



The Work-Child Care Interface: How working women with young children combine work and child care

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For women who are mothers of young children, the decision to participate in the labour force depends on a large number of co-determining factors. Using the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey this paper outlines the extent to which access to a set of employment benefits, childcare arrangements and domestic arrangements facilitate the combination of work and family responsibilities for women with young children. Women with preschool aged children are classified as being either employed, unemployed and marginally attached to the labour force and those not in the labour force. The paper examines the extent to which there are significant differences in family background, personal characteristics, job characteristics, domestic arrangements and attitudes to parental roles and work for each of these sub-groups.

I Introduction

The proportion of mothers with children aged 3 years or younger that participate in the labour force in Australia has continued to increase (Burgess et al., 2004). However Whitehouse (2004a) points out that the employment rate for Australian women with preschoolers falls consistently below that of similar American women though the explanation for this 'employment gap' is a matter of conjecture. Policy initiatives directed at lifting coverage of leave entitlements and access to affordable child care have been mooted as options to lift participation rates without exacerbating work-family pressures. To what extent mothers perceive these initiatives as complements or substitutes to one another or as irrelevant to their decisions about employment is unclear. Until recently it has been difficult to gauge the significance of the interplay of child care choice and access to family friendly workplace provisions because the two sorts of data have not been simultaneously collected in the same survey. The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey offers insight into these issues since it draws together a wide array of data pertaining to both labour market characteristics and child care choices that confront the women and families within the scope of the survey.

This paper provides a preliminary examination of the descriptive data available from HILDA for women who have responsibility for a pre-school aged child. The paper is modest in its aims setting out to provide a descriptive overview of relationships. Substantive testing of the relationships in the data via regression analysis will be the subject of later research. The paper is organised as follows. The next section will provide a brief outline of the HILDA data set as it pertains to this project, followed by a précis of previous studies in this area. Section IV compares the characteristics of women, drawn from HILDA, ordered by their labour force attachment and Section V reports access to family friendly workplace provisions and the child care utilisation patterns of employed women only. The final section draws broad conclusions and outlines the direction of future research.

II An outline of HILDA

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey is a nation-wide household panel survey sponsored by the Department of Family and Community Services and managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Watson and Wooden, 2002). It aims to build a longitudinal database that focuses on employment, income and family issues. The framework for the survey is a nationally representative sample of households. For each household a suite of three instruments are applied. A household interview draws data about the household from one adult member within the household. Individual interviews with all persons over the age of 15 years are sought and each individual completing a personal interview is asked to complete and return a self-completion questionnaire. The first wave collected data from 13,969 individuals in 7682 households in late 2001. Wave 2 data was collected in late 2002 and wave 3 data in 2003. This initial look at the HILDA data set will concentrate on the wave 1 data.

The HILDA data is chosen for this exercise for several reasons. First, it provides an extraordinarily rich, large set of data in terms of the variety of information that it collects. Second, it brings together details for the mother, the family and childcare use for families where there is a very young child present. Other data sets that might meet these criteria are either very small, as is the case with 'Negotiating the Life Course' (NLC) survey, or take as their point of reference the child rather than the mother, as is the case with the Australian Bureau of Statistics Child Care Survey. Third, since it is intended to be a longitudinal study, it will be possible to explore transitions in labour force status over time. Furthermore, the HILDA sample population has characteristics that are broadly in line with those of official Australian Bureau of Statistics sources. The one major exception is associated with the under-representation of Sydney residents (Wooden, Freidin and Watson, 2002). However, all the estimates in this paper are unweighted.

This paper seeks to draw together information on the child care utilisation of mothers with preschool children and their access to family conducive working arrangements. HILDA makes this possible but not without some difficulty. As noted, HILDA collects data from two interviews and a self completed survey instrument. The child care data appears on the Household file while the personal interviews and self completed questionnaires are coded onto the Responding person file. This latter file is the source of information on maternal employment, and where appropriate, job characteristics. Therefore the relevant files need to be merged. Note that the child care questions are only asked of the member in the household 'who takes primary responsibility for organising any childcare that might be needed for any of the children who are living with you'. So the subsequent questions on childcare are household based, apply to all children (natural, step, foster) and only asked where (both) primary caregiver(s) 'undertake paid work'. Further, households might include several families (making it impossible to separate out child care used by single families) and lone father families, so the merged file excises these cases.

Two sample populations are derived for purposes of this study. The first population includes all women, aged less than 65 years, identified in single family households who had at least one resident child (natural, step or foster) who was not attending school. Thus the sample includes some children aged 5 and 6 who are not yet at school and excludes a small number of children aged 4 who are reported as being at school. This sample contains 1104 women. The second sample is derived from the first and refers to women in families (including lone mother families) where all primary caregivers were employed and had at least one child not yet at school. One

further adjustment is necessary since HILDA totals child care for all preschool aged children in a responding unit. In effect, HILDA reports total childcare usage irrespective of whether there is one, two or more preschool children in the family. This creates potential for confusion when comparing across women. To avoid this issue, the second sample selects employed women with only one child of preschool age present. This yields a sample of 364 women.

Before turning to an outline of the characteristics of these sample populations, a brief summary of relevant previous Australian studies is provided in the next section.

III Previous Studies

Attempts to examine the influence of family friendly workplace provisions and the impact of child care on maternal employment tend to fall into separate camps. The studies also differ in terms of the reference populations examined and specific configuration of the research questions. For instance, Gray (2000a) investigates the relationship between parental involvement and work and workplace experiences using a study population of couples aged 18-54, with at least one child aged under 12 years, drawn from the Negotiating the Life Course (NLC) sub-sample survey of 1999. She posits variables that measure parental identity, parental involvement and work and workplace provisions. For Gray (2000a), the standard work benefits are paid sick leave, paid holiday/rec leave, long service leave, paid mat/paternity leave and family or carers leave; the workplace arrangements that are conducive to parenting are job sharing, flexible working hours, teleworking, permanent part-time work and access to rostered days off; and workplace requirements that might constrain parental involvement are shift work/irregular hours, overtime/long hours, work weekends, work nights, take work home and travel away overnight. The results are reported separately for families with children under and over 5. Of interest to present purposes, Gray (2000a) finds that men are significantly more likely than women to have paid sick leave, paid holiday/rec leave and long service leave, while women are significantly more likely to job share, work flexible hours and access permanent part-time work than men. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to confront shift work/irregular hours, overtime/long hours, work weekends, work nights and travel away overnight.

In a separate study, Gray (2000b) examines the relationship between workplace benefits and the life course stage. Using NLC data from 1996-97, Gray (2000b) identifies three life course stages – being couples who do not have a child but want one in the future, couples whose youngest child is under age 5 and couples whose youngest child is aged 5-12 – and seven workplace benefits – being the same five as above plus unpaid maternity or parental leave and a company car or vehicle for private use. As a group, women with no child present work the longest hours, followed by women with school age children and then women with a child under age 5. However the proportion of women with permanent employment falls with the presence of children and does not recover with the advent of school age. There are also significant differences in access to workplace benefits for women by life course group. The proportion that have access to paid sick leave, paid holiday/rec leave, long service leave, unpaid mat/paternity leave and family or carers leave is higher for women with no child compared to women with a child under 5 and generally the proportion does not improve as the child ages despite lengthening work hours of the mother. She speculates that the critical factor may be permanent employment status.

This same grouping of seven workplace benefits and six constraints is also deployed in Gray and McDonald (2002) to examine organisation and workplace characteristics on employment of

mothers of pre-school aged children across two waves of NLC data. Specifically, they seek to determine whether work factors at wave 1 impact on employment status at wave 2. Access to four or more benefits in wave 1 led to a greater proportion of women employed at wave 2. However, experiencing four or more workplace constraints in wave 1 was also associated with a greater proportion employed at wave 2, which is contrary to the expected effect. Samson (2002) also uses two waves of NLC data to examine the changing labour force status of women with preschoolers between 1997 and 2000. Samson (2002) nominates family or carer's leave as the relevant job benefit but this is subsequently dropped from regression analysis due to the high correlation with casual employment status.

Jefferson and Preston (2003) use the NLC survey to examine access to superannuation, maternity, paternity and family leave for full-time and part-time employment status by form of employment (permanent, contract or casual) and sector. They examine the situation of all employees and self employed irrespective of family stage. They find that permanent employees and those working in the public sector are more likely to have access to these leave provisions. Whitehouse (2004b) endeavours to assess changes in perception of access to benefits by drawing samples for adults 18-54 years old from two waves of NLC survey. She points out that respondents seem to be less certain about access to paid/unpaid parental leave and family care leave than they are about their access to the more long standing provisions of sick, holiday and long service leave. Logistic regression identifies permanent employment status, level of earnings, being female, sector and of child bearing age as being significant in perceptions of access to unpaid parental leave. With the exception of child bearing age, these same variables are significant in explaining perception of access to paid parental leave, with the dominant influence being permanent employment status. Surprisingly, Whitehouse (2004) finds a negative association between number of children aged less than 6 and access to paid parental leave, leading to speculation that parents of young children resort to employment options where paid parental leave provisions are least likely to be available.

Another suite of studies has examined the relationship between work-family pressures and a number of possible causal factors. For instance, Wooden (2003) uses HILDA wave 1 data to explore the relationship between parental working hours and work-family balance. The focus is on couple families with children under 15 years of age separated into household type depending on the employment patterns of the parents. A series of scales that rate satisfaction with relationships, job and life, alongside attitudinal questions on the gains and strains of combining work and family are compared across parents who work 35 to 40 hours per week versus those who work very long hours. He concludes that generally there are no strong negative repercussions of long hours on family life. Hosking (2004) constructs measures of job insecurity and work to family strain from HILDA wave 1 and assesses the extent to which these measures are sensitive to differences in employment status, employment contract, weekly work schedule and daily hours schedule. She confines her analysis to a sample of employees aged between 18 and 65 who have parental responsibility for a child aged 17 years or younger. Her broad conclusion is that casual and fixed term contracts tend to heighten job insecurity and that part-time employment status is associated with less work to family strain.

There is a sizable international literature that has attempted to estimate the parameters of the demand for child care services, especially as that demand interacts with the maternal decision to participate in the labour force. Analysis is complicated by the fact that parents may elect to

organise work schedules so that they can care for their own children or might substitute between market based formal and informal care providers (Lee and Strachan, 1998). Further the presence of means tested fee relief means that the price of formal child care varies across users. Cobb-Clark, Liu and Mitchell (2000), using NLC survey of couple families with a preschooler present, argue that child care costs do not act as a barrier to maternal employment. This is partly because non-working mothers do not cite child care costs as a major barrier and partly because parental care and zero cost informal care were widely used. There was evidence of a correlation between full-time employment of the mother and the use of formal care options. Samson (2002) finds that the hours that the preschooler spent in non-parental childcare were positively associated with a mother working both in 1997 and 2000. Furthermore, being in receipt of the government childcare benefit was positive and significant for maternal work hours in 2000 but not in 1997. Doiron and Kalb (2004), on the other hand, estimate the demand for formal and informal child care and model the impact of changing child care fees on the labour supply response for lone and partnered mothers using several data sources. They find that increases in the cost of care have the expected negative impact on maternal labour supply with the effect being greatest for lone parents and low waged partnered mothers.

IV Characteristics of women with responsibility for preschool aged children

The principal objective here is to examine the relationship between working arrangements for employed mothers alongside their child care arrangements using HILDA data. Lee (2003) points out that child care is used both by working and non-working mothers because it confers benefits on the family over and above releasing the mother to participate in employment. However HILDA only collects child care data where both parents (or the lone parent) are (is) employed and so it is not possible to establish the extent to which employed mothers use child care differentially to non-employed mothers.

In an effort to provide some context for the characteristics of employed mothers with preschool aged children, they are first contrasted against mothers who fall into the other labour force categories. By extended unemployed is meant those mothers who satisfied the standard labour force tests of actively seeking employment and being available to start work in the reference week plus those deemed to be marginally attached to the labour force (either wanted to work, actively seeking but not able to start in the reference week or wanted to work, not actively looking but available to start within four weeks). This split is adopted in preference to the two-way split of employed versus not employed (as in Gray, 2000b, for instance) because it is anticipated that the characteristics of the unemployed and marginally attached are dissimilar to the characteristics of the other two groups.

A range of characteristics is listed in Table 1. Whether or not the respondent’s own mother worked when the respondent was aged 14 is included as a family background variable following the work of Evans and Kelley (2004). They found that such a factor increased both workforce participation and hours worked for women, as did their parent’s education, father’s occupational status, and father as supervisor of other workers. As is common in many studies, a number of personal attributes of the woman that have been found to influence employment are included.

Table 1 Characteristics of women with resident children not yet at school, HILDA Wave 1, 2001

Characteristic	Employed women	Extended Unemployed		Women not in the	
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	N= 522	women N= 264		labour force N= 318	
Comparison of Means^a					
Maternal Age	33.07	29.83	***	31.86	**
Highest Education achieved (excluding undetermined) ^b	2.18	2.86	***	2.60	***
Age of youngest child	2.29	1.71	***	1.33	***
Number of preschool children	1.25	1.31		1.42	***
Number of children at school (up to and including age 14)	0.73	0.79		0.81	
Hours per typical week in household errands, housework and outdoor tasks ^c ~	29.65	34.89	**	37.94	***
Hours in typical week interacting with children ^d ~	33.64	37.39		40.92	***
Traditional attitudes to working mothers ^e ~	3.73	4.24	***	4.37	***
SEIFA 96 decile of index of relative socio-economic disadvantage	6.03	5.19	***	5.50	**
SEIFA 96 decile of index of economic resources	5.46	4.94	*	5.25	
SEIFA 96 decile of index of education & occupation	6.26	5.29	***	5.69	**
Comparison across groups (%)					
Employment of own mother when aged 14 years~ # #					
Yes	59.9	52.2		47.9	
No	38.5	44.3		51.4	
Mother deceased/Don't know	1.5	3.5		0.6	
Marital status # # #					
Married and de facto relationships	90.2	72.7		86.8	
Widowed, divorced, separated & never married	9.8	27.3		13.2	
% Non-native English language speakers #					
	9.4	14.4		15.7	
Used/thought about using childcare # # #					
	82.4	48.1		23.9	
Urban environment					
Major city	55.6	54.2		56.9	
Inner regional	31.8	32.2		27.4	
Outer regional	11.9	12.5		12.6	
Remote	0.8	1.1		3.1	

a ***, ** and * indicates a statistically significant difference at $p < 0.001$, $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.05$, respectively from the reference group of employed women.

b Highest education received is recorded in 5 categories: university trained; certificate or diploma; completed Year 12; completed Year 11 or less; and undetermined.

c Combined responses from three questions to elicit hours in a typical week spent on domestic chores but excluding child care tasks.

d Hours per typical week spent playing with children, helping them with personal care, teaching, coaching or actively supervising them, or getting them to child care, school and other activities.

e Index based on responses to 4 questions to gauge strength of traditional attitudes to maternal role i.e. 'Many working mothers seem to care more about being successful at work than meeting the needs of their children'; 'Whatever career a woman may have, her most important role in life is still that of being a mother'; 'Mothers who don't need money shouldn't work'; and 'It is much better for everyone involved if the man earns the money and the woman takes care of the home and children'. Scored on 0 to 7 scale where 7 is strongly agree; alpha reliability = 0.56.

~ Percentages based on responses that exclude respondents who did not answer, didn't know etc.

chi-square significant at $p < 0.001$; ## significant at $p < 0.01$; # significant at $p < 0.05$

Since lack of proficiency with the English language is expected to put respondents at a disadvantage in the labour force, a variable is created that distinguishes between Australian born plus overseas born native English speakers from those for whom English was not the first language spoken as a child. A set of variables follow that describe the age and number of dependent children, weekly hours spent on domestic chores, hours spent interacting with children, traditional attitudes to maternal role and whether or not, at any time in the last 12 months, had used/thought about using specific forms of non-parental child care to undertake paid work. Finally, urban environment is included as a location control for both access to employment opportunities and child care services. HILDA constructs three variables based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics socio-economic indicators for areas from the 1996 census. The indicators, as index numbers, are matched by Collection District to the households. The index numbers are then sorted and deciles created based on the population counts. Thus the decile attaches to the household a rank that reflects the socio-economic standing of the area in which the household is located.

Bivariate analysis of characteristics in Table 1 indicates that employed mothers with preschool children are significantly older on average, are more highly educated, have older preschoolers, spend fewer hours in a typical week on domestic chores, are less likely to hold traditional attitudes about the maternal role and reside in areas that are more advantaged relative to those of the other two groups. There is no difference between employed women and extended unemployed in number of preschoolers nor the hours per week spent interacting with children, whereas there is a significant difference between employed women and those not in the labour force on these points. There is no significant difference between the groups in terms of number of school age children. These results are broadly consistent with the results of similar studies. The chi-squares indicate significant association between labour force standing and own mother's employment history, marital status, English proficiency, and used/thought about using child care. Urban environment or otherwise is not significant.

V Characteristics of employed women with responsibility for preschool aged children

This section first presents summary statistics on the job characteristics of mothers with one preschool child and then moves to investigate access to workplace conditions conducive to combining work and family and the care arrangements that the women report using. The employed women are separated into four groups based on hours worked. These groups correspond roughly to quartile divisions, except for the top group that corresponds with full-time employment. Table 2 indicates significant differences between the four groups in the mean usual weekly hours worked, occupation, casual status and trade union membership. Full-time workers are significantly more likely to report management and professional occupations and are less likely to satisfy the standard definition of casual status. A somewhat higher proportion of full-time workers are trade union members. On the other hand, workplace size, as gauged by the number employed at place of work and employment in the private sector are not significantly different across the work hour groups.

Table 2 Characteristics of employed women with only one resident child not yet at school, HILDA Wave 1, 2001, unweighted observations

	Hours Worked
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	0-14 N=76		15-23 N=92		24-34 N=90		35+ N=106
Comparison of Means ^a							
Usual hrs pw in all jobs	8.29	***	18.43	***	27.53	***	43.06
Workplace size ^b	2.26		2.50		2.49		2.57
Comparison across groups (%)							
Occupation ^c #							
Managers & professionals	35.5		50		43.3		58.5
Clerical & service	48.7		45.7		44.4		34
Trades & manual	15.8		4.3		12.2		7.5
Casual worker ^{d ^ ###}	53		36		23		8
Employed in private sector ^{e ^}	73		70.1		70.9		62.2
Trade union membership ^f #	13.2		18.5		15.6		30.2

a ***, ** and * indicates a statistically significant difference at p<0.001, p<0.01 and p<0.05, respectively from the reference group of full-time employed women.

b workplace size refers to numbers employed at place of work and coded as less than 5; between 5 to 19 (including those who responded 'don't know but fewer than 20'); between 20 to 99 (including those who responded 'don't know but 20 or more'); and 100 or more, where less than 5 takes the value 1 and 100 or more takes the value 4.

c Occupation based on 2-digit ASCO where managers and professionals covers codes 10-39; clerical and services covers 50-69 and 80-89; and trades and manual covers 40-49, 70-79 and 90-99.

d Casual worker defined on the basis that the employee is without paid holiday leave and paid sick leave.

e Private sector includes private sector for profit, private sector not-for-profit, other commercial and other non-commercial. Public sector includes GBE or commercial statutory authority plus other government organisation (public service departments, local councils, schools and universities).

f Respondents answering 'don't know' were treated as if they did not have trade union membership.

~ Percentages based on responses that exclude respondents who did not answer, didn't know etc.

^ employees only.

chi-square significant at p<0.001; ## significant at p<0.01; # significant at p<0.05

Hours worked, work-family strain and workplace provisions

Following earlier work, (for instance, Gray, 2000a), this section examines the connection between work hours, workplace conditions and satisfaction with work-family balance. HILDA collects data on respondents' satisfactions with a number of work and life arrangements, alongside information on access to a certain workplace benefits and current work schedules. Table 3 provides a contrast between usual hours worked per week in all jobs and preferred hours of work. Employees working less than 24 hours would, on average, prefer to be working longer while full-time employees would prefer fewer hours. The disparity between actual hours and preferred hours is greatest at the extremes of the working hour's spectrum. On the other hand, the average score on the work-family strain index rises with maternal work hours and is significantly higher for full time workers.

Consistent with the lower average work-family strain index, mothers working short hours report a higher satisfaction with their work hours than do full time workers despite their average preference for more hours. The mean satisfaction with work hours is greatest for women working 24 to 34 hours – perhaps not surprising as this group has the smallest margin between actual and preferred hours. Furthermore, satisfaction with flexibility to balance work and non-work commitments is significantly lower for full-time employees and highest for those working 0-14

hours. Across the four hour groups, there is no significant difference, at the mean, to the assertion that the worker has 'freedom to decide when to do work', with respondents all erring on the side of agreeing that they have this discretion. Likewise, there are no significant differences between hour's groups on the index measuring peer attitudes towards work mates accessing family friendly work benefits with all groups asserting that their workplaces do not disadvantage workers accessing family provisions. The broad picture that emerges is that women with responsibility for preschool children obtain the flexibility to balance work and family pressures and cope with work-family strain by 'adjusting' their work hours. This is not equivalent to arguing that the hours worked are viewed as optimum since preferred hours deviate from actual hours and at short working hours the average score on satisfaction with hours is lower than the average score on satisfaction to balance. An issue for future research is the identification of the constraints that prevent women from achieving their preferred hours.

Table 3 Work-family balance and workplace provisions of employed women with one resident child not yet at school, HILDA Wave 1, 2001, unweighted observations

	Hours Worked						
	0-14 N=76		15-23 N=92		24-34 N=90		35+ N=106
Comparison of Means ^a							
Usual hrs pw in all jobs	8.29	***	18.43	***	27.53	***	43.06
Preferred Hrs pw ~	13.43	***	21.83	***	26.82	***	35.31
Work-family strain ~ ^b	2.88	***	3.47	**	3.79		4.2
Satisfaction with hours worked ^c	7.57	**	7.54	**	7.80	***	6.43
Satisfaction with flexibility to balance work & non-work ^c	8.80	***	7.93	***	7.80	**	6.42
Freedom to decide when to do work ^d ~	3.93		3.74		3.76		3.86
Peer attitudes ~ ^e	2.14		2.54		2.61		2.40
Total family provisions ^f ~	3.51		3.85		4.20		4.00
Current work schedule (%)							
Regular day	59.2		65.2		73.3		80.2
Regular eve/night	7.9		8.7		7.8		3.8
Irregular ^g	32.9		26.1		18.9		16.0

a ***, ** and * indicates a statistically significant difference at p<0.001, p<0.01 and p<0.05, respectively from the reference group of full time employed women.

b Index based on responses to 5 questions to gauge perception of work-family strain eg '...miss out on the rewarding aspects of being a parent', scored on 0 to 7 scale where 7 is strongly agree; alpha reliability = 0.84.

c satisfaction is gauged in response to a single question scored on a 10 point scale where 10 equals totally satisfied.

d satisfaction is gauged in response to a single question scored on a 7 point scale where 7 equals strongly agree.

e Index based on responses to 3 questions to gauge perception of lack of peer support for accessing family friendly provisions at work eg 'Employees taking family leave less likely to get ahead', scored on 0 to 7 scale where 7 is strongly agree; alpha reliability = 0.8.

f Count of workplace conditions and entitlements accessible. Includes paid maternity leave, unpaid maternity leave, parental leave, special leave for caring for family members, permanent part-time work, home-based work and flexible start and finish times

g Irregular work schedule covers rotating shifts, split shifts, being on call and any other irregular schedule.

~ Percentages based on responses that exclude respondents who did not answer, didn't know etc.

Table 4 Ability to use workplace provisions in current job for employed women with one resident child not yet at school, HILDA Wave 1, 2001, unweighted observations (%)

Workplace conditions and entitlements	Hours Worked			
	0-14 N=76	15-23 N=92	24-34 N=90	35+ N=106
Proportion certain ^a of ability to access paid maternity leave	64.5	72.8	77.8	61.3
Could access ^b paid maternity leave as proportion of certain responses	36.7	40.3	45.7	56.9
Proportion certain of ability to access unpaid maternity leave	61.8	69.6	73.3	62.3
Could access unpaid maternity leave as proportion of certain responses # #	66.0	70.3	93.9	81.8
Proportion certain of ability to access parental leave	71.1	71.7	72.2	75.5
Could access parental leave as proportion of certain responses #	61.1	63.6	78.5	82.5
Proportion certain of ability to access special leave for caring for family members	67.1	70.7	68.9	69.8
Could access special leave as proportion of certain responses #	66.7	72.3	87.1	81.1
Proportion certain of ability to access permanent part-time work	81.6	88.0	86.7	73.6
Could access permanent part-time work as proportion of certain responses #	77.4	85.2	89.7	73.1
Proportion certain of ability to access home-based work	80.3	79.3	81.1	72.6
Could access home-based work as proportion of certain responses	31.1	27.4	32.9	33.8
Proportion certain of ability to access flexible start and finish times	90.8	88.0	85.6	83.0
Could access flexible start and finish times as proportion of certain responses	65.2	66.7	61.0	59.1

chi-square significant at p<0.001; ## significant at p<0.01; # significant at p<0.05

a Certain responses defined as those who answered either yes or no to the item and excludes non-respondents, not applicable, don't know, refused/not stated etc.

b yes answers as a percentage of all certain responses.

Turning to family friendly workplace provisions, HILDA presented a list of seven conditions and entitlements sometimes provided by employers and asked respondents to nominate '...whether you would be able to use [each] if you needed to in your current job'. The seven workplace provisions were paid maternity leave, unpaid maternity leave, parental leave, special leave for caring for family members, permanent part-time work, home-based work and flexible start and finish times. In Table 3, 'total benefits' counts the number of positive responses of each individual. Thus the mean number of provisions of those working 0-14 hours is 3.51. While the number of average benefits generally rises with hours employed the difference is not significant. However missing responses casts doubt over the appropriateness of a simple count of affirmative responses. Table 4 reports access to each provision separately and identifies the proportion of responses that were certain, that is answered either 'Yes' or 'No'. Access to paid maternity leave and unpaid maternity leave carry high non-response rates, with many replying 'not applicable', perhaps signalling that the respondents construed the question to be asking if they were currently pregnant but it is difficult to determine what this response actually means. Further, the proportions selecting 'don't know' in answer to ability to access parental leave and special leave were higher across all hour categories, perhaps indicating uncertainty with the terminology used to describe these leave provisions. Table 4 then expresses the affirmative responses as a percentage of the certain answers. Overall, the two most widely nominated accessible provisions

were permanent part-time work and unpaid maternity leave with the two least nominated being home based work and paid maternity leave. There are also differences by hour groups with women working 0-14 hours generally having least access to all provisions, an observation that is consistent with this group having the highest proportion of casual workers. Four of the provisions, unpaid maternity leave, parental leave, special leave and permanent part-time work, register a significant correlation with the hour groups. Access to unpaid maternity leave, parental leave and special leave is more evident for women working in excess of 24 hours, while permanent part-time work rates more highly for women working 15-34 hours. Flexible start and finish times appear to be less available to women working longer hours but this difference is not significant.

Finally, Table 3 reports on the current work schedule of employed women organised by hour group. The dominant work schedule across all groups is regular day work. However, full-time employed women have a much higher proportion engaged in day work and a lower proportion working an irregular schedule than is the case for women working 0-14 hours. Nevertheless, the chi square test is not significant. Hosking (2004), working with HILDA wave 1 data, sets up a similar current work schedule variable and specifically tests for the relationship between it and work-family stress. The results find that working an irregular schedule relative to daytime work is significantly associated with increased work to family strain for fathers but not for mothers.

Hours worked and child care arrangements

This section opens by returning to the full group of women with responsibility for preschool children to explore the difficulties reported with the organisation of child care. Primary caregivers who responded in the affirmative to 'have you used/thought about using any of [formal/informal] forms of childcare so you could undertake paid work in the last 12 months?' were asked to rank (on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 was no difficulty at all) the degree of difficulty experienced with a range of childcare issues. Table 5 summarises the responses for all women. Only four questions elicit responses that identify a significant difference between employed women and extended unemployed. These differences emerge with quality of care, finding the right person, obtaining a place in centre of choice and finding care that the child is happy with. However, the mean scores cloak sizeable dispersion in the distribution of responses with over 30 per cent of all women rating 'getting care for a sick child' with a score at 7 or greater. Chart 1 indicates that generally women in extended unemployment lead the 'difficulties with organising child care' ladder. The exceptions are getting needed care hours, dominated by women not in the labour force, and finding care for a sick child which is dominated by employed women. Repeating Table 5 for employed women, organised by hour groups, reveals no significant difference at the mean in organising child care. Nevertheless, caring for a sick child and the cost of care yield mean difficulty scores above 4 and approaching 5 for all employed women working longer than 15 hours. Generally, as shown in Chart 2, full-time employed women have the highest proportion reporting difficulty levels of 7 or greater, with obtaining needed care hours, finding care for a sick child, the cost of child care and location of care standing out as issues.

Table 5 Difficulty with organising child care, women with resident children not yet at school, HILDA Wave 1, 2001 (unweighted observations)

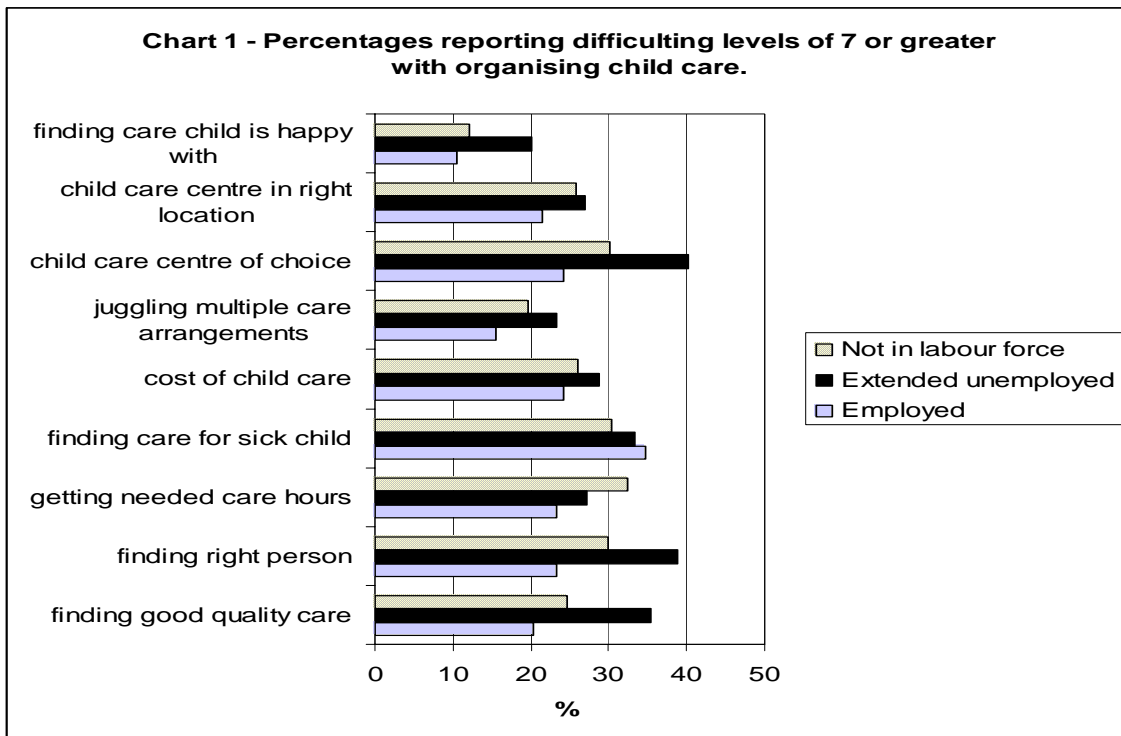
How much a problem/difficulty in the last 12 months was...

Characteristic ^a	Employed women N= 430	Extended Unemploy women N= 127		Women not in the labour force N= 76	
Comparison of Means ^b					
finding good quality childcare ^c	2.70	3.88	**	3.20	
finding right person to take care of my child	2.93	4.21	**	3.37	
getting care for the hours needed	3.08	3.59		3.92	
finding care for sick child	4.16	3.85		3.61	
cost of child care	3.86	4.05		3.81	
juggling multiple child care arrangements	2.69	2.56		2.67	
child care centre of choice	3.01	4.14	*	3.52	
child care centre in right location	2.61	3.06		3.21	
finding care my child is happy with	1.92	2.77	*	2.32	

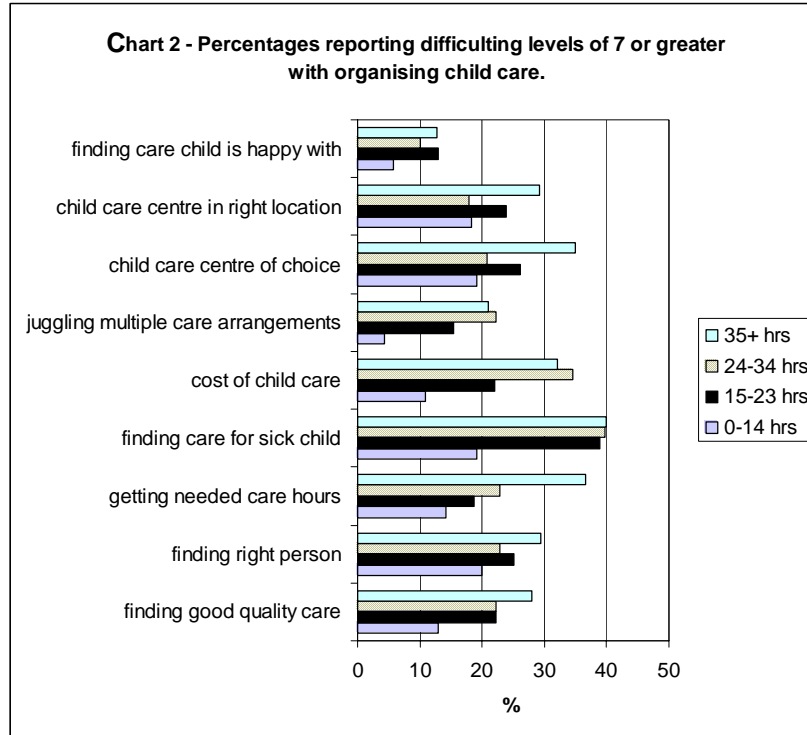
a HILDA does not distinguish between difficulties in connection with child care for preschoolers and child care for school aged children. To the extent that some of these women also have school aged children, their responses cannot solely be attributed to the presence of the preschooler.

b ***, ** and * indicates a statistically significant difference at $p < 0.001$, $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.05$, respectively from the reference group of employed women.

c HILDA identifies two other sources of difficulty that are omitted here. These are 'finding vacation care', omitted because it has more application to school aged children, and 'finding care for a difficult/special needs child', omitted due to small number of responses and extreme values.



Source: HILDA, wave 1, 2001.



Source: HILDA, wave 1, 2001.

Table 6 duplicates the rows on hours worked, preferred hours and work-family strain from Table 3 and then provides information on child care arrangements. It is evident that a significantly higher proportion of women working less than 15 hours per week rely on parent only provided child care. It is surmised that these women are more likely to work irregular schedules or shifts compatible with their partners providing care while the mother is at work. In all other cases, the care category coexists with some parental care. Thus informal care only indicates that the care arrangements were some combination of parental care, sibling care, relative care (either in child's or own home), friend care (either in child's home or own) and paid nanny. Women working between 15 to 34 hours are the greatest proportionate users of these care arrangements. Likewise formal care only indicates that the care arrangements were some combination of parental care, family day care, long day care (either private or workplace provided), preschool or kindergarten or two other care options. This is the dominant care arrangement cited for all groups.

Juggling multiple care arrangements is a factor often posited to add to maternal work-family strain. Table 6 indicates that more than 50 per cent of women in all groups report using only one form of 12 possible care types. Roughly 20 per cent of women working more than 14 hours use two care options in addition to parental care. However, there are no significant differences by hours worked.

Finally, Table 7 draws out in more detail the contrasts between users of informal care only and users of formal care only. This contrast is pursued since hours of parent only care were not collected and the number of respondents using 'both formal and informal care' are very small.

The weekly hours of care differ significantly across hour groups and are closely aligned to maternal work hours. Average formal care hours are longer than informal care hours and may

indicate the influence of prescribed quantum of time that go with formal care arrangements. Informal care has a sizable price advantage, relative to formal care, with a high proportion of these arrangements carrying no out-of-pocket expense to the parents. There are no significant differences in the out-of-pocket cost of an hour of formal care though the lower hourly cost of formal care for women working 0-14 hours is consistent with the higher proportion in this group that use preschool care (where zero cost care is more likely to be available). The out-of-pocket hourly cost of informal care is on average higher than for formal care but the small number of respondents suggests that these estimates should be treated with caution. There are no significant differences on age of youngest child between full-time employed women and the other groups for either formal or informal care. However, the mean age of the youngest child, for women using formal care, is almost 3 years compared to a mean age of approximately 2 years for informal care, reflecting perhaps the greater availability of child care places for children aged 3 years and over

Table 6 Child care arrangements of employed mothers with one resident child not yet at school, HILDA Wave 1, 2001, unweighted observations

	Hours Worked						
	0-14 N=76		15-23 N=92		24-34 N=90		35+ N=106
Comparison of Means ^a							
Usual hrs pw in all jobs	8.29	***	18.43	***	27.53	***	43.06
Preferred Hrs pw ~	13.43	***	21.83	***	26.82	***	35.31
Work-family strain ~	2.88	***	3.47	**	3.79		4.2
Child care arrangement (%)							
Parent care only **	32.0		13.0		11.1		15.1
Informal care only	18.7		28.3		30.0		18.9
Formal care only	38.7		41.3		45.6		45.3
Both formal and informal care	0.11		17.4		13.3		20.8
Number of care arrangements (%)							
0	31.6		13.0		11.1		17.0
1	50.0		64.1		67.8		57.5
2	13.2		20.7		18.9		23.6
3	3.9		2.2		1.1		1.9
4+	1.3				1.1		

a ***, ** and * indicates a statistically significant difference at $p < 0.001$, $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.05$, respectively from the reference group of employed women.

~ Percentages based on responses that exclude respondents who did not answer, didn't know etc.

Finally, Table 7 offers some insight into the modes of care used. Of those using formal care only, private long day care is particularly important to women working more than 14 hours per week, while over 30 per cent of women working less than 15 hours per week use preschools or kindergartens. The shorter operational hours of preschools makes them less suited as care providers to children of women working longer hours. The major providers of informal care only are relatives living elsewhere to the family – principally grandparents. This mode of care is used widely across all groups of working women but being able to access this care relies on the availability and goodwill of relatives in an older generation.

Table 7 Child care arrangements of employed mothers with one resident child not yet at school, HILDA Wave 1, 2001, unweighted observations

	Hours Worked						
	0-14 N=76		15-23 N=92		24-34 N=90		35+ N=106
Comparison of Means ^a							
Weekly hours of child care							
Formal care only	13.69	***	18.43	***	26.12	***	35.54
Informal care only	11.69	***	13.42	***	19.59	**	32.89
Proportion paying out-of-pocket for child care (%)							
Formal care only	92.9		89.2		97.6		95.8
Informal care only	14.3		20.0		18.5		50.0
Hourly out-of-pocket expense of care (if non-zero)							
Formal care only	\$2.50		\$3.28		\$2.72		\$3.35
Informal care only	\$2.67		\$5.98		\$1.99		\$4.29
Age of youngest child							
Formal care only	2.90		2.95		2.90		2.96
Informal care only	2.07		2.12		2.19		1.55
Proportion using modes of child care (%)							
Formal care only ~							
Private Long Day Care	34.5		52.6		53.7		52.1
Family Day Care	24.1		28.9		46.3		27.1
Preschool or Kindergarten	31.0		15.8		14.6		8.3
Informal care only ~							
Relative who lives elsewhere	71.4		88.5		88.9		65.0
Friend or neighbour in their home	21.4		3.8		-		25.0
Friend or neighbour in family home	21.4		3.8		-		-
Paid sitter or nanny	-		3.8		7.4		15.0

a ***, ** and * indicates a statistically significant difference at $p < 0.001$, $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.05$, respectively from the reference group of full-time employed women.

~ Percentages may sum to more than 100 per cent as some children access more than one type of care.

VI Conclusion

The bivariate analysis in this paper points to some tentative conclusions and opens further research questions. Broadly the analysis suggests that the factors that determine whether women will be employed and if so what hours they will work are similar to findings of other studies, even though this study population is restricted to women with preschool aged children. An interesting group, identified for further study, is that of the extended unemployed women who appear to be different from the other two groups in important respects. Amongst other things, this group reports a higher incidence of difficulties with organising child care.

The paper shows that there are differences between employed sub-groups on satisfaction with hours worked, satisfaction with flexibility to balance work and non-work commitments and with work-family strain. However there are no significant differences between mean scores on discretion over when they work or peer attitudes to employees accessing workplace benefits, nor significant association with current work schedules. There is support for the contention that awareness of certain benefits like unpaid maternity leave, parental leave and special caring leave is allied to more hours worked. The claimed ability that a worker could access permanent part-

time work was stronger with less than full-employed hours, though whether this ability translated into actual experience is a moot point. Interestingly, there is no significant difference across groups in their ability to use flexible start and finish times. So while there are clear differences in satisfaction and work-family strain indicators, there are few differences between the groups in the characteristics that might account for the differences in the indicators.

There is only one significant difference in the care arrangements used by various groups. Parental care only is a significant choice for women working less than 15 hours and exploring whether this is connected to irregular hours or shift work remains to be investigated. Informal care only is used by less than 30 per cent of any employment category though the supply of this largely costless service is dependent on the predisposition of other relatives. Formal care only is an important source of care across employment groups though there are intimations that the mode of care chosen is influenced by operational hours and age of the child. This picture suggests that while access to non-parental child care is necessary to release women into employment for working hours in excess of 14 hours per week, the actual mode of child care arrangement used is not particularly tied to employed hours of the mother but rather is driven by child care supply characteristics and preferences of the family. The missing variable from this analysis is family income. Finally, women employed full-time are more likely to have experienced difficulty with organising child care.

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