



Issue 2 | December 2008

# → Newsletter

## THE SECOND YEAR: AS GOOD AS THE FIRST

It's been more than six months since we interviewed you for the second time for the Australia at Work study. The second year has been a successful one. We managed to interview most (85 per cent) of you who participated in the first year of the study. The research team are incredibly grateful for your continued support and participation.

The Australia at Work project continues to grow. This year we added to the project further in-depth interviewing to understand what is going on behind the statistics that we collect. See inside the newsletter to read more about the 'stories' component of Australia at Work.

The second annual Australia at Work report, *Working Lives: Statistics and Stories* was released on 29 October 2008. The report detailed findings from both the 2007 and 2008 surveys and the in-depth interviews. The report was well-received and gained coverage in a wide variety of media across Australia. Inside this newsletter you can read more about the report and the coverage it received.

This year we also launched a new and improved Australia at Work website. We encourage you to visit the website to find out what we are up to and also to update your contact details if they change.

We know that things will change a lot in the coming year, as the economic climate becomes more uncertain. We want to keep in contact with you and keep hearing about your experiences no matter what happens.

Thanks again and I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter.

Dr Brigid van Wanrooy, Lead Researcher on Australia at Work

### FROM SURVEYTALK

The team at Surveytalk have enjoyed the second year of Australia at Work. It's been great opportunity to talk to you again. It took persistence to track some of you down but we got there! Please be sure to contact the Australia at Work team or Surveytalk if you change your contact details. We are looking forward to making contact again.

Samuel Condello, Associate Director of SurveyTalk.





### We're Famous!

We believe that there is no point conducting large research studies if it doesn't feed into public debate and influence policy-making in some way. Therefore, disseminating the research is really important to the Australia at Work research team. One way we can do this is by obtaining media coverage of the report.

The second report *Working Lives: Statistics and Stories* was released on 29 October 2008. Brigid van Wanrooy and John Buchanan, from the Australia at Work research team, travelled down to Canberra to talk to journalists and policy-advisors about the report. The report received coverage across all the major newspapers, including:

- *The Courier Mail* - front page!
- *The Australian* (p.5)
- *The Sydney Morning Herald* (p.6)
- *The Age* (p.4)
- *Hobart Mercury* (p.3)
- *The Daily Telegraph* (p.11)
- *Adelaide Advertiser* (p.9)

In addition, the researchers talked to a variety of radio stations and the report made the television news on ABC, SBS and Channels 7 and 9. The issues that the journalists were most interested to talk about were living standards of workers and long working hours. Read more about the findings on the next page.

### The 'Stories'

Last year we reported on just the statistics. However, statistics only tell you so much. Some of you wanted to tell us more than just the answers to the questions we were asking. So this year two researchers, Dr Shaun Wilson from Macquarie University and Dr Sean Scalmer from Melbourne University joined the Australia at Work team and conducted further in-depth interviews. This amounted to almost 50 interviews with randomly selected Australia at Work participants. This has been a great addition to the project and excerpts from the interviews really help to illustrate the data we report on. We were able to incorporate the results from these interviews in the second report, *Working Lives: Statistics and Stories*.



# **WORKING LIVES: STATISTICS AND STORIES**

The second Australia at Work report examined particular aspects of working life including relations at the workplace; working hours and workload; union membership; different forms of employment such as permanent, casual, fixed-term contracts; self-employed workers; and earning and spending within the household.

### **Financial pressures**

The report found that there had been an increase in the proportion of workers who said they were either 'finding it difficult to get by' or 'coping' on their household income. In 2007, 52 per cent of workers reported this and in 2008 it had increased to 56 per cent. This is a notable change for just one year. We also need to remember that you answered the survey in the first half of the year, prior to the global economic crisis in October. This survey will become particularly important in examining how the changing economic climate will impact on your experiences both in and out of work.

This year we also asked you about your debt obligations such as credit cards and mortgages. The reason for this was that we want to examine how certain obligations such as financial commitments or caring for dependents impact on working life. The majority of you reported having some sort of debts to pay. We found that one in five employed people do not always make their debt repayments on time and there is evidence of some workers facing both work and financial pressures. One respondent in the in-depth interviews said:

*"You can't have it both ways; either you sacrifice family for money or vice versa, money for family. So I thought 'I'm going to have to stick this through a couple of years'. My transition I suppose is money at the moment, trying to pay off the mortgage. The mortgage is killing us at the moment" [Male, aged 32].*

### **Work pressures**

Australia has some of the longest full-time working hours among OECD countries. In both 2007 and 2008 many of you have reported long working hours, consistent with data coming from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. We also found that more than half of employees in both years agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'More and more is expected of me for the same amount of pay'.

### **And some good news...**

We find that employees are generally happy with the relationships they have with their workplace managers. The majority of employees agree that they can trust their managers to tell things the way they are, their managers consult them and they believe staff are treated fairly. Employees in a new job are more likely to have positive views towards management.

You can download a copy of the full report from the website: [www.australiaatwork.org.au](http://www.australiaatwork.org.au)



## Australia at Work Newsletter

# The New & Improved Australia at Work 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. Therefore we thought it was important to have an attractive and easy to use website. The new 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, there is a page specifically for you, the participants, where you can download copies of the newsletters and update your contact details, or get one of the team to contact you. If you want to change your details on-line you will need to log-in. If you have lost your log-in details and would like them please fill in the feedback form and we can get these to you as soon as possible.

If you have any feedback regarding the website or the study more generally please do not hesitate to contact us. The best way to do this is by going to the 'Contact Us' page on the website. Otherwise, please see the box below about keeping in touch.

### PLEASE KEEP IN TOUCH

We are beginning the new round of interviews at the end of February so it's really important that we are able to contact you. Please don't forget to let us know if your contact details change. There are several ways you can do this:

- Fill in the enclosed change of address card and post it using the reply paid envelop. Please only send us the card if your contact details are different from that on the card.
- Go to the website: [www.wrc.org.au/auswork](http://www.wrc.org.au/auswork) and log into 'Your Site'.
- Phone us toll free: 1800 260 864

### Australia at Work Diary - What's Next?

*December 2008 – January 2009*  
Finalising the third questionnaire

*February/March 2009*  
Commence telephone interviews

*June 2009*  
Finish interviewing

*October 2009*  
Release of the 3rd Australia at Work Report

