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- Year 1 we interviewed 8,341 participants
  - Year 2 we interviewed 7,086 of the same participants
  - Year 3 we interviewed 6,801 people including 300 new recruits
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## Overview: Year 3 of the study

The third year of our five year study is just about complete.

Once again this year, we managed to interview most (89 per cent) of the participants we interviewed in 2008. Some 168 people who were not interviewed last year also re-joined the study in 2009. This was a fantastic result! We thank all of you for your continuing participation in the study.

When we started the Australia at Work project in 2007, our participants were aged between 16 and 58 years. Given our study is for five years, this would mean that by the fifth year the youngest person in the study would be 21. So in order to keep our sample similar to the actual Australian labour force, 300 young people aged 16 to 24 years were newly recruited into our study in 2009.

We welcome our new recruits and we hope you keep participating for the remainder of the study.

The third annual report: *Australia at Work: In a Changing World* was released on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2009. You can download a copy of the report from the project website. The launch received good media coverage and provides a platform for future policy debate.

On a more personal note, after three years managing the *Australia at Work* project, Dr Brigid van Wanrooy is leaving our Centre to go to the UK. She will work on a similar major study of British employers and workers. We wish Brigid all the very best in the UK and thank her for all her hard work.

Thanks again for participating in our study.

Sally Wright  
Senior Researcher  
Workplace Research Centre  
The University of Sydney



## Key findings in 2009

- In a nutshell, while much of the workforce has been relatively unaffected by the global financial crisis, those who have changed jobs were likely to have reduced their working hours, experienced a reduction in pay or moved into a casual job.
- There was a slight ease on the cost of living and an associated improvement in financial security, with the proportion of people finding it 'very difficult' or 'difficult' to get by on their current household income dropping from 20 per cent in 2008 to 16 per cent in 2009. Correspondingly, the proportion of those 'living comfortably' or 'doing really well' increased from 41 to 45 per cent in the same period.
- Despite a drop in total hours worked, we found no evidence that job losses were being mitigated by work-sharing. Full-time employees still work an average of 44 usual hours per week.
- After more than two decades of active promotion of bargaining in Australian industrial relations policy, low employee understanding of, and involvement in, workplace bargaining remains.
- Employee perceptions about managers' opposition to unions in some industries appear to influence union membership choice.

Some of the other findings are highlighted throughout the newsletter, or you can download a copy of the full report from the website: [www.australiaatwork.org.au](http://www.australiaatwork.org.au).

## Media coverage

In order to feed our findings into public debate and influence government policy making, we launched the report on 26<sup>th</sup> November.

Major media outlets covering our findings, including:

- ABC's *Lateline* program and Sky TV News program
- The Sydney Morning Herald, Australian Financial Review, The Age (Melbourne), The Daily Telegraph, The Mercury (Hobart) and the Gold Coast Bulletin
- ABC, Triple J, 2GB, 2SM, 2UE, Sky News, Radio National, 6PR, Curtin FM, HO FM, 4BC and 7LA radio stations.

The issues the journalists were most interested in this year were the impact of the financial crisis on job losses and working hours, the increased likelihood of cuts in hours and pay when changing jobs, and the high level of casual work among those who changed jobs.

## Keeping in contact

We will begin the fourth round of interviews at the end of February so please don't forget to let us know if your contact details change.

There are several ways you can do this:

1. Fill in the enclosed change of address card and post it using the reply paid envelope.
2. Go to the website: [www.australiaatwork.org.au](http://www.australiaatwork.org.au) and log into Your Site.
3. Phone us toll free: 1800 260 864

**Note:** Please only return the card if your contact details are different from those printed on the card.

## Showing our appreciation

We really value your participation in the *Australia at Work* study. To show our appreciation we are providing you with an *Australia at Work* Benefits Card. This card provides you with benefits and discounts at a variety of retail and accommodation outlets, which we hope will come in handy.

The benefits are for:

- AMF Bowling
- Bob Jane T-Marts
- Civic Video
- ITP Tax
- Strandbags
- Rebel Sports
- Medina
- Bristol Home & Decorator Centre
- Domino's Pizza
- Roger David
- Ultra Tune
- Europcar

The benefits are valid for all of 2010. The discount card has been included with this newsletter. The card also has the details of how you can contact us if your details change.



## FINDINGS IN BRIEF

### *Job losses ...*

- Eight per cent of respondents lost a job between 2008 and 2009, with five per cent of people being made redundant
- Just under half of those who lost a job in the past year were back working again when interviewed in 2009
- One-quarter remain looking for work and almost one-third are no longer in the labour force

### *Security at Work ...*

- Twelve per cent of workers agreed with the statement 'There's a good chance I will lose my job or be retrenched within the next 12 months', up slightly from nine per cent in 2008
- Half think that their employer could easily replace them, a five per cent increase from 2008

### *Living standards and debt ...*

- Self-reported living standards are slightly more favourable in 2009 than in 2008. Sixteen per cent reported finding it 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to get by – down from 20 per cent in 2008
- Unsurprisingly, unemployed people report a lower standard of living than the employed, with 42 per cent finding it 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to get by
- Of those with debt obligations, three-quarters 'always' meet these on time, while 21 per cent 'sometimes' or 'never' make timely repayments

# Message from Surveytalk

Hi,

I'm Samuel Condello and I lead the team of interviewers who have been contacting you for *Australia at Work*. My team has enjoyed talking to you about your working lives over the last three years. We are now preparing to conduct the fourth round of interviews with you.

It has been tricky to track some of you down. So please be sure to keep in contact with the Australia at Work team or Surveytalk if your contact details change.

Thanks for your co-operation throughout the surveying process.

*Samuel Condello, Associate Director, Surveytalk*



## Our Website

The *Australia at Work* website is an important way for us to communicate the research findings to the broader public and, most importantly, to keep in contact with you. The website address is:

[www.australiaatwork.org.au](http://www.australiaatwork.org.au)

On this website you can download copies of the reports, find out the latest news, read about the research team and provide feedback. Most importantly, as participants you can download copies of the newsletters, update your contact details or get one of the team to contact you.

## Australia at Work Diary

Jan 2010	Finalise Wave 4 questionnaire
Feb 2010	Commence telephone interviews
June 2010	Finish telephone interviews
Nov 2010	Release of 4 <sup>th</sup> <i>Australia at Work</i> report

## FINDINGS IN BRIEF

### *Working hours ...*

- One-quarter of respondents report usually working 50 hours or more per week, unchanged for the last two years
- Twenty-two per cent of part-time employees want to work more hours while 28 per cent of full-time employees want to work fewer hours.
- The self-employed have some of the longest working hours, so it is not surprising that almost half of this group who are working full-time hours would prefer to reduce their hours of work

### *Changing jobs ...*

- Forty-one per cent of workers who changed jobs in 2009 increased their hours
- Over one-third of those who changed jobs had a decrease in pay
- Fourteen per cent of people who change jobs moved from permanent to casual work

### *Workplace negotiation ...*

- Over half of all employees say they do not have the opportunity to negotiate their pay with their employer
- Only two in five of those employees who feel that they can negotiate with their employer actually did so in the past year