
9 Non life cycle related factors affecting part time employment

Factors not directly related to the life cycle (or any particular age group) can impact on an individual's labour force status. These factors, such as the onset of a disability or the need to become a carer, may restrict the amount of time an individual can (or desires to) work or their ability to work at all. For this reason, the availability of suitable part time employment may allow some workers who are unable or reluctant to work full time to actively participate in the labour market.

This Chapter examines the relationship between hours of work and groups of the population including individuals with a disability or poor health and individuals with caring responsibilities.

9.1 Probability of working part time for people with a disability

Some segments of the population face specific barriers to employment. In February 2008, the Government foreshadowed the development of a National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy to be released by the end of 2008. The strategy '...would help to identify why people with a disability and mental illness find participation difficult and put in place strategies to address these challenges' (O'Connor and Shorten 2008, p. 1). This section examines the current pattern of work for people with a disability. It focuses on the role part time work can play in assisting people with a disability to participate in the workforce.

For people with a disability, the nature or severity of the disability could influence their ability to participate in the workforce or may limit their involvement. The ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) can be used to examine the relationship between hours of work and disability status. The SDAC classifies a person as having a disability if they report that they have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has either lasted or is likely to last for at least six months and which restricts everyday activities.

In 2003, there were an estimated 4 million individuals aged 15–64 years (or 20 per cent of the population) with a reported disability in Australia. Only 53 per cent of individuals with a reported disability were participating in the labour force, compared to around 80 per cent of individuals without a disability. For those with a core-activity limitation (box 9.1), individuals who reported more severe limitations were more likely to be outside the labour force (figure 9.1).

Box 9.1 **Disabilities with specific limitations or restrictions**

The SDAC defines a person as having a *specific limitation or restriction* if they are limited in one or more of the *core activities* (*self care, mobility and communication*) or have an employment or schooling restriction. Individuals with a core-activity limitation may also have a schooling or employment restriction.

Core-activity limitation

There are *four levels of core-activity limitation* which are determined based on whether a person needs help, has difficulty, or uses aids or equipment with any of the core activities. A person's overall level of core-activity limitation is determined by their highest level of limitation in these activities.

- *Profound* — the person is unable to do, or always needs help with, a core-activity task.
- *Severe* — the person sometimes needs help with a core-activity task, has difficulty understanding or being understood by family or friends, can communicate more easily using sign language or other non-spoken forms of communication.
- *Moderate* — the person needs no help but has difficulty with a core-activity task.
- *Mild* — the person needs no help and has no difficulty with any of the core-activity tasks, but: uses aids and equipment; cannot easily walk 200 metres; cannot walk up and down stairs without a handrail; cannot easily bend to pick up an object from the floor; cannot use public transport; can use public transport but needs help or supervision; needs no help or supervision but has difficulty using public transport.

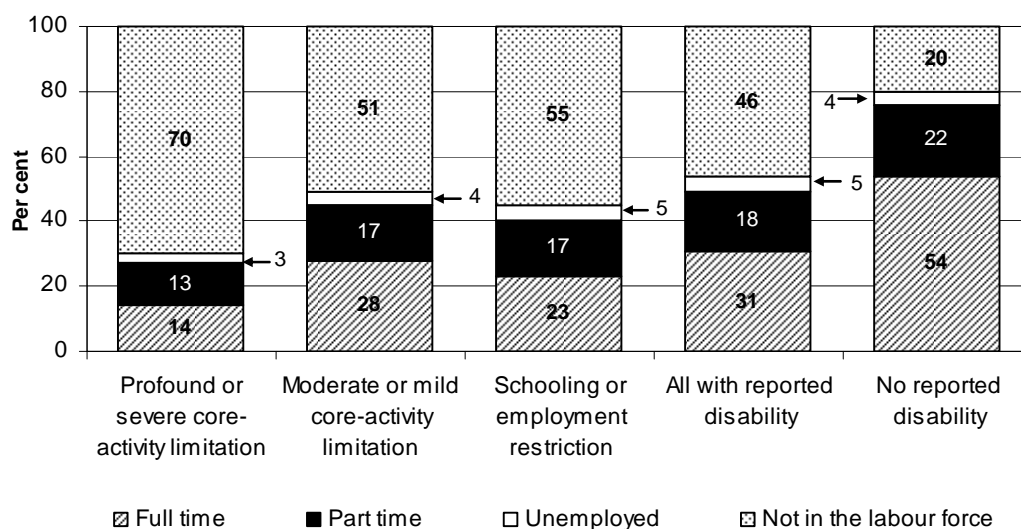
Employment or schooling restriction

A person with one or more disabilities has an *employment restriction* if, because of their disability, they are restricted in type of work or number of hours they can work, need a modified working environment or special equipment, or are not able to work at all.

A person aged 5–20 years with one or more disabilities has a *schooling restriction* if, because of their disability, they are unable to: attend school; attend a special school; attend special classes at an ordinary school; need at least one day a week off school on average; or have difficulty at school.

Source: ABS (2003c).

Figure 9.1 Labour force status by disability status, 2003
Persons aged 15–64 years



Data source: ABS (*Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings, 2003, Cat. no. 4430.0*).

Not only are individuals with a disability less likely to be in the labour force, but they are also less likely to be working full time (figure 9.1). In 2003, while more than half of all individuals with no disability worked full time, only 31 per cent of individuals with a disability worked full time (a difference of 23 percentage points). In addition, a higher share of employed individuals reporting a disability worked part time (37 per cent), compared to employed individuals with no disability (29 per cent) (ABS 2003c).

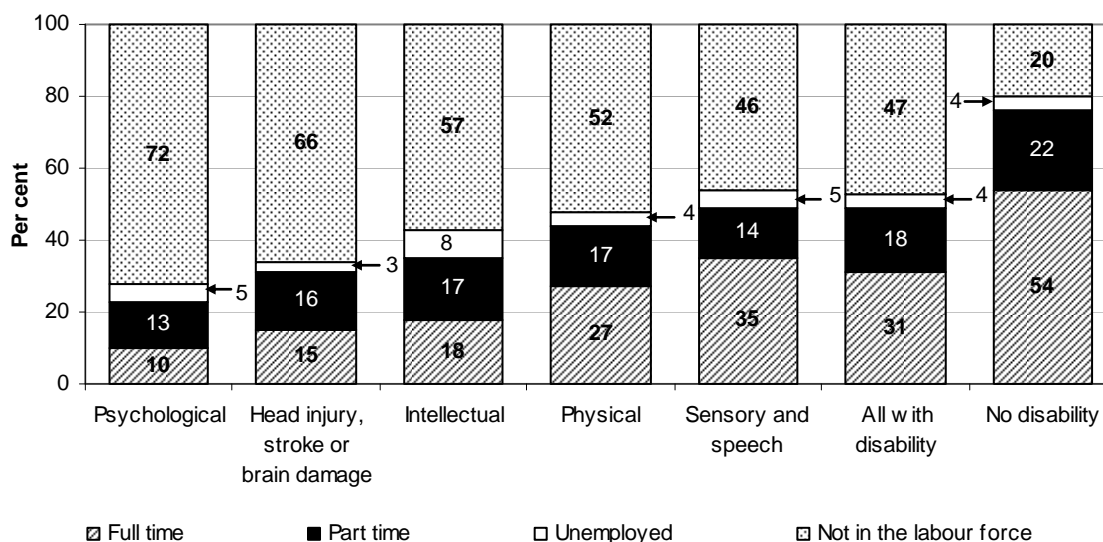
As the severity of disability increases, part time employment becomes a more significant means of maintaining attachment to the workforce. Full time employment among workers with moderate or mild limitation was 11 percentage points higher than part time employment. By contrast almost equal percentages of workers with profound or severe core-activity limitations worked part time and full time.

While some individuals with a disability in the SDAC do not have a core-activity limitation, they may be classified by the ABS as having a disability that restricts their ability to participate in schooling or work, including restricting the type or the hours of work or study they can do (box 9.1). In 2003, around 17 per cent of individuals with a schooling or employment restriction worked part time (compared to 22 per cent of employed individuals with no disability).

The nature of the disability can also limit hours of work (figure 9.2). In 2003, those with psychological disabilities had the lowest employment rate (around 23 per cent)

with more than half of those employed working part time. In comparison, 54 per cent of those with sensory or speech disabilities were employed, with a quarter of those employed part time.

Figure 9.2 Labour force status by disability type, 2003
Persons aged 15–64 years



Data source: ABS (*Disability, Ageing and Carers, Disability and Long Term Health Conditions*, 2003, Cat. no. 4430.0.55.002).

The analysis suggests that people with a disability are less likely to be working and, if they are working, are more likely to be working part time than are people without a disability. Furthermore, the likelihood of restricted involvement in the labour market increases with the severity of an individual’s disability and varies by the nature of the disability. The high rate of part time work may be a reflection of the work limitations placed on individuals by their disability, or it may reflect employer attitudes (ABS 1999).

For some people with a disability, part time employment provides an important opportunity to remain in contact with the world of work and the financial independence and broader social contact that this involves. Such social contact may be especially important to people with more limiting disabilities. Indeed, in a study of the employment outcomes of persons with a disability in the United States, Hotchkiss (2004) commented that:

... for some workers, part-time jobs, or jobs with flexible hours, are the difference between being out of the labor market and being gainfully employed. Workers with disabilities, for example, may view the prospect of part-time employment more enthusiastically than nondisabled workers do. (p. 1).

9.2 Part time work and health status

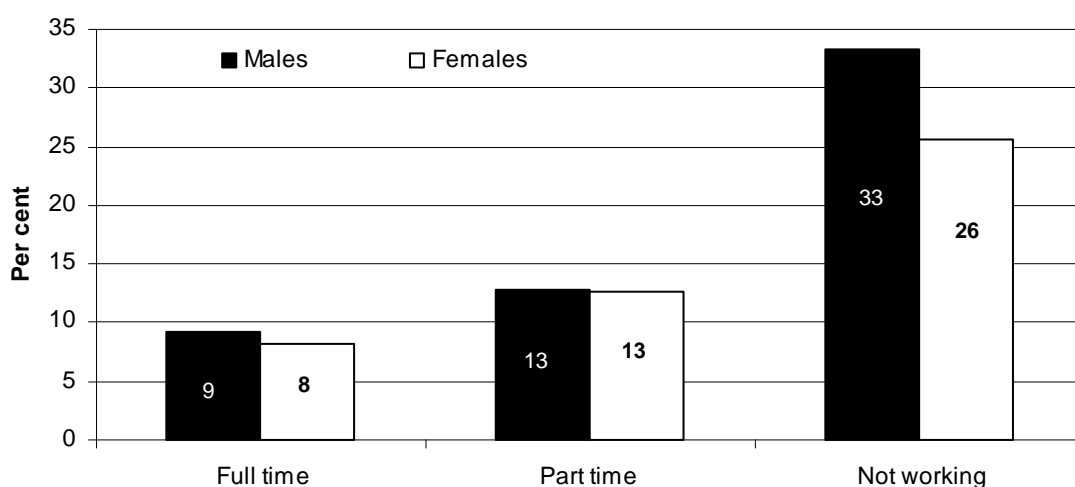
For some people, poor health may limit the extent to which they are actively involved in the labour market. By reducing an individual's productivity, poor health may lead to reduced returns from work and to increased difficulty in achieving preferred hours of work. For some people with poor health, their condition may be such that they are not capable of working full time or of working at all. Therefore, it may be expected that poor health will increase an individual's likelihood of being outside the labour force and, if they are working, increase their likelihood of working part time.

In the HILDA survey, respondents are asked to subjectively assess their general health condition. In 2005, for men aged 15–64 years, around 33 per cent of those not working rated their health as 'fair' or 'poor', whereas only 13 per cent of part time workers and 9 per cent of full time workers rated their health as 'fair' or 'poor' (figure 9.3). For women aged 15–64 years, those who were not employed had a lower share, around 26 per cent, with 'poor' or 'fair' health compared to that for men. Women who were working reported very similar levels of 'poor' or 'fair' health as those reported by men.

Respondents to the HILDA survey who worked part time were also asked about their main reasons for working part time rather than full time hours. In 2005, around 7 per cent of male part time workers and less than 3 per cent of female part time workers reported their 'own health or disability' as the main reason for working part time (HILDA release 5.1).

Figure 9.3 **Share of persons with 'poor' or 'fair' health by labour force status, 2005**

Persons aged 15–64 years



Data source: HILDA 2007 Release 5.1 (weighted data).

This evidence suggests that poor health is associated with an increased likelihood of being out of the labour force, and slightly more likely to be in part time compared to full time employment.

9.3 Do carers work part time?

In 2003, there were an estimated 2.6 million informal carers in Australia — 13 per cent of people living in households — who provided some assistance to those who needed help because of age or a disability (box 9.2).¹ Primary carers, as defined in box 9.2, comprised around 19 per cent of all carers in 2003. Women make up over half of all carers (54 per cent) and the clear majority of primary carers (around 71 per cent).

Box 9.2 Who are carers?

A *carer* is defined in the SDAC as a person of any age who provides any informal assistance, in terms of help or supervision, to persons with disabilities or long-term conditions, or older persons (those aged 60 years and over). This definition also includes providing care to children. This assistance has to be ongoing, or likely to be ongoing, for at least six months.

There are two classifications of carers:

- *Primary carers* — persons who provide the majority of informal assistance, in terms of help or supervision, to a person with one or more disabilities. The assistance has to be ongoing, or likely to be ongoing, for at least six months and be provided for one or more of the core activities (communication, mobility and self care).
- *Other carers* — persons who provide informal assistance, but who are not the main (or primary) source of assistance.

Source: ABS (2003c).

The caregiving role can be a time demanding role. As noted by Lee (2001, p. 150):

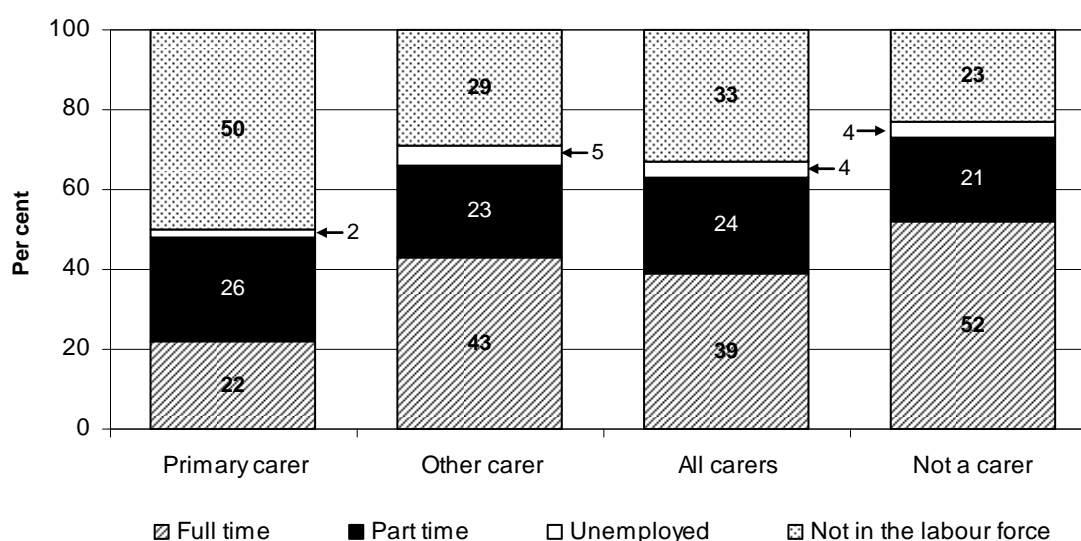
Caregivers have to deal with stress and restrictions on employment, social and leisure choices ... Many of them are combining family caregiving with paid work and running a household, and their ability to cope comes at considerable personal cost.

Balancing caring responsibilities and paid work may be particularly difficult for primary carers. In 2003, 18 per cent of primary carers spent between 20–39 hours per week providing care and a further 37 per cent spent 40 hours or more per week providing care (ABS 2003c). The need for flexible and/or shorter working hours to manage caring responsibilities may limit the employment choices for some carers.

¹ Data used in this section draws on the ABS 1998 and 2003 SDAC.

A lower proportion of carers are employed compared to individuals who did not have a caring role — 63 per cent of all carers compared to 73 per cent respectively in 2003 (figure 9.4). The reduction in employment falls entirely on full time employment. Indeed, a greater proportion of carers work part time compared to non-carers. This proportion is increased when the carer is a primary carer and providing the majority of assistance.

Figure 9.4 Labour force status of carers, 2003^a
Persons aged 15–64 years



^a In the SDAC, primary carers only include persons aged 15 years and over for whom a personal interview was conducted. Persons aged 15–17 years were only interviewed personally if parental permission was granted.

Data source: ABS (*Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Caring in the Community*, 2003, Cat. no. 4430.0.55.003).

This supports the view that carers, and particularly primary carers, use part time work to help meet caring responsibilities while undertaking paid work. For some 70 per cent of employed primary carers, taking on a caring role did not change their weekly hours of work (ABS 2003a). Yet, a large minority (23 per cent in 2003) of employed primary carers reduced their weekly working hours after taking on caring responsibilities. This provides additional evidence of a link between caring responsibilities and the likelihood of part time work.

9.4 Summary

This analysis indicates that for certain groups in the population, part time employment is a means of maintaining their involvement in the workforce commensurate with their capacity. People with a disability and carers are more likely to work part time if they are in the workforce. Moreover, the significance of part time employment increases as disabilities become more severe or the caring role more onerous, suggesting at the broad level that part time work is being used in a graduated manner to fit with capacity to work.

In contrast, the main impact that an individuals' health status appears to influence whether a person is in work or not. If a person is working, their health status appears to have only a small influence on the probability of being in full or part time work.