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Work/Family Balance and Family Responsive Working Arrangements

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Abstract

A plethora of working arrangements have been advanced to meet the difficulties workers encounter in combining work and family roles. The focus of this article is on outlining family obligations and then classifying family responsive working arrangements against these obligations. It is argued that the majority of working arrangements are concerned with accommodating short-term non-routine family obligations and even on this count considerable numbers of workers are denied coverage.

Introduction

As both men and women seek the prerogative to choose market-based employment, problems of combining work and family responsibilities arise. Where previously social organisation centred on a gendered division of labour into paid market activity (typically the masculine domain) and unpaid domestic activity (the feminine domain), now individual household members are more likely to attempt to integrate/combine both market (work) and domestic (family) roles. However family solutions to effect integration may spillover to workplaces as absenteeism or high turnover and by the same token, work arrangements may have detrimental affects on family life if organisations fail to recognise the dual roles of employees. One possible way forward lies in finding some mutually advantageous middle ground that offers benefits to both employers and workers. Family responsive working arrangements offer employers the prospect of a more productive and committed workforce. For workers, some alteration to working arrangements and domestic responsibilities will allow individuals to satisfy both work and family obligations.

But what are these familial obligations that must be balanced against work commitments and to what extent is it possible to adjust working arrangements to allow workers to arrive at a satisfactory work/family balance? The paper seeks to answer these questions. In the process some underlying controversial issues will be either side stepped or ignored. First, the paper will not address the broader debate about work/life balance. Work/life balance is concerned with the changes in work organisation like the demise of secure, full time employment, the disappearance of standard hours and the shift to multi-skilling, that impact on the quality of workers' lives in general. Second, the paper will accept that

conceptually at least family responsive working arrangements are gender neutral. The accommodation of work and family roles need not fall disproportionately on women. However, despite evidence that men are playing a more active role in domestic responsibilities, it is still the case that women shoulder the major burden. Third, the paper avoids defining ‘family’ though its import is acknowledged. If government pronouncements are to move beyond exhortation and nostalgia, there must be a clear understanding of the boundaries to familial relationships as these will govern eligibility for policy initiatives. The same strictures apply when considering the adjustment of working arrangements to make them more family responsive. Finally, the paper will take as given the governmental and institutional framework. Accommodating family responsibilities has implications beyond the immediate family. It may influence perceptions of optimum family size and future population growth. Under present arrangements, parents bear the substantial costs of child rearing while delivering significant benefits to society as a whole. These spillover benefits to society are the basis for claims for greater government involvement with legislated entitlements to leave, standard working hours or subsidised child care services. These wider issues will not be canvassed in this paper.

Family Obligations and Work/Family Balance

The discussion of ‘work/family balance’ addresses the individual who is at work (and hence aged 15-64 years) and has family obligations. Potentially this has a very wide reach but the debate tends to be preoccupied with assisting parents of dependent children to combine work and family roles. More recently carer responsibilities have been extended to include elder care and other family relationships. Consequently the families under consideration will have at least one family member, with carer responsibilities, in the workforce. Literature out of the management/organisation tradition tends to assume that these families have an innate understanding of what constitutes ‘balance’ and survey instruments are used to gauge the extent to which workers find that present working arrangements satisfy these requirements. For example, the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS) asked employees to gauge change in satisfaction with the balance between work and family over the previous year. For 27 per cent of employees satisfaction had declined compared to 14 per cent of employees for whom satisfaction had

risen (Morehead, et. al., 1997: 289). The decline in satisfaction was more pronounced for full-time employees and managers, professionals and para-professionals. Overall, male carers and female carers reported declines in satisfaction of 33 per cent and 31 per cent respectively. Employees who experienced a rise in working hours were more likely to report a decline in satisfaction with the balance between work and family life than employees whose hours were unchanged. Longer weekly hours produced declines in satisfaction in 55 per cent of male carers and 45 per cent of female carers. Likewise, declines in satisfaction with work/family balance were more pronounced for employees with high scores on the work intensification index. It is not possible to determine from the changes in satisfaction the accommodations or otherwise to family objectives that were taking place though increased hours worked, increased work intensification and presence of carer responsibilities made it more difficult for employees to sustain satisfaction in their perceived balance.

Families as a form of social organisation represent a support network of mutual obligations with the expectation of reciprocity should the need arise. A family member, depending on their position within the family, can be expected to contribute to the collective unit. The broad familial obligations or expectations are presented in Table 1. The contention is that families will attempt to satisfy these obligations though the priority attached to each will depend on family composition and stage in the life course. Thus income without household services or leisure will be unacceptable to most families. For families with dependent children under 12 years of age greater weight will be attached to the care and socialisation of children.

It might seem self evident that families will seek secure employment for adult members and an adequate family income. Employment confers socialisation benefits for adults and potential self-fulfillment. However uncertainty regarding the employment contract and the associated income can be de-stabilising for the individual and the family. Further, the amount of time that must be devoted to earning the family income may have deleterious consequences for the time available for the other family objectives.

Table 1 Family Obligations

Secure employment and family income
Household services of an infrastructure kind like cooking and house maintenance
Leisure time including volunteer/community time
Day to day care of children
Child management and socialisation
Recognition and satisfaction of longer term aspirations of family members
Maintaining other family relationships

Source: Derived from Russell and Bowman (2000) and Burgess and Strachan (1999)

Time use surveys consistently find that households devote significant resources to the production of household services. Bittman (1999) found that Australian women on average devote 33 hours per week to unpaid work compared to 15 hours per week of their male counterparts. The three family objectives of the production of household services, leisure and child care services are interdependent. Miller and Mulvey (2000), using the Time Use Survey 1992, found that the presence of dependent children aged 0-14 years reduced the hours of market work, for women, from 2.26 hours per day to 1.74. Further, the presence of children impacted on domestic work and child care/minding activities increasing the hours from 3.79 to 4.53 and from 0.14 to 2.32 respectively.

Miller and Mulvey (2000) offer a more detailed decomposition of the category child care/minding that supports the inclusion of day to day care and socialisation of children as family objectives. They find that the activities of physical care; playing, reading, talking; and associated travel are the most time intensive irrespective of whether the mother is employed or not. Physical care accounts for 55 per cent of child care activity for employed women and 64 per cent for women not in the labour force.

The category day to day care is singled out in Table 2 as it points to the largely routine care needs of dependent children. This family obligation is characterised by its regular and predictable time demands. This demand on parental time decreases with the age of the child. The two most critical age ranges, in terms of availability of alternate care providers and intensity of dependence, are 0-2 and 3-4 years of age. With the commencement of

school at the age of 5 years, the hours of parental care reduce to before and after school hours and school vacation periods.

Table 2 Time allocation (minutes per day) to child care activities for females aged 15-64 with dependent children, by employment status, 1992 Time Use Survey

Child care activity	Children aged 0-14 years		Total ^a
	Employed	Not in labour force	
Day to day care ^b	72.76	123.7	92.74
Socialisation ^c	42.02	51.21	46.19
Other ^d	0.44	0.6	0.46
Total	115.22	175.51	139.39

(a) Total includes the unemployed (b) Day to day care of children - includes physical care; care for sick/disabled child; and passive minding. (c) Child management and socialisation - includes teaching, helping, reprimanding; playing, reading, talking; associated communication; and associated travel. (d) Other - includes child care nfd; child care nes.

Source: Miller and Mulvey (2000)

Child management and socialisation refers to those activities that involve equipping children with the skills necessary to function in a social context. It refers to activities that communicate values, attitudes and social skills. Thus there is an emphasis on interaction with the child (teaching, reprimanding, playing) and also support of socialisation by way of parties, sports or other hobby groups, school functions etc. Like day to day care, child management and socialisation activities can also be classified according to the timing of the activity and the extent to which the activity can be anticipated as indicated in Table 3.

Family objectives include recognition and accommodation of longer term aspirations and future plans of family members. Women may adopt a short term strategy of current part-time employment with aspirations to future long term employment as a means of accommodating family objectives when children are young. Walsh (1999: 184) reports that UK work “found that life cycle variables, e.g. the position of a woman in relation to childbirth and child care, were the most important factors affecting the shift from full-time to part-time jobs, and *vice versa*.” However, previous work history and current labour market decisions impact on and constrain future job opportunities. In her study, Walsh

(1999) identifies a group of women who worked part-time in order to spend more time with children. Only 7 per cent of this group would prefer current full-time work but over a third wanted full-time work in the future. Women, in her sample, who wanted full-time jobs in the future tended to be younger, better educated, saw themselves as a primary or equal income earner and demonstrated stronger attachment to the labour force (signaled by days per week worked, willingness to travel greater distances to work, previous full-time employment and job motivation).

Table 3 Classifying child caring activities according to timing and predictability

	Day to day	Management and socialisation
Regular and predictable	physical care, intensity decreases with age of child.	parent interaction with child; travel associated with regular sports, music etc sessions
Irregular and unpredictable	care during school vacations; school curriculum days.	medical or dental appointments etc
Irregular and unpredictable	care of sick child; care if regular caregiver ill or unavailable; other emergencies.	presentation days or other special function days with school or sport etc.; parties.

Finally, families will seek sufficient time to maintain other family relationships. The gamut of these relationships will range from elder care through to occasional gatherings to celebrate family anniversaries. As the population ages, elder care will assume greater significance. Issues like support during illness or hospitalisation, dealing with a bereavement, or assistance in finding alternate accommodation and relocation may impinge on time available for other activities.

Strategies to satisfy family objectives and achieve work/family balance

The first strategy is one of specialisation or segregation. In this case, family obligations are achieved by designating specific family members to have primary responsibility for certain tasks. For example, neoclassical economic theory postulates that families seek to balance income (market goods), domestic production (meaning both household services and child

care), and leisure. In this view, the balance and the subsequent division of responsibilities are determined by the relative market wage rates of family members, their relative advantage in domestic production and the presence of other non-waged income. All other things equal, family members who command the highest market wage will devote more of their time to market work relative to domestic production and minimise the opportunity cost to the family of having the individual out of the labour force. This analysis is often coupled with the presumption that women are inherently better suited to providing caring labour and thus household services. The combination of higher male wage rates and the supposed comparative advantage of women on the domestic front results in a familial division of labour that assigns men market work and females domestic duties. However, this view of the process whereby families achieve balance is flawed because it ignores economic and institutional factors, relative bargaining positions and subjugates the interests of at least some women. Further, in a deregulated labour market where part-time hours are a feature, some families of necessity will have to have multiple earners in the labour market to achieve an adequate family income.

The second strategy is one of accommodation. By this is meant arrangements internal to the family that facilitate combinations of work and family responsibilities across family members. There is clear empirical evidence to support the view that families will try to solve the dilemma of work and family internally. VandenHeuval (1993, 1996) found that informal care arrangements involving grandparents or other family members and parental care were important options for both preschool and school age children. Parental care was dominated by parents choosing work hours that did not coincide (shiftwork). As discussed earlier, women may choose part-time employment as a means of reconciling work and family responsibilities (VandenHeuvel, 1998).

A third strategy involves 'domestic outsourcing' or "the process of replacing unpaid household production with market substitutes" (Bittman, Matheson and Meagher, 1999: 249). This domestic outsourcing may be a total or partial substitute for home production. Total substitutes would include market provided child care and purchased restaurant meals. Partial substitutes would be frozen, ready prepared meals and ready to hang curtaining. Bittman et al (1999) use the Australian Household Expenditure Surveys to

investigate domestic outsourcing. The particular interest here is the extent to which families use domestic outsourcing to reduce certain claims on their time and thus produce an improved balance between work and family. From the 1993-94 Survey, they identify expenditure on cleaning, gardening, laundry, food preparation and child care services. All of these expenditures with the exception of child care would sit under the heading of household services. The results indicate that ten per cent or less of households bought any cleaning, gardening or laundry services. However almost 90 per cent of households had some expenditure on food preparation services. By comparison, 30 per cent of households with a child aged 0-12 years had some expenditure on formal child care services. Further, over the period 1984-1994, expenditure on child care services had the fastest rate of growth.

Finally, male and female employees within households may use working time arrangements as a strategy to resolve work/family tension. A range of work practices have emerged with a view to facilitating work/family balance and the next section assess the contribution they have made.

Working time arrangements and work/family balance

Secure employment and family income

The provision of secure employment and adequate income are seldom explicitly mentioned in discussions of family friendly working arrangements. Yet for the majority of families earned income is the principal source of family income and earned income is consequent on wage rates and hours worked. However, recent changes to working time arrangements have eroded both the notion of standard working hours and secure full time employment. The polarisation of hours has meant that some employees are now working very long hours while other employees face highly variable and uncertain hours. There has also been a growth in casual and part-time employment often associated with the absence of employment conditions offered to full-time employees. Casual employees are also exposed to lack of secure employment tenure.

Employee attitudes to the hours worked vary. ACIRRT (1999: 115) applied the pseudonyms of 'consenting over-worked' and 'conscripts' to those who worked very long hours and who were happy with those hours versus those who would prefer fewer hours.

On the other hand, employees working short hours could equally be split into the 'consenting under-worked' and the 'coerced'. The consenting under-worked may see the shorter working hours as a means of accommodating family or study needs, while supplementing family income. However amongst the 'coerced' will be some families, for whom poor employment prospects will require both adults to be engaged in the labour force just to earn a basic family income and workers who regard themselves as primary or equal income earners despite circumstances locking them into very short hours.

Flexibility in working hours has been accompanied by a drift to less predictable patterns of work hours with practices like hours averaged over extended periods, increased length of shifts and flexibility in start and finish times. Coincidentally there has also been a blurring of the divide between ordinary working hours and overtime with consequent impacts on income. The variability in hours poses a problem for families attempting to organise routine care for dependent children.

Household Work

Generally there are few specific work arrangements that directly assist families to fulfill their responsibilities for household work. Russell and Bourke (1999: 239) report a Swedish study in which 'a very small number of companies have provided managers with allowances to purchase cleaning, laundry and ironing assistance ... as a way of helping dual-career couples manage their work and family commitments.'

Leisure time including volunteer/community time

In some studies a corollary of deregulation in the labour market and the trend to increasingly flexible work hours has been an increase in the levels of workplace stress that employees report (ACIRRT, 1999; Probert et. al. 2000). Some companies have sought to ameliorate the stress by the introduction of stress management and family life education programs and exercise or subsidised fitness centres (Bardoel et.al., 1998; Russell and Bowman, 2000). However these initiatives are confined to a small number of companies. Russell and Bourke (1999) report that from a random sample of human resource managers in 154 corporations that 23 per cent offered support groups for employees with family issues and that 7 per cent offered seminars for employees with family issues.

Care of Children and Other Dependents

The presence of dependent children increases the load of family responsibilities. Work/family balance requires arrangements to cover the routine and predictable demands of day to day care and socialisation. Less regular, shorter term contingencies and unanticipated events involve different arrangements. Note that here a distinction is drawn between flexible work options and flexible hours. Flexible work options like part-time employment and job share indicate an on-going reduction in employment hours with consequent reduction in income and employment entitlements. Flexible hours arrangements involve alterations to the schedule of work but with the understanding that the 'normal' load of hours will be worked. Flexible hour provisions would thus not entail reduction of income or entitlements. As a result, the degree of discretion that these arrangements offer employees over hours worked will be more constrained and will be of most advantage to families dealing with non-routine, short term situations.

Table 4 brings together data on working arrangements from a number of sources. It classifies working arrangements on the basis of those that will assist with the routine and predictable care and socialisation needs of dependent children and those that assist with the non-routine needs, both anticipated and unanticipated. Note that relative to some lists of family responsive provisions, Table 4 represents a narrow assortment. There is no direct reference to elder or disabled care, school holiday care or after school care, emergency, back-up or sick child care or organisation culture support of family issues. Further, it is not possible to infer from the Affirmative Action Agency (AAA) reports or the agreements databases the extent to which the provisions cover the workforce. The AAA provisions apply to certain employers with more than 100 employees and so represents a population of larger employers. The Certified Agreements are biased by an industrial mix that over-represents manufacturing, construction, transport and storage and government administration and defence. There is a higher representation of Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) in government administration and defence and communication service industries. AWAs have a higher representation in the occupations of managers and administrators, and intermediate clerical, sales and service workers.

In terms of combining work and routine care for dependent children, flexible work options offer the most promise. Within this subset, part-time work dominates. A high 81 per cent of organisations reporting to the AAA claim that permanent part-time work is available. The provision appears in 18 per cent of certified agreements and 44 per cent of AWAs though in the latter case it is not clear that agreements carry pro rata conditions. Twenty three per cent of families with at least one parent employed and a child under 12 years of age access permanent part-time work. This figure rises to 33.7 per cent in the case of employed mothers. (ABS, *Child Care*, Cat. No.4402.0, 1999, Table 30). Job-share and compressed work weeks offer some of the potential of part-time work, in being able to organise regular slabs of time around which family commitments can be organised. However except for job-share in AAA reports, the provisions would appear to be not widely dispersed across the labour force. Home-based work represents an innovation that permits the location of employment to shift to the home. As a working arrangement it only appears in a limited number of agreements though 13.5 per cent of all parent employees with children under 12 cite this as a working arrangement.

Probert et al (2000: 33) sound a note of caution in interpreting the family friendliness of part-time work. It may lock women out of training and promotion possibilities and it is important that the employment, if it is to ensure some safeguard in conditions to women, meets at least permanent part-time requirements. Sharing a full-time job, it is argued, is more likely to allow the employee to tap into promotion and progression patterns and thus promote career development. It may also give employees more control over their working hours as permanent part-time employees come under more pressure to provide unpaid overtime hours and cope with short notice of changes in start and finish times.

Child care assistance provisions also address the routine care needs of dependent children. Table 4 indicates that 13 per cent of organisations reporting to the Affirmative Action Agency have some form of employer assistance with child care. This drops to 2 per cent and 9 per cent in Certified Agreements and AWAs respectively. This pattern of low employer involvement in the provision of child care is evident in ABS (1996) *Child Care* (4402.0). Only 6.6 per cent of employed mothers with a child under 12 years of age was offered some form of assistance. Of this group nearly a third took advantage of the offer.

The most frequently cited forms of assistance offered to either parent were work-based facilities (3.7 per cent) followed by referral/ information services (2.0 per cent). We can only speculate on reasons for the low up-take which could include perceptions of cost, convenience, compatibility of child ages with services offered and parental preference for alternate care arrangements.

Flexible hours and leave provisions are suited to meeting the demands of non-routine and unanticipated care needs. However the spread of these hours provisions across the workforce is uneven with at best less than 40 per cent of employees having access to them. Some care needs to be exercised when interpreting access as it may vary with employment status. For example, 38 per cent of all employees (ABS, Cat. No. 6342.0, 1997) were able to work extra hours in order to take time off. This provision was available to 43 per cent of full-time female employees and 32 per cent of part-time female employees. Of full-time female employees, 44 per cent with permanent status and 36 per cent with casual status could access this provision.

There are major differences between having provisions available and employees accessing them. AWIRS 95 demonstrates that despite a wide range of paid leave options available to employees, the most frequently accessed options remain employees' sick leave, paid holiday leave and unpaid leave. Women are more likely than men to take unpaid leave (44 per cent and 30 per cent respectively) and men more likely to use holiday leave (47 compared to 37 per cent). Both part-time and casual employees use unpaid leave more heavily than their full-time or permanent counterparts.

The promise of some provisions is diluted in implementation. For instance, employee discretion to vary start/finish times may be confined to within half an hour of agreed start/finish time. Further, of the start/finish times that are not fixed, 62 per cent are variable daily. Sixty five per cent of females with dependent children aged under 12 years whose start/finish times were not fixed had those times varying daily (ABS, Cat. No. 6342.0, 1997, Tables 1 and 4).

Table 4 Family Responsive Working Arrangements

	AAA ^a	Certified Agreements ^b	Australian Workplace Agreements ^c	ABS Working Arrangements ^d	ABS Child Care ^d
	1997	1/1/97-31/12/98	up to 31/12/98	1997	1999
	% of reporting organisations	% of all CAs	% of all AWAs	% employees aged 15+ yrs	% emps children <12 yrs of age
ROUTINE CARE OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN					
Flexible work options					
Part-time work	81 ^e	18 ^e	44 ^f		23.0 ^e
Job-share ^g	63	2	8		2.7
Compressed work week ^h		1	6		
Home-based work ⁱ		1	8		13.5
Child care assistance					
Child care / child care assistance provided ^j	13	2	9		
NON-ROUTINE CARE OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN					
Flexible hours^k					
FOIL ^l		17	42		
Start and finish times flexible ^m		6	22	37	
Flextime ⁿ		6	24		
Hours of work negotiable ^o		7	12		
Make-up time ^p		6	9	38	
Banking / accrual of RDOs ^q		31	1	23	
Leave options^r					
Family leave ^s	72	28	66		
Single days annual leave ^t		6			

Legend for terms, definitions, concepts, time periods etc available from the author.

Source: Work and Family Unit (1999) *Work and Family State of Play, 1998*, Canberra, DEWRSB, AAA Table 1, WAD Tables 1 and 2, AWA Tables 1 and 2; ABS *Working Arrangements, 1997*, 6342.0 and ABS *Child Care, 1999*, 4402.0

Putting to one side the spread of flexible hours and leave options, it is apparent that entitlement to time off in lieu, flextime and make up time later is valued by employees. Probert et al (2000) found that over 28 per cent of teachers had used family emergency leave and carer's leave. In banking, paid leave to care for family members was the most widely used flexible work entitlement followed by time off in lieu (27.2 per cent). This latter was most commonly used in insurance. However, in banking, it appears that 'those without children make more use of the (TOIL) provision than those with children. It would appear that time off in lieu is not a provision that is made available in ways that are particularly helpful to employees with family responsibilities.' (Probert, et. al., 2000: 32)

Three other issues come out of the Probert study. First, it is apparent that attitudes of principals, co-workers and management impact on up-take of provisions. Within the finance sector there is hostility to a worker wishing to exercise their right to leave work on time, refuse overtime and use their RDOs. Second, there is something of a paradox in employee responses. Employees are generally very happy with family friendly provisions yet report that work has negative impacts on family or household responsibilities. One explanation for the paradox lies in the possibility that respondents draw a distinction between coping with specific eventualities, like childbirth and sick children, and the overall tensions between work and family balance.

Maintaining other family relationships

Apart from relationships involving dependent children discussed above, there are also caring relationships involving spouses or partners, disabled relatives and older relatives. Periods of illness for these relatives create work/family conflict for their carers. Paid family or carer's leave assist employees who need a short term absence from work to care for the sick family member. Non-routine and short term needs like assisting elderly relatives with appointments, relocation or legal matters might all be accommodated with flexible work hours. Comments about these provisions raised above will apply here also.

However agreements, awards and corporations have been slow to address other pressing needs, perhaps because such areas are regarded as the domain of welfare policy rather than employment conditions. For instance, where a family seeks to combine part-time

employment with on-going care of an elderly or disabled relative providing access to respite care or emergency care may be very family responsive. Other sorts of family relationships involve activities of a socialisation kind that are accommodated within individual leisure time.

Recognition and satisfaction of longer term aspirations of caregivers

It was earlier argued that some family members consider their current part-time employment state as a transitory arrangement and they aspire to full-time employment in the future. Family responsive practices that meet these aspirations must allow for transition between employment states. Permanent part-time work and job-sharing have the potential to make this possible though the earlier reservations have to be born in mind. Paid maternity leave, and to a lesser extent paid paternity leave, are important to women who want to maintain employment prospects despite childbirth. Australia lags behind much of the developed world in regard to paid maternity leave.

The legislated entitlement, in Australia, is for 52 weeks of unpaid leave to permanent full-time or part-time employees with 12 months continuous service prior to commencing leave. However, if the objective is to ensure that women are not disadvantaged by childbirth and their employment entitlements are not eroded by prolonged absence then paid maternity leave that spans 26 weeks is desirable (Earle, 1999). Against this ideal, we find that paid maternity leave is subject to awards, agreements or specific employment contracts. AWIRS 95 found that 34 per cent of workplaces provided paid maternity leave. Seven per cent of certified agreements and 30 per cent of AWAs had paid maternity leave provisions. Where agreements allowed for paid maternity leave, the period of the leave varied significantly. Forty nine per cent of Certified Agreements that provided for paid maternity leave allowed a period of two weeks and a further 22 per cent allowed 12 weeks. However, 92 per cent of AWAs provided 12 weeks maternity leave (Work and Family Unit, 1999).

Conclusion

The paper has outlined the obligations that being part of a family entails and has considered the ways in which families might satisfy these obligations and permit

engagement with the workforce. Working arrangements, where available to workers in Australia, address only a narrow selection of family obligations. Family responsive working arrangements, especially flexible working hours and leave options, principally offer assistance with the non-routine, short term care of dependents particularly in coping with periods of illness. Working arrangements offer families little assistance in dealing with the routine care needs of dependents. If families choose to use part-time employment configured around care arrangements as a means of meeting family and work obligations, there may be both a short and long term cost in income and forgone future prospects. Provisions, like maternity leave and job sharing, to assist transition between employment states such as not-in-the-labour force to employed and from part-time to full-time employment, are limited. The present system relies on awards, enterprise agreements, and company policies to secure benefits for employees. Yet reliance on these mechanisms results in uneven dispersion of entitlements and leaves some families with no paid leave provisions at all. There is thus a case for greater government leadership and involvement in legislating worker entitlements and in assisting with subsidised child care services.

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Endnotes

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