

EMBARGOED Sunday 27 August, 2017

Australia is a nation of working carers, new study finds

ACTU campaign launch:

Change the Rules for Working Women & Families

Australia's workforce is dominated by working people who are juggling work with caring and parenting responsibilities.

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) launches its new campaign to Change the Rules for Working Women & Families today, with new survey results showing 85 per cent of working Australians also have significant family caring and/or parenting responsibilities.

More than 5,400 Australians responded to the survey and have clearly told us that life is not all about working. Participants said they need time to care for children or family members with a disability, medical condition, mental illness or an aging parent or other family member.

Most working people, 60 per cent, have never asked for reduced hours to assist with juggling family caring and work, with many worried about their job security and many suggesting that their workplace management and culture does not support flexible work.

The ACTU is arguing in the Fair Work Commission (FWC) that all employees should be entitled to reduced or part-time working hours when they have caring and parenting responsibilities, on a temporary basis, and go back to their role and previous hours when caring responsibilities reduce or cease. The FWC will hear the case in December.

Key survey findings:

- Almost 85% of Australian workers have or have had a caring role;
 - 65% had cared for a child of school age or younger
 - 27% had cared for someone frail or aged
 - 25% had cared for someone with a medical condition
 - 14% had cared for someone with a mental illness.
- Almost 40% of workers have asked their employer for reduced hours for caring and almost a quarter of these had been knocked back;
- Almost one in two workers need access to reduced hours for caring;
- Women are almost twice as likely to ask for reduced hours for caring;
- Employers are 50% more likely to reject a male worker's request for reduced hours;
- Inflexible workplace culture is the reason most cited for workers not asking for reduced hours to care for a family member;

The ACTU's "Change the rules for working women and families" campaign will include:

- Changing the rules for women to tackle the gender pay gap, insecure work and inequality;
- Providing a better balance for women and families for work, family and care;
- Enshrining 10 days paid family and domestic violence leave universally.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Ged Kearney:

“Australia is a nation of working carers, with 85 per cent of working people juggling caring and work responsibilities.”

“We are a country of working people who value our loved ones more than anything else, but often we are stopped from providing the care needed because our workplace laws and rules have not kept up with modern life.”

“Almost 6,000 Australians responded to the survey and have told us that life is not all about working. Participants responded that they need time to care for a child or a family member with disability, a medical condition, a mental illness or an aging parent or other family member.”

“Whether a dentist in Newcastle, a security guard in Sydney or a teacher in Melbourne, working women and men have told us that juggling both caring for family and working is a major issue.”

“The cost on individuals and families is enormous, with some survey participants estimating they are doing in excess of \$50,000 a year in unpaid caring for a family member.”

“This new survey shows us families are under constant pressure from the responsibility of maintaining secure employment and the reality of looking after children, ageing parents or a loved one with an illness.”

“Many of the survey respondents said their workplace culture was not flexible and others said they did not ask their employer for reduced working hours because they feared they would get sacked. This is the disgraceful reality of our modern workplaces.”

“While women still carry the lion’s share of the burden of caring, men want reduced hours but are 50 per cent more likely to get knocked back when they do ask.”

“What is clear from the survey is that our workplace laws have not kept up with the realities of working Australians’ lives.”

“The ACTU wants a new right for all Australian workers, especially women who predominantly carry the caring load, to have the right to part-time or reduced hours temporarily while they have important family caring responsibilities.”

“The ACTU is committed to continuing to use every available option to make this a reality for working women and families.”

“Australian women and families shouldn’t need to fit in to the outdated broken system. We are arguing that we need modern workplaces and modern laws.”

“The rules are broken for working women and families and the Australian trade union movement will always fight for better conditions for working people and lead the way in industrial reforms that support women, all workers and their families.”

“Life is not all about working and we will pursue reform that sees this end.”
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