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Changes in working time preferences over the lifecycle

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Abstract

Working time in Australia is very diverse, with large segments of the work force working part-time hours, standard hours and very long hours of work. These diverse working time arrangements often reflect the preferences of workers, however, it has been established there is a substantial proportion of the workforce that have not achieved their desired work hours.

There is very little literature that explores the dynamics of working time preferences. Hakim's (2000) preference theory argues that women have certain preferences that are maintained throughout their lives. The three 'ideal types' she identified were home-centred, work-centred and adaptive. However, from a small study of women in a large banking and financial organisation in Australia, Walsh (1999) found that women's preferences for full-time work varied depending on the age of the child.

Data from the Negotiating the Lifecycle (NLC) survey shows that working time and working time preferences do change over time for individuals. Preferences are not solely determined by actual hours of work but tend to be influenced by other factors such as occupation and gender, as well as lifecycle factors such as family structure and age. Understanding the types of people who experience changes in work hours and preferences is a useful first step in knowing more about the dynamics of working time preferences.

The purpose of this paper is to unpack the different preference movements over time. Using the NLC data I will examine the different preference change groups, in terms of actual and desired work hours, and lifecycle and work characteristics. It is expected that preferences and the likelihood of achieving preferences will be determined by lifecycle characteristics, and that preferences generally, will conform to a 'standard' working week.

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I. Introduction

Despite a historical and industrial gravitation towards a ‘standard’ working week of 35 to 40 hours, working hours have become increasingly diverse in Australia. Part-time work has grown rapidly over the last 30 years as women have entered the workforce and working hours of full-time workers have become increasingly extended. It would be expected that this increasing diversity would have led to more worker’s preferences being satisfied, however, there is a prevalent mismatch between working hours and preferences in the Australian labour market.

Examining working time preferences is taking a subjective look at working time. Rather than assigning a ‘standard’ that is deemed appropriate to every worker, examining working time preferences takes the more personal approach of determining whether the worker is happy with their hours. In determining their preferences the worker will most likely take into account their own personal context of work, household and individual desires. Working time preferences are influenced by work factors such as job satisfaction, income, current hours of work, working hours arrangements (such as shift work), and working time regulation; but also by factors beyond the workplace such as lifecourse status, age, gender, health, material desires and level of education (Bielenski, et.al. 2002:11).

The study of working time preferences have been inextricably linked to household working arrangements. Reynolds (2003:1188) discovered that those families that would be expected to have the least work-family conflict, such as dual-earner couples with no children and breadwinner families are more likely to desire fewer hours; while dual-earner couples with children are less likely to want fewer hours. Research on working time preferences commonly examines the working time composition and preferences within households. Three common household types have been found (Bielenski et. al. 2002:12; Drago et. al. 2004:3) Egalitarian households are those where the partners have similar paid working hours. Neotraditional households are those where the husband works full-time and the mother works part-time and the more traditional model is breadwinner households, where only one person in the couple works (usually the male). Preferences for these different household working arrangements are likely to depend on various factors such as child care availability, financial situation, and general beliefs about work and family. Drago et. al. (2004) discovered a widespread preference for neotraditional working arrangements in Australian families.

There is very little literature that examines working time preferences over time. Hakim’s (2000) preference theory argues that women have certain preferences for work and family that are maintained throughout their lives. The three ‘ideal types’ she identified were home-centred, work-centred and adaptive. However, from a small study of women in a large banking and financial organisation in Australia, Walsh (1999) found that women’s preferences for full-time work varied depending on the age of the child.

While much attention in the Australian working time debate has been given to the extent and growth of long working hours, the intended focus of my research is on worker’s preferences for greater or fewer hours and whether this changes over time. That is, I will take a more subjective look at the issue of working time. I believe this perspective is important because it focuses on the ability of the worker to choose their hours rather than an organisational or industrial norm being forced upon them. The ability to choose one’s hours enables the worker to find a better balance between their work and personal life. Measuring preferences, and particularly within the lifecycle context, will determine the impact of work on a person’s wellbeing (ABS, 2001). Taking a more subjective look at working time is likely to give a greater weight to more personal factors in examining people’s work hours.

This paper takes the first steps in analysing the changes in individual working time preferences over the two waves of the NLC survey. The Negotiating the Lifecourse Survey (NLC) presents a unique opportunity to closely examine individual working time preferences, longitudinally. This paper will examine whether or not changes in working time preferences occurred over the three years and the work and lifecourse characteristics of workers who experienced particular types of changes.

The first wave of the Negotiating the Lifecourse survey collected a wide variety of information from 2231 people aged 18-64 in 1996/1997. In 2000 a second wave was conducted, collecting information from 1768 cases. The aim of the survey is to examine people's decision-making processes over the lifecourse, and includes variables from the household and work domains, as well as more personal aspects. This analysis looks specifically at workers with working time preferences in both waves; the sample size is 1206.

Overall, in wave 2 of the survey, more than one-third (36 per cent) of all workers would like to work fewer hours and just over half (56 per cent) do not want to change their current hours of work. Females are generally more content with their hours, while almost half (44 per cent) of all working males would like to work fewer hours.

The lowest skilled occupations of elementary clerical, sales and service workers and labourers are more likely to want more hours. Although, the former tend to be more content with their hours as well. Overwhelmingly it is managers and administrators who have a desire for fewer hours (60 per cent compared to 35 per cent overall).

Breadwinners, particularly those with no or older children, are more likely to have a desire for fewer hours. Those who appear to be the most content are those who would be expected to have the most work-family conflict – dual earner households with children. This corresponds with Reynolds' (2003:1188) findings that those household structures associated with work-family conflict were not linked to a desire for fewer hours.

Table A.1 in Appendix A shows the working time preferences for selected lifecourse and work characteristics.

II. Working Time Preferences in Australia

In terms of the number of hours preferred, there appears to be a desire for hours around what is known as the 'standard' working week – 35 to 40 hours a week. Table 1 shows the average actual hours for all workers, the average desired hours for those who are unhappy and the average actual working hours for those who are content with their current hours for wave 1. Overall, average desired hours are 35 per week, with some obvious differences between men and women. Women with children prefer, on average, longer part-time hours. Men prefer to work at the longer end of the 'standard' working week at 39 hours a week, while women without children prefer to work less, at around 35 hours a week. The preference questions asks respondents to give a number of hours that they would prefer to work but it is likely that workers would be happy to work a range of hours. The last column of Table 1 shows that workers who are happy with their hours settle slightly higher than desired hours nominated by unhappy workers. Overall, the average working hours of 'happy' workers are 37 hours a week. Men are content to work 43 hours a week and women without children work 38 hours a week. However, women with children's preferences are very similar to those who are unhappy.

Table 1 Average working hours, wave 1

	Actual	Preferred	Actual = Preferred
Employees	37.6	34.5	36.0
Self-employed	45.0	35.1	40.2
Men	45.8	39.1	43.4
Women	34.6	31.1	32.8
Women with children	29.8	27.8	27.6
Women without children	39.3	34.6	37.6
All	38.9	34.6	36.6

Table 2 shows the average hours data for wave 2. Additional working hours data was collected in wave 2. The extra questions asked about hours usually worked (as well as hours worked last week) and how many hours workers are paid for. Comparing average hours for those worked last week and those usually worked, actual hours give a lower estimate of weekly hours worked. This is partly due to less weekly hours being included in actual hours figures due to leave taken within the reference week. It is also possible that workers may overestimate the hours they work on a ‘usual’ basis.

Comparing preferred hours for unhappy workers in both waves, the average figures are very similar, except the self-employed have a preference for more hours in wave 2 (from 35 to 38) and women without children wish to work fewer hours in wave 2 (from 35 to 33). With the exception of women with children, preferred hours are still around ‘standard hours’, ranging from 33 hours for women without children to 39 hours for men.

The addition of the ‘hours paid for’ question has been very valuable, as we can see that preferred hours of unhappy workers are very similar to hours workers are paid for on average. This indicates that the tendency for preferences to hover around ‘standard hours’ could be due to the fact that most workers are paid for ‘standard hours’.

Table 2 Average working hours, wave 2

	Actual	Usual	Preferred	Usual = Preferred	Paid
Employees	35.4	38.5	34.0	35.9	34.3
Self-employed	44.8	47.6	37.8	39.7	-
Men	45.0	47.5	38.5	44.3	39.9
Women	30.0	33.4	30.7	30.6	29.9
Women with children	26.9	30.2	28.6	27.0	26.4
Women without children	33.2	36.6	32.5	34.6	33.1
All	37.1	40.1	34.9	36.4	34.3

III. Changes in Working Time Preferences

It is clear from Table 3 that workers do change their working time preferences (the shaded areas). The table displays all the different preference movements that occurred between 1997 and 2000. Two-fifths (40 percent) of workers changed their preference over the two waves. Stable preferences were the most common occurrence, with 39 percent of workers being content with their hours in both waves. Other common occurrences were those who wanted fewer hours in both waves (19 percent) and those who were happy in 1997 but wanted fewer hours in 2000 (17 percent).

Table 3 Working time preferences for individuals, 1997 and 2000 (total %)

		Working time preferences 2000			
Working time preferences 1997	More hours	Same	Less hours	Total	
	Cell 6	Cell 2	Cell 9		
More hours	2.6	5.6	1.7	9.9	
	Cell 4	Cell 1	Cell 5		
Same	3.2	39.0	16.5	58.6	
	Cell 8	Cell 3	Cell 7		
Less hours	1.7	10.9	18.8	31.5	
Total	7.5	55.5	37.1	100	

The key question is whether these different movements are a result of changes in working hours or changes in the number of desired hours. The approach of this paper is to gain a better understanding of who belongs in each of the different cells in Table 3, in terms of who became happy or unhappy with their hours and those who remained happy or unhappy; as well as to understand any possible changes in their work hours and desired hours. An explanation of the groups for analysis is provided in Table 4.

Table 4 Preference groups examined

Preference cells	Descriptor	<i>n</i>	Research questions
Cell 1	Staying happy	470	Who remain happy with their hours? What are their lives like? What is their work like? Did they experience any change in their work or households?
Cells 2 & 3	Becoming happy	199	How do you become happy? Does getting what you want, make you happy? Or if you can't get what you want, do you adjust your preferences?
Cells 4 & 5	Becoming unhappy	237	How do you become unhappy? Did their hours change or was it their preferences? What led to this change?
Cells 6 & 7	Still not getting what they want	258	What are the lifecourse and work characteristics of these people? Do their work hours or preferred hours change in any way over the time period?
Cells 8 & 9	Radical changers	42	These people change their type of preference, but does this translate into a large change in preferred hours?

There are three main areas that I expect working hours preferences to be influenced by, as shown in Table 4, lifecourse factors, workplace factors and more personal factors. There are many variables in the NLC dataset to choose from, Table 5 establishes the factors used in this analysis.

The majority of the analysis is based on use of 'actual' hours data (ie. hours worked last week). This can disadvantage the analysis of preference data in that responses to preferences questions are based on hours usually worked. Thus, comparing hours worked last week to preferred hours may appear nonsensical for some cases. However, this is for the small minority of cases and is not expected to severely impact on the analysis but it is important to bear in mind when considering the results.

Table 5 Units of Analysis and Hypotheses

Explanatory groups	Variables	Hypotheses/predictions
1. Lifecourse factors	Age of respondent Marital status, and Partner's employment & hours Number of children in household Age of youngest child Education	Young children – fewer hours for mothers? More children – fewer hours for mothers, more for fathers?
2. Workplace factors	Actual work hours Employer/self-employed Occupation Employment type (e.g. casual) Length of time with employer Job requirements (hours arrangements) Work satisfaction	If work hours tend to 'societal norms' are they more content? Are professionals more likely to be unhappy with their hours? Less secure requiring more hours? More satisfaction, more likely to be happy with hours?
3. Personal factors	Importance placed on career and financial position Health rating Satisfaction with time, pressure, standard of living	Are those who place more importance on their career and financial position unhappy with their hours? Are those unhappy with their hours more likely to be unsatisfied with other aspects of life?

i. Staying Happy

This group of workers, who are happy with their hours in both waves, has a higher proportion of females (55 percent) and the average age is 40 (with a standard deviation of 9.4). The majority are married and this increased in wave 2 to 64 percent; overall 13 percent experienced a change in partner status, in terms of living with a partner. Just over half (52 percent) have children, with the most common number being two. The majority of these households consist of dual-earner couples. In total, the most common household formations (in terms of work, partner and age of child) are:

- dual-earner households with child under 13 (25 percent);
- dual-earner couple with no children (19 percent); and
- single workers (18 percent).

These household characteristics are in line with the general working population. Table A.2 in Appendix A shows the lifecourse factors for those workers happy with their hours in both waves.

It appears that where this group varies from other workers is more in the work context, work characteristics of these workers are displayed in Table A.3. The 'stayed happy' workers are less likely to be managers and administrators (or in managerial positions more generally) and are more likely to be clerical, sales and service workers (aggregated), they make up 31 percent of the 'stayed happy' compared to 21 percent of the rest of the workers. The 'stayed happy' are less likely to be self-employed. This is likely to be related to the fact that self-employed workers tend to work extended hours of work.

The level of education required for jobs in which the ‘stayed happy’ workers are employed tends to be at the middle levels (ie. secondary school or a post-school certificate or diploma). While the other workers are at both extremes and are more likely to need either a degree or don’t need to have completed school. This could be due to the fact that workers who want both ‘less’ and ‘more’ hours are bundled into the one group.

Looking at the type of working arrangements required from the ‘stayed happy’ workers and the other workers, it is clear that longer hours and more irregular working patterns are required from the other workers. Most of the long and irregular hours arrangements are required on a frequent basis from roughly a quarter of the ‘stayed happy’ workers, except a much lower proportion are required to take work home or travel away from home overnight.

In terms of personal objectives, both groups of workers tended to consider a secure financial position as important, however, the ‘stayed happys’ were more likely to have felt they achieved this goal by wave 2 (71 percent compared with 56 percent of the rest). It is possible that both groups of workers may have different perceptions of what a ‘secure financial position’ entails. While similar proportions of workers achieved the objective of advancing their career, the ‘stayed happys’ were more likely to consider this objective as not important; this is especially so amongst the ‘stayed happys’ in wave 2 who had not yet achieved this objective (36 percent compared with 23 percent of the others).

In terms of work hours, Table 6 displays the average hours worked for those people who were happy with their hours in both waves. The hours that men are happy to work are very different from those that women are happy to work. Men appear to be content working an average of 44 hours a week on usual basis. It would be expected that women without children would be happy to work similar hours to men, however their average usual hours are almost 10 hours a week less. Women with children are happy to work longer part-time hours of 27 hours a week on a usual basis.

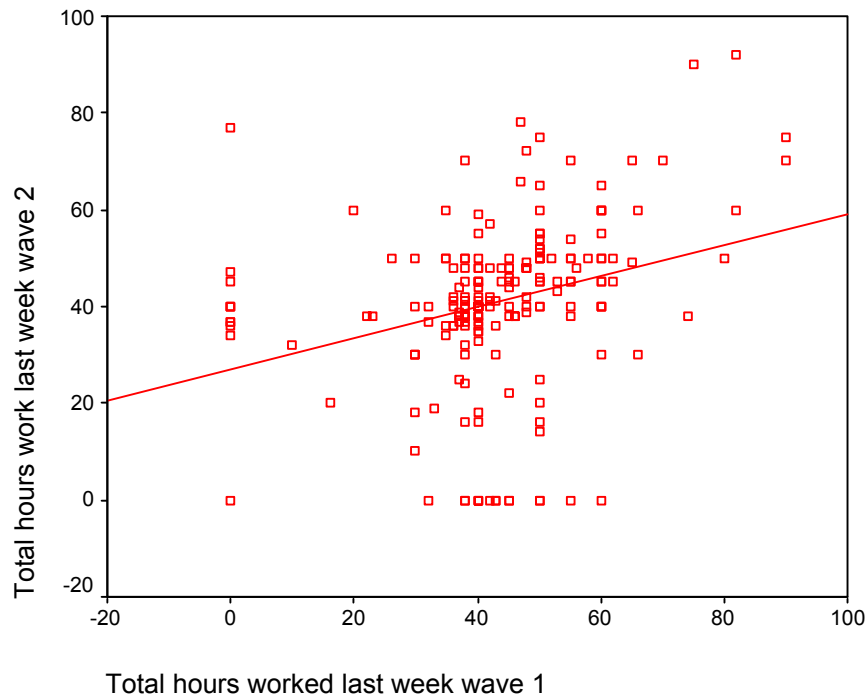
Table 6 Average working hours for those happy with their hours, wave 1 and wave 2

	Actual w1	Actual w2	Usual w2	Paid w2
Employees	36.0	33.1	35.9	33.4
Self-employed	40.2	37.5	39.7	-
Men	43.4	42.0	44.3	40.2
Women	32.8	27.7	30.6	28.7
Women with children	27.6	24.6	27.0	25.3
Women without children	37.6	31.3	34.6	32.4
All	36.6	33.8	36.4	33.4

The following two figures distinguish the working hours for men and women who are happy in both waves, and illustrate that contentment with hours worked are reached at different points for these two groups.

The working hours of ‘happy’ men tend to be around 40 hours and higher. It is different for women, with most working hours scattered around the part-time vicinity. For both waves there appears to be a fairly distinct barrier at the 45-hour mark. Thus, men are satisfied with working longer hours.

Graph 1. Men's actual working hours wave 1 and 2, happy both waves.



Graph 2. Women's actual working hours wave 1 and 2, happy both waves.



Summing up, the story for those workers who remained content with their hours in 1997 and 2000 appear to be single workers or dual-income earners with no children or dual-income couples with primary school

aged children. The women worked, on average, below 30 hours a week in both waves, while the men worked around 40 hours a week.

ii. Becoming Happy

This section examines those workers who wanted to change their hours in 1997 but then reported to be content with their hours in 2000. The most pressing question for this group is whether they achieved their stated wave 1 preference in wave 2. Alternatively, did something at work or in their lives change impacting on their preference or did they simply ‘adjust’ to their working hours.

Looking at the average hours, in Table 7, it seems that the majority of workers wanted a decrease in hours and although they did not achieve their desired hours stated in wave 1, they did get a general decrease in hours. However, men experienced a very small decrease in actual hours by only 1 hour per week. With the exception of women, desired hours amongst this group tend to be around the lower end of the standard working week, but they settle for usual hours closer to 40 hours a week. The men in this group report to be happy working 45 hours a week, even though they had a preference for 40 hours a week in wave 1. The women in this group were the most likely to achieve their desired hours, on average.

Table 7 Average working hours for those who became happy with their hours in wave 2

	<i>Wave 1</i>		<i>Wave 2</i>		
	Actual	Preferred	Actual	Usual	Paid
Employees	38.1	34.7	36.0	38.1	35.4
Self-employed	45.2	34.2	40.0	40.2	-
Men	45.8	39.8	44.8	45.3	41.4
Women	34.1	29.6	29.3	32.0	30.2
Women with children	30.6	26.6	27.5	28.9	28.0
Women without children	39.2	34.0	32.2	36.1	32.6
All	39.8	34.6	36.9	38.6	35.4

The averages are unable to tell us how many people actually attained their desired hours. This group was divided into those who attained their desired hours stated in wave 1, within in a range of -5 to 5 hours and those who did not (using usual hours). Only 45 percent of the ‘becoming happy’ group achieved their preferred hours (give or take 5 hours). The below table looks at the average hours for those who attained their desired hours, those who are working more than they wanted in wave 1 and those working less.

Table 8 Happy with hours in wave 2, Average actual and desired hours

Desired hours attainment	<i>Wave 1</i>		<i>Wave 2</i>		n
	Actual	Preferred	Actual	Usual	
Attained desired hours	40.3	37.8	37.2	38.0	89
Working more hours than desired	37.8	26.6	40.1	44.0	73
Working fewer hours than desired	42.3	44.2	29.0	28.1	33

Table 8 shows that the average hours discussed above hides some significant differences between actual hours achieved in wave 2 and desired hours in wave 1. If we distinguish between those who are working more hours than they wanted and those who are working less, it becomes clear that many of the workers who became happy in wave 2 did some substantial ‘adjusting’ to their preferences. Those who are not working their desired hours, have ‘adjusted’ (either up or down) their preference by almost 20 hours per week on average. What has led to this adjustment, for example changes in work or life characteristics or whether it has been a pure adjustment made by the individual to what they can get as opposed to what they want, will have to be unpacked in a further analysis. However, Table A.4 examines the lifecourse and some work characteristics of the two main attainment groups, this can be found in Appendix A.

Of those who became happy with their hours in wave 2, the average age was 41 for both attainment groups. However, examining the age groups show that it was more common for those in the 25-34 age group to achieve their desired hours. Men were more likely to attain their desired hours (50 percent), compared to 41 percent of females. This indicates that females do more ‘adjusting’ of their preferences, or their preferred hours are more likely to change over time.

Amongst those who did not attain their desired hours, there was a decrease in the proportion of people not in a relationship (22 percent to 17 percent). In wave 2, there were more breadwinners amongst those who did not attain their desired hours (16 percent compared to 6 percent) and more single workers who did get their desired hours (30 percent compared to 20 percent).

In examining children in the household it is interesting to note that amongst those who attained their hours, the proportion of households with children decreased in this group, while the opposite happened amongst those who did not get their desired hours. This appears to indicate that in families where children are born (or arrive), significant adjusting of preferences occurs that enables satisfaction with hours.

In terms of the work situation, those who did not attain their preferred hours were more likely to be self employed in both waves, while those who did get their hours were more likely to be employed in the private sector. The proportion of people in white-collar jobs amongst those who did get their hours decreased from 50 percent to 43 percent. More than half (53 percent) of those who did not get their hours were in white-collar jobs.

iii. Becoming Unhappy

Just as there were people who became happy with their hours between the two waves, there is a group of people who became unhappy. It is almost meaningless to include the ‘more’ and ‘less’ groups together in the analysis of average hours, Table 9 looks at those who were happy with their hours in wave 1 but wanted to work fewer hours in wave 2. There are likely to be several underlying patterns, but from looking at the averages it appears for many of these workers, their newfound unhappiness is a result of a change in preferred hours. Overall, this group is working an average of 43 actual hours a week in both waves, but they prefer 34 hours in wave 2. Comparing usual and paid hours, this group appears to be working a high amount of unpaid overtime on a usual basis, no less than 7 hours for each group.

Table 9 Average working hours for those who became unhappy with their hours in wave 2 – want fewer hours only

	Actual wave 1	Wave 2			
		Actual	Usual	Preferred	Paid
Employees	42.0	40.8	45.6	33.6	38.1
Self-employed	45.7	50.9	54.1	36.2	-
Men	47.3	47.2	52.8	38.2	41.0
Women	37.1	38.7	41.6	29.2	35.2
Women with children	30.9	35.5	38.6	26.2	31.8
Women without children	42.5	41.1	43.9	31.4	37.2
All	42.7	43.3	47.7	34.2	38.1

It appears that for many of these workers that they were working long hours of work over a period of time and eventually no longer want this. The only group where this doesn't appear to be the case is women with children – their hours increased over the two waves, however their preference is for fewer hours than what they were working in the first wave. It is likely that this pattern has occurred due to their children getting older.

Table 10 displays the average hours and preferences for those who were happy with their hours in wave 1 and wanted more hours in wave 2. It appears to be the case that average actual hours did decrease for this group, but overwhelmingly for women, whose hours decreased by over 10 hours a week. For the women, it seems that they want their hours to return to their previous level from wave 1. However, for the men it seems that they became unhappy with their hours because their desired hours have changed, now wanting an average of 39 hours a week rather than around 29 hours a week which they appear to be working in both waves.

Table 10 Average working hours for those who became unhappy with their hours in wave 2 – want more hours only (n=38)

	Actual wave 1	Wave 2			
		Actual	Usual	Preferred	Paid
Men	28.8	27.0	32.5	39.3	27.0
Women	31.7	17.5	20.5	31.5	19.7
All	30.8	20.5	23.8	34.0	22.0

To determine whether this newfound unhappiness was due to a change in hours or preferences, I created a new variable: 'loss of desired hours'. This variable confirms the pattern indicated in Table 9; 71 percent of these workers have changed their hours preferences. For the majority (76 percent) this is because their preferences have adjusted downwards, that is, they now desire fewer hours than what they were working in wave 1. Only 30 percent of these workers want the same hours in wave 2 as to what they were working in wave 1 (within a range of +/-5), refer to Table 11.

Table 11 Becoming unhappy, changes in preferences and hours

Change in preferences	Difference in actual hours		Column %
	± 5 hours – small change	∠ 5 hours – large change	
± 5 hours – small change	18 (y)	49 (X)	29.5
∠ 5 hours – large change	59 (Y)	101 (x)	70.5
Row %	33.9	66.1	100

There are 49 people, in Cell X, who had a large change in their hours and it appears that they would like those hours back, that is, their underlying preferences have not changed, but their working time situation has. Conversely, for those the 59 workers in Cell Y, their working hours situation hasn't changed, but their preferences have. Table A.5 (in Appendix A) displays some basic employment and family characteristics of these groups.

Cell y's sample size is too small to comment on. Cell Y, those whose actual hours did not change substantially but their preferences did, don't seem to differ greatly from the general working population in terms of lifecycle (see Table A.7 in the Appendix). In terms of work, 61 percent are working more than standard hours and more than half (58 percent) are working in the private sector. Average actual working hours are 45 in wave 1 and 44 in wave 2, which is relatively long hours for men and women combined. Thus it seems for this group that after working extended hours over a period of time, they no longer want to in wave 2.

Cell x is the biggest group and it is those people who experienced both a notable change in preferences and hours. This group is made up of more men, proportionately older (55 plus) people, 65 percent are in dual-earner households and 59 percent have no children. In terms of work, their usual hours in the second wave tend to be around 35-40 and they are in professional jobs. Many in this group appear to be empty-nesters who have managed to decrease their hours of work over three years but want to continue the hours decline. It is possible for this group that they want to wind down to part-time work or ease their way out of the workforce as they approach retirement.

Cell X, those whose preferred hours did not change substantially but they became unhappy because their actual hours did change, tend to be females aged 35-44. More than a third (37 percent) are single, but there is also a large proportion (27 percent) that have primary school aged children. Two-thirds of this group work longer hours and are more likely to be employed by the Government. Thus it appears for this group that their attachment to the labour force has increased but they are unhappy about this change.

iv. Still not getting what they want

Cell 7 (from Table 3) are those people who have a desire to work fewer hours in both waves. This could be a result of a few scenarios, either: their actual hours have remained the same along with their preferred hours; their actual hours could have decreased but so could have their preferences; or their hours could have increased and their preferences remained the same.

Table 12 shows the average working and desired hours for this group. Overall, the average hours indicate that the constant preference for less is not due to changes in preferred hours, as these have remained steady. Actual hours appear to have decreased slightly, although obviously not enough to warrant 'happiness'. The preferences in both waves remain in line with worker's preferences generally, with the

lowest desired hours amongst women at 32 hours per week and the highest among men and the self employed at 38 hours a week.

Table 12 Average working hours for those who want fewer hours in both waves

	<i>Wave 1</i>		<i>Wave 2</i>			
	Actual	Preferred	Actual	Usual	Preferred	Paid
Employees	47.4	34.7	45.8	49.6	34.9	39.7
Self-employed	57.7	37.3	55.8	56.2	38.1	-
Men	52.7	37.7	52.8	53.8	37.6	40.5
Women	44.9	30.1	40.1	46.8	32.4	38.4
Women with children	42.5	29.0	39.6	47.1	32.0	38.9
Women without children	47.5	33.0	40.4	46.7	32.6	37.7
All	50.0	35.4	48.5	51.4	35.8	39.7

Table 13 gives a better indication of hours and preference changes that occurred for these workers. For the majority (65 percent) of the workers who had a constant preference for fewer hours, the number of desired hours did not change substantially over the three years. For more than a third of these workers (38 percent), part of the reason for still not getting what they want is because they experience a large shift (increase) in their actual hours, while their preferred hours remained relatively constant. The least common reason (12 percent) was that their preferred hours had shifted (decreased) while their actual hours remained similar over the two waves. Amongst those whose actual hours changed, it is roughly equal between those who experienced a decrease in hours and those whose hours increased.

Table 13 Want fewer hours both waves, changes in preferences and hours

Change in preferences	Difference in actual hours		
	± 5 hours – small change	$\triangleleft 5$ hours – large change	<i>Column %</i>
± 5 hours – small change	58 (y)	85 (X)	64.7
$\triangleleft 5$ hours – large change	27 (Y)	51 (x)	35.3
<i>Row %</i>	38.5	61.5	100

Table A.6 (in Appendix A) examines some of the lifecourse and work characteristics of these different ‘cells’, not much can be said for Cell Y as the sample size is so small. For the remaining cells, it should be noted that compared to the general working population, these workers have some characteristics that are common to workers wanting fewer hours. These are that they are more likely to be middle to older (35-54) aged men who are breadwinners and in professional jobs. It is interesting to note that although all groups have had different experiences in actual and preferred hours over time, their average preferred hours are all very similar at around 36 hours, which again indicates a tendency to some sort of ‘societal norm’ for working hours.

As for the different cells, it is interesting to note that Cell X and Cell y are similar in terms of lifecourse characteristics; it is only differences in the work situation that are apparent. Both these cells did not

change their preferred hours substantially over the three years. Cell X, those who experienced a large change in hours, work the least hours out of this group (45 hours a week on average) and are more likely to be employed by the Government and in professional jobs (67 per cent). Cell y, on the other hand, are more likely to be employed in the private sector and (compared to other cells) in non-professional jobs (47 percent). These workers did not experience a large change in their work hours.

Cell x, on the other hand, tends to have older workers who are a little more likely to be single (24 percent) and with no children (55 percent). On average, they work the most hours (51 per week) and are more likely to be self-employed.

Returning, more broadly, to changes in working time preferences over the two waves, Cell 6 – those who wanted more hours in both waves – has a very small sample size of 31; thus, analysis is limited. The general characteristics of this group are: predominately female (65 percent); almost three-quarters (74 percent) are aged 35-54; 45 percent are not living with a partner; 61 percent do not have any children in the household and the majority are non-professionals and employed in the private sector. Additionally, a relatively large proportion is employed on a contractual or casual basis, 42 percent compared to 24 percent of employees in general. The following table shows that the average actual and preferred hours have remained relatively steady over the two waves, with desired hours being around 39 per week.

Table 14 Average working hours for those who want more hours in both waves (n=31)

	<i>Wave 1</i>		<i>Wave 2</i>			
	Actual	Preferred	Actual	Usual	Preferred	Paid
Men	34.7	47.7	36.5	40.5	47.5	38.5
Women	22.3	34.6	23.7	24.2	34.1	24.7
All	26.7	39.2	28.3	30.1	38.5	30.5

v. Radical changes in preferences

Interestingly, these two groups of workers make up an identical number in each cell, but are too small to look at in any great detail. I created some variables to examine the absolute range of the gap between actual and preferred hours across both waves. For example, if the gap in the first wave was -8 (ie. wanted to work 8 hours less) and in wave 2 was 6 (ie. wanted to work 6 hours more) then the absolute range is 14.

The following table shows that, on average, the differences between preferred and actual hours are quite large: 16 hours in wave 1 and 13 hours in wave 2; resulting in a very large range of differences across the two waves. The table does not include cases where actual hours were zero in one week. It is unexpected that the minimum difference in wave 2 is 0. This highlights the problem of using actual rather than usual hours data when examining preferences. There are two cases that have a minimum of 0 and both reported working 40 hours in the previous week and wanting to work 40 hours a week. From this you would assume that 40 hours a week are not the regular hours for these workers.

Table 15. Radical preference changes, absolute differences and shifts (n=38)

	Average	Minimum	Maximum
Difference in actual and preferred hours wave 1	15.5	2	48
Difference in actual and preferred hours wave 2	12.8	0	36
Range in preference difference w1 to w2	25.1	7	68
Change in preferred hours w1 to w2	10.4	0	40

IV. Conclusion

At an initial glance it is obvious that there are various types of change in working time preference and closer examination of each change group reveals that the nature of and reasons for these changes are diverse.

For a large proportion of the workers examined working time preferences did not change. Almost two-fifths (39 percent) of workers remained content with their working hours over the three year period. These workers' hours remained relatively steady over the time period, with men working around 40 hours a week and women working a little less than 30 hours a week. It is significant that this group experienced relatively little change in their work and lifecourse characteristics.

Two-fifths (40 percent) of the workers experienced changes in preferences and the reasons were a seemingly complex combination of work hours, preferences, workplace and lifecourse changes. Hakim (2000) suggests that women have a general preference for no paid work, some paid work (on a part-time basis) or full-time work that remains constant throughout their lives. This data suggests however, that preferences vary depending on various work and lifecourse influences, for both men and women.

In the 'Becoming Happy' group there was evidence of significant adjusting or changing of preferences, particularly amongst women. Similar to Walsh's (1999) findings the group who became happy by changing their desired hours were more likely to have the addition of children by the second wave. Similarly, in the 'Becoming Unhappy' group, it was found that for the majority of these workers their newfound unhappiness was a result of a change in desired hours. The largest group, of those who became unhappy, was those workers whose preferences changed as well as their hours. For most, it was that they were working less and also wanted even fewer hours. This group appeared to have a higher proportion of male 'empty-nesters', that is, older professionals in dual-earner household with no children. This group was working standard hours in wave 2 (which was less than in wave 1); thus they appear to be gradually easing their way either out of work or into part-time work.

This initial analysis highlights the diversity of preference changes across the two waves of data, and indicates that preferences and changes in preferences can be influenced by both work and lifecourse factors. There is some indication that workers are constantly striving to achieve working hours that gravitate toward a 'standard' working week, which differs for men, women without children and women with children. Areas of further research include examining the relative impact work characteristics, stage of the lifecourse, and in particular changes in these factors, has on determining working time preferences and the ability to achieve desired hours.

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Appendix A: Tables

Table A.1 Working time preferences of all workers (%)

		More	Less	Same
<i>Age</i>	Male	6	44	50
	Female	10	28	62
	18-24*	14	21	65
<i>Hours of work</i>	25-44	7	34	58
	45 and older	9	40	32
	1-15	28	4	69
	16-34	20	11	70
<i>Work Characteristics</i>	35-44	5	31	65
	45-54	1	50	49
	55 plus	2	69	29
	Private or NGO	9	31	60
	Public	7	35	58
	Self-employed	6	51	43
	Managers & Administrators	1	60	39
	Professionals	5	39	56
	Associate Professionals	8	36	56
	Tradespersons	8	37	55
	Advanced clerical & service*	5	20	75
	Intermediate clerical & service	10	29	61
Intermediate production & transport*	9	31	60	
Elementary clerical, sales & service*	18	18	64	
Labourers*	28	21	51	
<i>No children (18 or under) in household</i>				
	Single	13	32	55
	Partner works	7	37	56
	Partner doesn't work ^a	3	41	55
<i>Youngest child under 12</i>				
	No partner *	22	28	50
	Partner works	5	37	58
	Partner doesn't work ^a	11	38	51
<i>Youngest child aged 12-17</i>				
	No partner ^a	19	27	54
	Partner works	7	33	60
	Partner doesn't work ^a	14	38	48

Source: NLC, wave 2. Population is all workers with usual work hours data (not including irregular hours), n = 1391. Ages range from 19 to 51. *n<100 ^an<60

Table A.2 Happy with hours in both waves and ‘other’ workers, lifecycle factors(%)

	‘Stayed happy’		Other		
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 1	Wave 2	
<i>Age</i>					
	18-24	4.7		2.9	
	25-34	26.8		17.7	
	35-44	33.8		38.7	
	45-54	28.1		34.1	
	55 plus	6.6		6.7	
<i>Partner status</i>					
	Not in a relationship	24.0	18.9	24.3	20.2
	In a relationship but not living with them	6.4	5.5	7.7	5.6
	Living with someone but not married	8.7	11.3	7.9	11.0
	Married and living with spouse	60.9	64.3	60.1	63.2
<i>Household-work status</i>					
	Single worker	30.4	24.5	32.2	25.9
	Breadwinner	11.1	14.3	14.8	15.0
	Dual-earner household	58.5	61.2	53.0	59.1
<i>Number of children (under 18) in household</i>					
	No children	49.1	50.2	48.2	51.0
	1	16.4	16.6	17.4	17.7
	2	23.2	21.5	22.3	21.5
	3	7.9	8.5	9.0	8.2
	4 or more	3.4	3.1	3.1	1.8
<i>Age of youngest child in household</i>					
	Under 5	17.0	16.2	17.9	14.1
	Between 5 and under 12	22.6	18.1	20.1	19.6
	Between 12 and under 18	11.3	15.5	13.7	15.4
	No children	49.1	50.2	48.2	51.0
<i>Future Objectives – secure financial position*</i>					
	Very important / Important	88.3	81.5	88.4	83.8
	Somewhat important	6.0	14.1	5.4	14.3
	Not at all important	3.0	4.4	1.5	1.9
	Not applicable to me	1.1	-	1.2	-
	I have already achieved this	1.7	-	3.4	-
	Achieved objective - secure financial position		70.9		56.0
<i>Future Objectives – advancing career*</i>					
	Very important / Important	58.1	45.3	61.5	52.4
	Somewhat important	18.5	21.6	17.8	24.0
	Not at all important	22.3	35.8	16.8	23.3
	Not applicable to me	0.9		1.9	
	I have already achieved this	0.2		1.9	
	Achieved objective - advancing career		68.0		64.2

Source: NLC. n=1206

Table A.3 Happy with hours in both waves and ‘other’, Work characteristics (%)

	‘Stayed happy’		Other	
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 1	Wave 2
<i>Occupation</i>				
Managers and administrators	7.7	6.9	14.3	13.3
Professionals	24.2	25.8	26.9	26.1
Associate professionals	12.4	14.0	14.9	14.2
Tradespersons and related	11.8	10.9	9.7	12.5
Advanced clerical & service	7.1	6.2	3.2	3.1
Intermediate clerical, sales & service	18.0	17.1	13.2	13.6
Intermediate production & transport	6.4	6.5	6.4	7.2
Elementary clerical, sales & service	7.3	8.0	4.5	4.5
Labourers & related	4.9	4.5	6.8	5.4
<i>Employer</i>				
Private company or NGO	56.6	59.9	52.9	50.7
Government – federal, state or local	30.9	26.7	24.9	25.3
Self-employed	12.6	13.4	22.3	24.0
<i>Education or schooling required by job</i>				
Less than complete secondary school	29.4	24.1	29.4	29.1
Completed secondary school	25.8	25.2	18.5	20.9
Post school certificate or diploma	23.0	25.4	22.8	20.1
Degree from university	21.9	25.2	29.3	29.8
<i>Job requires broken shifts or irregular hours</i>				
Often	29.2	24.7	36.7	28.4
Sometimes	15.8	19.8	15.9	18.5
Rarely or never	55.0	55.5	47.3	53.1
<i>Job requires overtime or very long hours</i>				
Often	25.1	22.1	42.7	42.0
Sometimes	31.6	33.4	27.9	31.0
Rarely or never	43.3	44.5	29.5	27.0
<i>Job requires you to work nights</i>				
Often	25.2	22.8	30.3	28.4
Sometimes	20.0	23.0	25.7	29.6
Rarely or never	54.8	54.3	43.9	42.0

Source: NLC. n=1206 * employees only

Table A.4 Became happy with hours in wave 2, lifecourse factors by attainment (%)

	Attained desired hours		Did not attain desired hours		
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 1	Wave 2	
<i>Age</i>					
	18-24	1.1		3.7	
	25-34	23.6		17.4	
	35-44	38.2		42.2	
	45-54	29.2		29.4	
	55 plus	7.9		7.3	
<i>Partner status</i>					
	Not in a relationship	25.8	22.5	22.0	16.5
	In a relationship but not living with them	6.7	7.9	8.3	3.7
	Living with someone but not married	9.0	6.7	7.3	14.7
	Married and living with spouse	58.4	62.9	62.4	65.1
<i>Household-work status</i>					
	Single worker	32.6	30.3	30.6	20.4
	Breadwinner	13.5	5.6	14.8	15.7
	Dual-earner household	53.9	64.0	54.6	63.9
<i>No. of children (18 or under) in household</i>					
	No children	46.1	52.8	50.5	44.0
	1	19.1	16.9	16.5	23.9
	2	21.3	21.3	17.4	20.2
	3	9.0	5.6	12.8	10.1
	4 or more	4.5	3.4	2.8	1.8
<i>Age of youngest child in household</i>					
	Under 5	16.9	14.6	18.3	17.4
	Between 5 and under 12	20.2	18.0	19.3	22.9
	Between 12 and under 18	16.9	14.6	11.9	15.6
	No children	46.1	52.8	50.5	44.0
<i>Work characteristics</i>					
	Part-time hours* (1-34)	31.4	30.7	35.9	35.3
	Standard hours (35-40)	22.5	33.0	21.1	25.0
	Longer hours (41+)	46.1	36.3	43.2	39.8
	Self-employed	19.1	19.1	27.5	24.8
	Private/NGO employer	58.4	57.3	47.7	47.7
	Government employer	22.5	23.6	24.8	27.5
	Professional (white collar)	50.0	42.8	54.6	52.5

Source: NLC. n=198 *Hours worked last week

Table A.5 Becoming unhappy, lifecycle and employment factors, w2 (%)

	Preferred hours changed		Preferred hours did not change	
	x	Y	X	y**
Male	54.5	49.2	44.9	66.7
Female	45.5	50.8	55.1	33.3
<i>Age</i>				
18-24	2.0	5.1	4.1	0
25-34	24.8	22.0	20.4	11.1
35-44	30.7	35.6	55.1	50.0
45-54	31.7	32.2	20.4	38.9
55 plus	10.9	5.1	0	0
<i>Partner-work status</i>				
Single worker	24.2	28.8	36.7	38.9
Breadwinner	11.1	11.9	4.1	16.7
Dual-earner household	64.6	59.3	59.2	44.4
<i>Age of youngest child in household</i>				
Under 5	13.9	10.2	4.1	16.7
Between 5 and under 12	13.8	15.2	26.5	27.7
Between 12 and under 18	12.9	18.7	14.3	16.7
No children	59.4	55.9	55.1	38.9
<i>Work characteristics</i>				
Part-time hours (1-34)	18.8	15.3	12.2	16.7
Standard hours (35-40)	31.7	23.7	20.4	38.9
Longer hours (41+)	49.6	61.0	67.4	44.4
Self-employed	27.7	18.6	24.5	5.6
Private/NGO employer	48.5	57.6	44.9	50.0
Government employer	23.8	23.7	30.6	44.4
Professional (white)	55.4	47.5	44.9	44.4

Source: NLC. n=227 **n=18

Table A.6 Want less hours both waves, lifecycle and employment factors w2 (%)

	Did shift actual hours		Did not shift actual hours	
	Cell X	Cell x	Cell Y**	Cell y
Male	62.4	64.7	74.1	67.2
Female	37.6	35.3	25.9	32.8
<i>Age</i>				
18-24	0	3.9	0	1.7
25-34	8.2	11.8	14.8	12.1
35-44	41.2	27.5	29.6	39.7
45-54	42.4	43.1	48.1	44.8
55 plus	8.2	13.7	7.4	1.7
<i>Partner-work status</i>				
Single worker	20.0	23.5	18.5	20.7
Breadwinner	23.5	19.6	37.0	20.7
Dual-earner household	56.5	56.9	44.4	58.6
<i>Age of youngest child in household</i>				
Under 5	15.3	13.7	14.8	17.2
Between 5 and under 12	22.3	14.0	18.5	22.5
Between 12 and under 18	15.3	17.6	11.1	17.2
No children	47.1	54.9	55.6	43.1
<i>Work characteristics</i>				
Average actual hours*	45.0	50.8	52.7	49.0
Average preferred hours	35.5	36.0	36.8	35.6
Self-employed	21.2	37.3	22.2	29.3
Private/NGO employer	44.7	41.2	55.6	48.3
Government employer	34.1	21.6	22.2	22.4
Professional (white)	67.1	58.8	59.3	53.4
Non-professional (blue)	32.9	41.2	40.7	46.6

Source: NLC. n=221 *Standard deviation for Cells X and x are around 21. **N= 27.

Table A.7 All workers with preferences in both waves – comparison data (%)

		Wave 1	Wave 2
<i>Sex</i>	Male		50.7
	Female		49.3
<i>Age</i>	18-24		3.6
	25-34		21.2
	35-44		36.8
	45-54		31.8
	55 plus		6.6
<i>Partner status</i>	Not in a relationship	24.2	19.7
	In a relationship but not living with them	7.2	5.6
	Living with someone but not married	8.2	11.1
	Married and living with spouse	60.4	63.6
<i>Household-work status</i>	Single worker	31.4	25.3
	Breadwinner	13.3	14.7
	Dual-earner household	55.0	59.7
<i>Number of children (18 or under) in household</i>	No children	48.6	50.7
	1	17.0	17.2
	2	22.6	21.5
	3	8.5	8.3
	4 or more	3.2	2.3
<i>Age of youngest child in household</i>	Under 5	17.6	14.8
	Between 5 and under 12	21.0	18.9
	Between 12 and under 18	12.8	15.6
	No children	48.6	50.7
<i>Work characteristics</i>	Part-time hours (1-34)	29.7	33.9
	Standard hours (35-40)	26.9	23.2
	Longer hours (41+)	43.4	43.0
	Self-employed	18.5	19.9
	Private/NGO employer	54.3	54.3
	Government employer	27.2	25.8
	Professional (white)	50.9	47.8

Source: NLC. n=1206