to his shifts along with his long hours overall were exacerbated by his young family situation. Although previously he had worked 12 hour days, he feels more tired now because the children are young and he is up two or three times during the night for them and then organising them at 5.30am so they get to crèche by 7 o'clock:

It's a lot more of a strain looking after the children than working longer hours. 'Cause once I walked out the door that's work for the day. Now I walk out the door... and I've still got three four hours to do when I get home with the children. I take them home. Bath them. Dress them. Repack their clothes for crèche in the bag. Cook tea. Feed them. Wash them.

He felt that Lucy's work had an impact on the children as they missed her:

When Lucy does her 2 night shifts in a row, she goes for 72 hours without seeing the children or myself. They tend to want mum all the time. I mean when mum's not here they're happy with dad. But they miss mum very much as a three year old and four year old would.

It also had an impact on him when she was understandably 'tired and cranky'.

Richard and Diana with young children also felt that his hours gave him time at home with his children, but that there were both positive and negative effects. The longer hours at home are good, but working shift work means that his and the families hours often don't match: 'When they want to do something, I might be tired after a shift and not want to do it.' He can't be relied upon to be there for a birthday or a particular event because he may be working. This is generally accepted – if not liked – because Richard has always worked shift work.

Looking back on their years at work and with younger children, Ralph and Pauline felt cheated that they had missed out on family activities. The children also noticed his moods in those days; they would laugh that he had PNT (post night syndrome). They had to have someone to look after the children when they were young because Ralph couldn't reliably be home. Now he feels that he misses out on social activities with his wife, especially with the carry-on overtime.

'14 hour shifts are for the young and childless'

A number of interviewees felt that their recovery times from long shifts impinged upon their non-work hours. Andy described how 'People lose one day off or even two before feeling "normal again"' as they recovered from long shifts.

Adam felt that this effect became pronounced as people got older:

I think 14-hour night shifts are just outrageous. They're for the young and healthy and people without kids...I mean I was like that at the start, you could get a night shift out of the road, go home, get out of bed at 11.30 because you're young and fit and haven't got much on and go to the beach or something... but as time goes on, and you've done shift work for a while, you don't recover and you sleep all day... If you've got a 14-hour night shift you go home, you've got 10 hours between that to sleep and if you get off late, that starts whittling into your time to sleep... I hate it.

Adam stayed with his job because of the people he worked with:

There's no way I would have stayed there for 17 years if I didn't like the people I was working with. That's the key. I mean I'm willing to put up with it because the people I work with are fantastic.

'Tag team parenting'

Andrew and Maureen work opposite shifts:

Basically what we've tried to do, she'll pick up an extra shift... in between my day shifts and night shifts. She normally tries to get an early on my night shifts. So she'll leave the house at 7 o'clock in the morning and be back by 3 o'clock but then she's out by 5. So I don't sleep before my night shift, because we want to spend time together, it's the only way we can work it... And then she'll try and pick up an afternoon maybe on my first day off. That way I'll be able to sleep in the morning and then be right to look after the kids. And then we get two days off together which is what we aim to try and get. But it's tag-team parenting.

They feel that it is important they look after the children. His wife's roster is more flexible whereas his is static: 'We try to look ahead and see what we've got and use her flexibility to fit in, so that one of us is always at home to look after the kids.' Under this arrangement they 'don't have any social life' and Maureen has not been able to play her netball.

Andrew finds that it is better for him to take up an extra shift than his wife, both for financial reasons and also because he gets in a bad mood after the night shifts and can take it out on the kids:

I tend to get a bit crankier with the kids. And they certainly put up with me. My son, he'll say, 'and what's wrong with you, cranky head?' he'll say sometimes. You know they are coming to understand it, what shift-work is about. And kids education, that's all Monday to Friday... and when they say, 'oh we want the parents to do this or be involved in this' and you say, 'oh no we can't come and do that. We can't come to the kinder weekend because we're working'. A lot of people have no concept of shift work is about, what night shift is about. They sort of like, 'oh, work, you know, it's a weekend'. And also that impacts on the kids 'cause they're saying, 'oh, mum and dad can't do it because they're working, or they're sleeping' and that sometimes is a bit hard to take... emotionally. You feel like you're letting them down. But you've got to work.

The effect on relationships

Amanda and Adam found that their hours impinged on their new relationship (both work as paramedics). Amanda found it difficult to develop her relationship because he worked opposite shifts, so they had little time together.

There's days on end where we just don't [see each other]. And he's got kids and he sees them. So it's a nightmare. If we were both on 9 to 5 it would be a lot easier.

Social life

Adam finds that his hours mean that he cannot play cricket. Diana cannot plan around Richard's hours so she has given up tennis, and find any routine difficult to maintain.

However, Lucy and Larry use a fitness activity as family time:

I had patient who went berserk in the back of the ambulance with me, in a confined space. And they're very strong and so I joined a martial arts club... And hubby joined it with me. So that's our time together... It keeps me fit for work. It relieves his anxiety

because he knows at least if someone goes nuts at you, I've got some knowledge of self-defence, so I can defend myself long enough to run away... And our little fellow is interested in it too, so we make it a family thing. And when I'm not on the night shift, we'll go down and we spend about 2 hours together as a family and train, so it's great.
(Lucy)