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Australian Women *at work*

RESEARCH AND OUTCOMES



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COVID-19 exposed a broken system for women

Women do more of the parenting and domestic work than their male partners, and the mental load largely sits with women. Increases in parenting requirements due to COVID-19 were borne more heavily by women, but the increase in flexibility for men and women during this period did result in increased parenting contribution from a portion of male partners. COVID-19 pressures exposed outdated stereotypes and entrenched gender roles.

Women faced blurred lines between work and home, long workdays, a lack of support in the office and many are at risk of burnout.

“The whole concept of ‘working mothers’ drives me nuts. Australian society has a massive shift to make towards ‘working parents’ and actively encouraging equal care. The way the system is currently set up... reinforces the assumption that it is the ‘mother’s job’ to care for kids.”

71%

of women feel they **neglect their own health** looking after everyone else

69%

of women feel they do **more parenting** than their partner/co-parent

39%

of women agree working **mothers are given fewer opportunities** in their workplace than working fathers or employees without children

27%

of women agree COVID-19 has had a **negative impact** on their ability to progress their career

24%

of women have no sense of balance and **feel overwhelmed** most of the time

“Before I got pregnant with my first child, my husband and I were on equal pay, at equal stages in our careers. Since having children he has progressed significantly and I have stagnated. I strongly believe this is because he has been supported by me to do this. COVID-19 made me realise just how wide that gap was. My work hours went through the roof and so did the responsibility at home. This seems to be a common thread with other mums I’ve spoken to.”

There were comments about wage theft, particularly among part time workers, who often on a full time load for reduced pay to protect their flexibility. There are a lack of career advancement opportunities, fewer senior roles available part time, and part time workers are often seen to be less committed.

“I think as a society we need to look at the fact that work has moved way outside a 9–5 window and we need to review and address how we provide traditional supports to families. We also need to look at how to support employees more holistically. I do not want to work anymore like I don’t have two small children at home nor be overlooked for opportunities because I work four days a week.”

72%

of women said trying to balance work and family life means they **don’t get enough time to themselves**

60%

of women feel guilty that they are **doing neither work nor home properly**

48%

of women feel **totally at capacity**, so can’t take on more

26%

of women feel that a **lack of support at home** hinders their ability to progress their career



Looking to the future - What women want and need from employers

Australia's working women like being part of the workforce. They enjoy the variety of working, the independence that comes with personal financial security and value being role models to their children.

However, women are finding it tough to balance competing priorities and lack time for themselves. Women struggle with the mental load and inequality, and often feel they aren't doing things well enough in either arena.

When asked what changes women would like to see going forward, the key points identified are:

- 1 Ongoing flexibility** and work from home options
- 2 Career and leadership development** opportunities
- 3 Non-gendered support** encouraging men to work flexibly, to increase equality both at home and work
- 4 Part time and job share options** at senior levels
- 5 Visible leadership** around balancing a career with other responsibilities



Women want to be included in the workplace

“There are a lack of professional and leadership roles that enable women to both work and have a fulfilling family life. There should be more high-level job share roles available - society and organisations are both missing out on a huge pool of talent that could have both satisfying work lives while making huge and valuable contributions to a company or organisation. Whilst we have experienced a fundamental shift in the way we work due to Covid – working from anywhere – there is still a long way to go when it comes to allowing people who have families, flexibility in hours.”

81%

of women said it would be very or extremely helpful to have a **continuation of flexible work hours**

81%

of women want to see **visible leadership** around flexibility and supporting working parents

66%

of women want to see more **working mothers in senior roles**

53%

of women **enjoy the variety** of having a career while raising children

50%

of women enjoy having a **personal self and a professional self**

50%

of women would like **leadership development** programs

“Better workplace policies to support working parents. I think there still is a big gender gap where women are expected to take on the majority of the mental load with managing work and parenting duties, and workplaces tend to grant flexibility to women far more readily than males. Workplaces need to be more encouraging of males to take on the same flexibility with work and parenting.”

The path forward – How companies and organisations can enhance value through equity

Many issues were exacerbated by COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions but are problems that have been identified in the past and continue to need focus.

While employers can't influence the distribution of the physical and mental load at home for employees, they do have influence over policies and practices that support working mothers and shift the workplace dynamic for parents and women.

Recommendations to companies as a result of research findings are:

Ongoing flexible work

Women want flexible and work from home options to continue.

Companies should formalise or adjust their flexible working policy, capturing updated workforce needs. Training around policy application will increase consistency.

Leadership development opportunities

50% of women want to participate in leadership development programs or careers coaching.

This is one method to attract, develop and retain women as they progress within their careers.

Increased visibility of active parents in leadership roles

There is a lack of visible leadership from working mothers or fathers perceived as playing a significant role in the lives of their children or modeling flexible work.

Women would like to see senior leaders encouraging men and women to work flexibly in a way that allows family engagement.

The provision and encouragement of flexibility for men

Non-gendered flexible working options can result in a more even sharing of the domestic load, allowing women to participate more fully in the paid workforce.

Companies would benefit from working to normalise flexible options.

Part time and job share opportunities

Women report feeling sidelined in part time roles, with few opportunities to progress.

Companies would benefit from considering part time and job share options for senior positions to increase candidate pool size and access more experienced women.

Individual empowerment – You don't need to wait for the system to change

Individual women cannot fix systemic issues. However, women can play a role in seeking development opportunities, self-advocating, and encouraging change both at work and in the home.

Impacts on women can clearly be separated into home and work, with the domestic load being more of an issue for parents.

Influencing outcomes at work

There is an opportunity for women to advocate for part time work, job share opportunities and ongoing flexibility, and to choose workplaces that offer these. Using Employee Resource Groups, sponsorship and executive buy-in are approaches that may help achieve desired shifts. Additionally, women in senior position have access to levers of power and can advocate on behalf of other women.

Women could benefit from seeking coaching or development programs to progress their careers.

Comments from the research indicate that many women feel pressure to 'do it all' and guilt that they can't perform a full time workload in part time hours. There is an opportunity for women to put in boundaries around working paid hours. Some women may also benefit from coaching around releasing perfectionism, setting boundaries and self-advocating.



On the home front

There were many comments around the impact of the mental and domestic load on women's ability to participate at work and pushing them to burnout. The increased pressure of COVID-19 encouraged some women to have difficult yet useful conversations with their partners. They reported stepping back from doing all the tasks, stopping 'martyring' themselves and telling their partner to contribute more in the home.

There are opportunities for women to redefine relationships and responsibilities in the home. Couples counselling or individual coaching may support couples and women through creating changes in the home dynamic.

Where to from here

The tricky bit from here is not understanding what needs to happen, but actually creating and embedding change. 1,288 women have spoken up about what they need, now is your chance to respond.

Samantha Sutherland Consulting offers a range of solutions to help with creating change in the workplace and for individual women including:

- Diagnostic, design and delivery of **gender equity solutions**
- Team building and strategic planning sessions, that encompass **embedding cultural change**
- Women's **leadership development** programs
- **Individual coaching** for women on self-advocacy at work



About Samantha Sutherland

This research was conducted by Samantha Sutherland Consulting.

Samantha believes that our people are our number one asset, and we need to constantly remember the human aspect of work. Spending 8-10 hours a day in the office means a bad work culture creates a bad life. And we all deserve to enjoy what we do (and who we do it with) every day.

Samantha has 18 years' experience in diversity & inclusion, strategy & planning, analysis, facilitation and consulting. She is passionate about improving workplaces through conversation, connection and community.

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Research conducted by Samantha Sutherland consulting.

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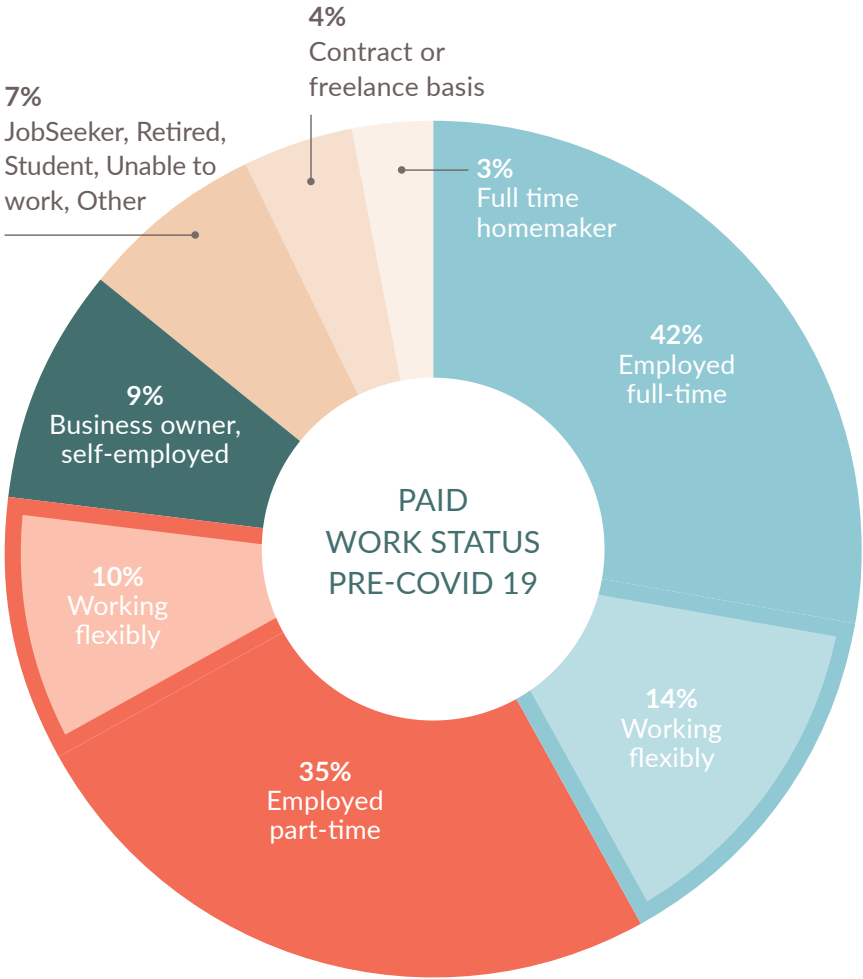
Who did we hear from?

1,287 women and 1 non-binary person responded to the research. The majority of participants are partnered working mothers in their 30s and 40s from major cities. The following charts offer more detail into demographics and work status.

Employment status

89% of research participants were employed in some capacity before COVID-19 hit, with 24% working flexibly pre-pandemic.

Respondents work across a range of industries, with 32% in professional, technical and other services, 13% in healthcare, 13% in education and 9% in financial services.



Changes to Employment

During and beyond the peak of the pandemic, some people faced changes to employment hours and pay.

Changes in paid work hours were driven by an increased work volume, smaller teams, taking time off to care for children and homeschool. Additionally, increased flexibility and a reduction in commuting time paradoxically often resulted in longer working hours as people worked during their previous commute time and into the evenings



1 in 5 women reported reduced hours due to COVID-19 and 44% of them remain on lower hours, even as face-to-face schooling returned and restrictions eased.

22%

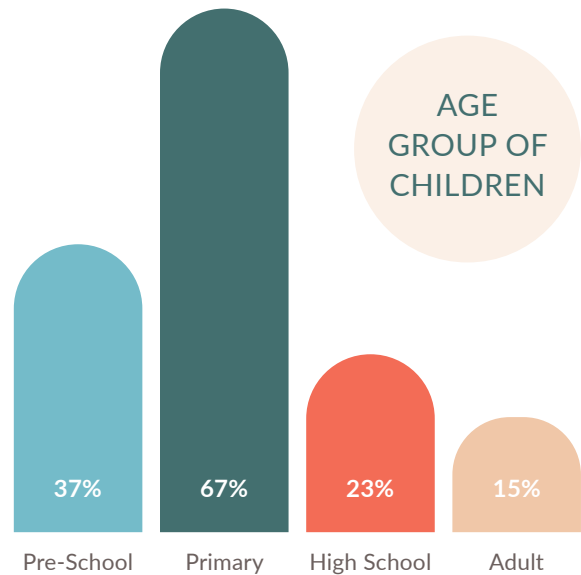
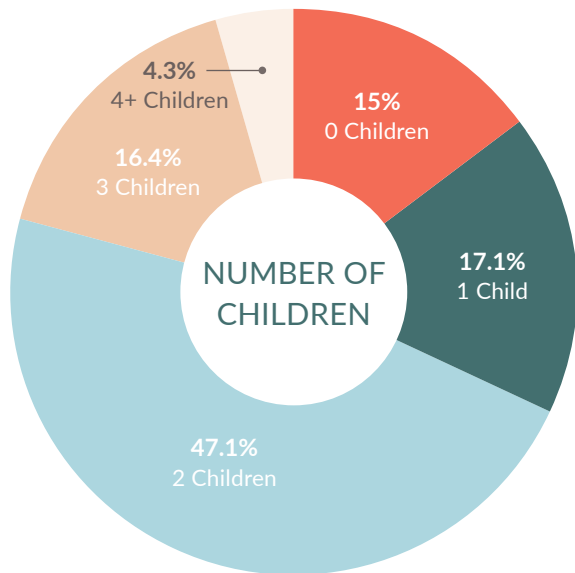
of women had reduced pay
71% of those on reduced pay were working the same or more hours for that lower pay.

30%

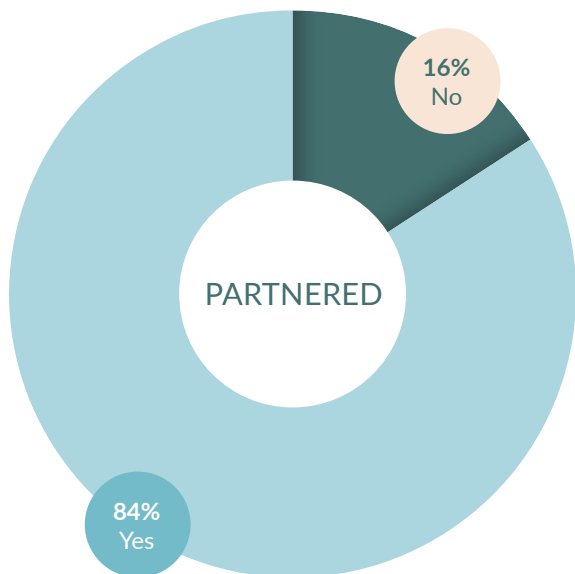
of women had increased hours
71% of them were working the increased hours for the same or less money and 66% of them said their increased hours have remained higher after initial lockdowns ceased and restrictions eased.

Parenting and partnership status

85% of research participants have children, and 84% are partnered. 67% had primary-aged children.



Note: parents can have children in more than one age grouping



Location

Women came from all the states and territories, with 80% of them in urban areas.

