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## 2 International comparisons of part time work

How does part time work in Australia compare with part time work in other countries? This Chapter outlines Australia's experience of part time work within an international context. Specifically, it compares the level of part time work in Australia to that of other OECD countries. It also investigates other aspects of part time work across OECD countries such as the working hours of part time workers, and the incidence of part time work by different demographic groups.

Comparing the levels of part time work across countries is confounded by the different definitions and measurements used by countries. Several researchers have drawn attention to the various differences in what constitutes part time work in different countries (see, for example, de Neubourg 1985; OECD 1997).

Among OECD countries, the main areas in which definitions differ include:

- whether working hours are measured as 'actual hours' in the survey week, or 'usual hours' averaged over a longer period;
- whether the working hours from multiple jobs are acknowledged, or whether working hours refer only to a person's main job;
- the final classification rule for part time work, for example, fewer than 30 hours per week, fewer than 35 hours per week, or based on self assessment.

The ABS defines part time employment in Australia as working fewer than 35 hours per week. Workers are considered part time if their usual and actual weekly hours are both less than 35 hours.

The diversity of definitions of part time work and its impact on international comparisons are discussed further in section A.1 of Appendix A. This Chapter attempts to employ common definitions and measurements of part time employment where possible, or if this is not possible, those definitions and measurements which minimise any distortions in the international comparisons. Still, care should be taken in interpreting cross-national comparisons of part time work.

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## Data and method

This study uses the OECD data for work hours contained in Usual Hours Worked by Weekly Hour Bands (OECD 2007a). In order to make international data more comparable with Australia, the Chapter measures part time work in each country as consisting of fewer than 35 hours per week.

In order to account for the variety of definitions used internationally, the analysis includes alternative definitions of part time work as in Lemaitre, Marianna and van Bastelaer (1997). Additional comparisons are made using the national definitions of part time work (OECD 2007b) and a common definition of fewer than 30 weekly hours (OECD 2007c). The full results from these additional comparisons are contained in Appendix A.

Most of the data regarding work hours in OECD countries is based on usual hours worked in the main job. However, none of the measures available from the ABS for Australia is directly comparable to this measure. This Chapter uses the measure of actual hours in all jobs from the ABS as it is the measure used for Australian data by the OECD.<sup>1</sup> To make the analysis more complete, comparisons are also made using the ABS data referring to actual hours in the main job and usual hours in all jobs (ABS 2007b), and results from these comparisons are in Appendix A.

This Chapter also adjusts the part time rates of countries by taking into account the differences of age and gender structures in the workforces of countries. This aids the interpretation of international comparisons by accounting for many of the demographic factors affecting part time rates while leaving those differences that may be the result of behavioural and institutional differences between countries.

## 2.1 The prevalence and growth of part time work

In Australia, 35.5 per cent of the workforce worked less than 35 hours per week in 2006.<sup>2</sup> While Australia's ranking differs according to the measure used, it appears

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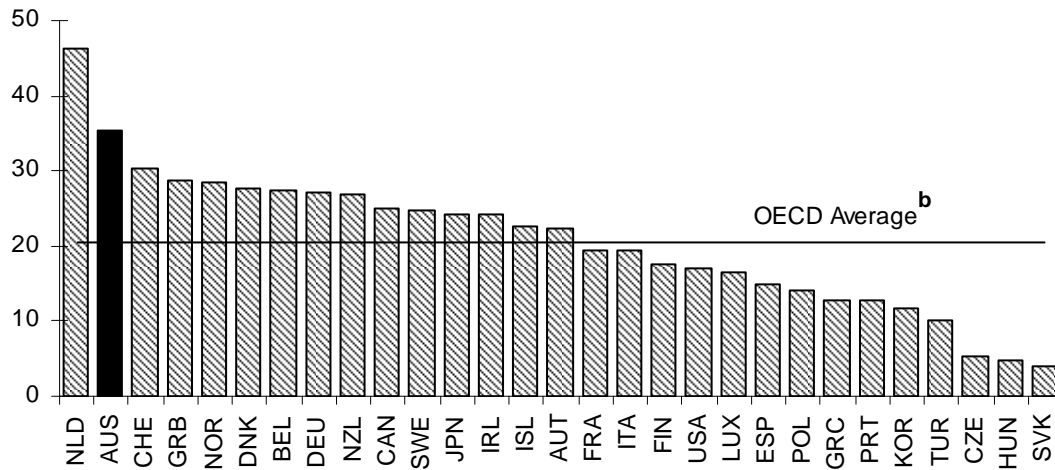
<sup>1</sup> In the OECD datasets for individuals working fewer than 30 hours per week and for individuals separated into discrete hour bands, the Australian data are presented as referring to usual working hours after 2000, and actual hours until that date. It was found by the authors of this paper and confirmed by the ABS that the data are consistent with actual working hours in all jobs as presented in *ABS Labour Force, Australia, Detailed — Electronic Delivery, February 2007 6291.0.55.001*.

<sup>2</sup> According to Australia's national definition, people who usually work less than 35 hours per week and actually worked less than 35 hours in the reference week, 28.6 per cent of Australia's workforce worked part time. A further dissection of the workforce shows that 29.6 per cent usually work part time hours, 35.5 per cent had actually worked part time hours during the survey week, and 36.6 per cent actually worked part time hours in their main job.

that part time work as a percentage of the workforce is higher in Australia than in most other OECD countries, regardless of the measure used. The rankings of countries are also shown to differ only slightly under different definitions of part time work (table A.1 in Appendix A).

Figure 2.1 shows the level of part time work in 2006, where part time work refers to persons working fewer than 35 hours per week. Countries vary in their use of part time work, ranging from less than five per cent to over forty-five per cent. Australia ranks behind only the Netherlands in terms of the part time work rate, although it has a much lower rate of part time work than the Netherlands.

**Figure 2.1 Part time workers as a per cent of all workers, 2006**  
Less than 35 weekly hours



<sup>a</sup> Rate of part time work in Australia is calculated using actual hours in all jobs, and is taken from the OECD dataset. <sup>b</sup> OECD average is based on 29 countries for which data were available in 2006, weighted by workforce size.

Data source: OECD (*Usual Hours Worked by Weekly Hour Bands*, 2007).

The use of alternate definitions of part time work clarifies some cross-national comparisons. For example, previous comparisons by the OECD (1997 and 2003) placed Japan in the top five users of part time work, in a similar range as Australia. Yet, when comparisons are made on the basis of common 30 and 35 hour cut-offs as opposed to national definitions, Japan is shown to rank 14<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> respectively (table A.2).

In summary, by any measure, Australia currently has a relatively high level of part time work compared to other OECD countries. And while changing definitions leads to considerable changes in the size of the part time work rates for some OECD countries, Australia's rank alters only slightly.

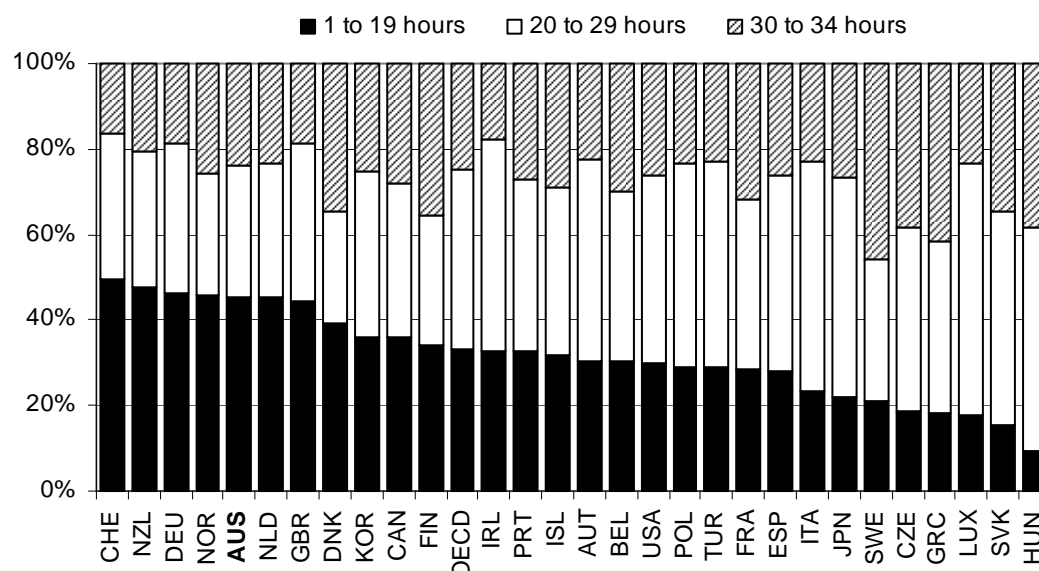
## Part time hours

While part time employment involves fewer hours than full time employment, there remains a wide range of weekly hours within part time employment. Indeed, the distribution of weekly working hours within the part time workforce differs considerably between countries. By comparing these distributions, it is possible to see how the use of part time employment varies in intensity between countries. This indicates how the experiences of part time employment may be different between countries even when their overall levels of part time employment are similar.

Figure 2.2 shows the proportions of the part time workforce divided according to the number of hours worked per week in 2006. Almost half of Australia's part time workforce works fewer than 20 hours per week, and less than one quarter works 30–35 hours per week. The distribution in Australia appears to be similar to that of the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Norway.

It appears to be more likely for countries with higher part time work rates to have more part time workers working less than 20 hours per week. Countries such as Japan and the United States have almost half of their part time workforces working 20–29 hours, and close to one quarter working less than 20 hours.

**Figure 2.2 Part time workforce by weekly hours<sup>a</sup>, 2006**  
Per cent of part time workers



<sup>a</sup> Data for Australia, Korea and Poland refer to actual hours. For other countries, data refer to usual hours. OECD average is based on 29 countries for which data were available in 2006, weighted by workforce size.

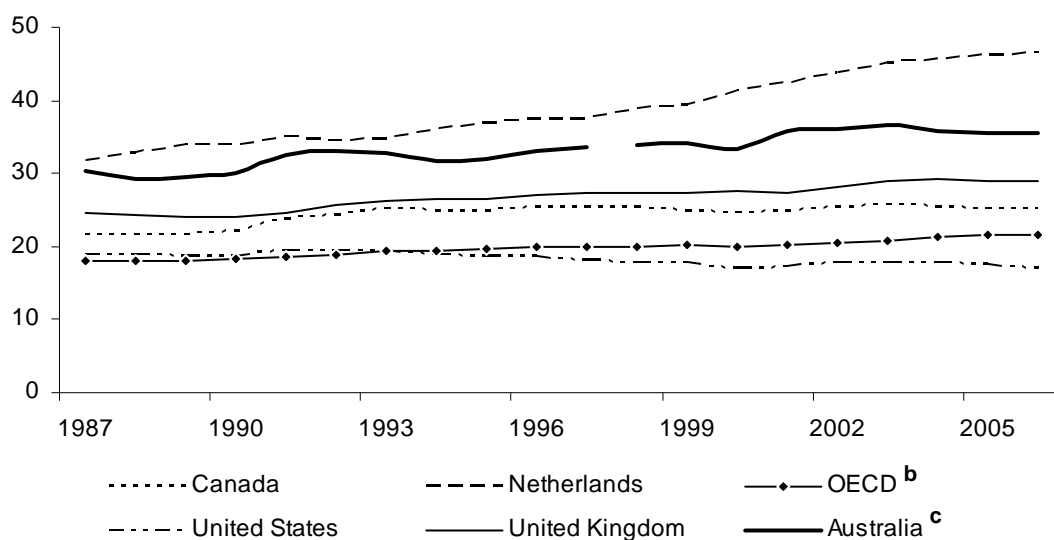
Data source: OECD (*Usual Hours Worked by Weekly Hour Bands*, 2007).

## Historical trends in part time rates

The measured growth of part time work in Australia is heavily influenced by the choice of definition. Under the national definition, Australia's part time employment as a share of total employment has grown from 19.7 per cent in 1987 to 28.6 per cent in 2006. By contrast, persons who worked fewer than 35 hours in the survey week comprised 30.3 per cent of the workforce in 1987, compared to 35.5 per cent in 2006.

Over the same period, countries such as Ireland, Spain, and Germany have doubled the part time proportions of their respective workforces. In contrast, the United States, Sweden, and Denmark all experienced slight decreases in part time work. Figure 2.3 shows comparisons of part time work between Australia and several OECD countries.

Figure 2.3 **Part time work<sup>a</sup> as a per cent of all workers, 1987–2006**  
Common 35 hour cut-off, per cent



<sup>a</sup> Part time work refers to work with fewer than 35 hours per week. <sup>b</sup> OECD average is based on countries for which data were available in from 1987–2006, and is weighted by workforce size. Countries include Australia; the Netherlands; the United Kingdom; Denmark; New Zealand; Sweden; Canada; Japan; the United States; France; Belgium; Germany; Ireland; Italy; Luxembourg; Portugal; Greece; Spain. <sup>c</sup> Australia experiences a series break at 1997–98 in the OECD data, due to the inclusion of persons older than 65.

Data source: OECD (*Usual Hours Worked by Weekly Hour Bands*, 2007).

Using the 35 hour cut-off and actual working hours, Australia's part time employment annual growth rate varied between -3 per cent in 1994 to 8 per cent in 1992, averaging 0.9 per cent per annum over the period 1987–2006. The OECD average for annual growth for this period of the part time rate was also 0.9 per cent.<sup>3</sup>

## 2.2 Comparisons based on gender

Across OECD countries, part time work is dominated by women. Over 60 per cent of part time workers in Australia are female. Nonetheless, Australia is ranked towards the bottom of the OECD in terms of female concentration of part time work. Table 2.1 shows the proportion of the part time workforce in Australia that is female, and Australia's ranking against other OECD countries (table A.3 contains full results). This relatively low concentration of female part time work can occur either because of a low rate of female part time work or a relatively high rate of male part time work.

Table 2.1 also shows that women dominate each of the three discrete hour bands of part time employment. In Australia, twice as many women than men work part time hours, except in the 30–34 hour band where women comprise around 58 per cent of the relevant part time workforce.

Table 2.1 **Gender share of part time work, 2006**

<i>Definitions</i>	<i>Per cent of part time workers who are female</i>	<i>Rank<sup>a</sup></i>
	%	No.
Less than 35 weekly hours	62.2	26 <sup>th</sup>
1–19 weekly hours	67.3	21 <sup>st</sup>
20–29 weekly hours	67.3	24 <sup>th</sup>
30–34 weekly hours	57.6	27 <sup>th</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Rank is calculated using 29 OECD countries for which data were available in 2006.

Source: OECD (*Usual Hours Worked by Weekly Hour Bands*, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> The OECD average is a weighted average of the proportions for Australia; the Netherlands; the United Kingdom; Denmark; New Zealand; Sweden; Canada; Japan; the United States; France; Belgium; Germany; Ireland; Italy; Luxembourg; Portugal; Greece; Spain — these countries where OECD members over the entire period.

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## Part time work in the male and female workforces

Australia has a high proportion of its working women in part time work compared to most other OECD countries — 51.5 per cent of the female workforce by the 35 hours cut-off, which is well above the OECD average (33 per cent). Australia ranks behind the Netherlands and Switzerland, and at a similar level to Germany and the United Kingdom. Table A.4 shows the prevalence of part time work as proportions of the male and female workforces in 2006.

Australia has also one of the highest male shares of part time employment in the workforce by the 35 hours cut-off at 22.5 per cent, whereas the OECD average is 10.4 per cent. The closest ranking countries are the Netherlands (23.2 per cent) and Canada (15.3 per cent).

Australia also differs from other OECD countries with regard to discrete weekly hour bands. For women, Australia ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> in the 1–19 and 30–34 hour bands respectively. In the 20–29 hour band, Australia ranks 11<sup>th</sup>. This suggests that Australia's relatively high rate of part time work among women may be largely due to the number working 1–19 and 30–34 hours per week.

For men, Australia ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> to the Netherlands within the 1–19 and 30–34 hour bands. Australia ranks 1<sup>st</sup> ahead of Japan in the 20–29 hour band, while the Netherlands drops to 4<sup>th</sup>. This suggests that relative to other countries, Australia's high rate of part time work among men is relatively constant across each weekly hour group.

Overall, Australia and the Netherlands rank highly among OECD countries in terms of the prevalence of part time work among both men and women. For other countries, part time work rates are more likely to be highly ranked for one gender of workers and not the other. For example, Canada and Denmark rank much higher for men than for women, while Switzerland and Ireland rank much higher for women than for men.

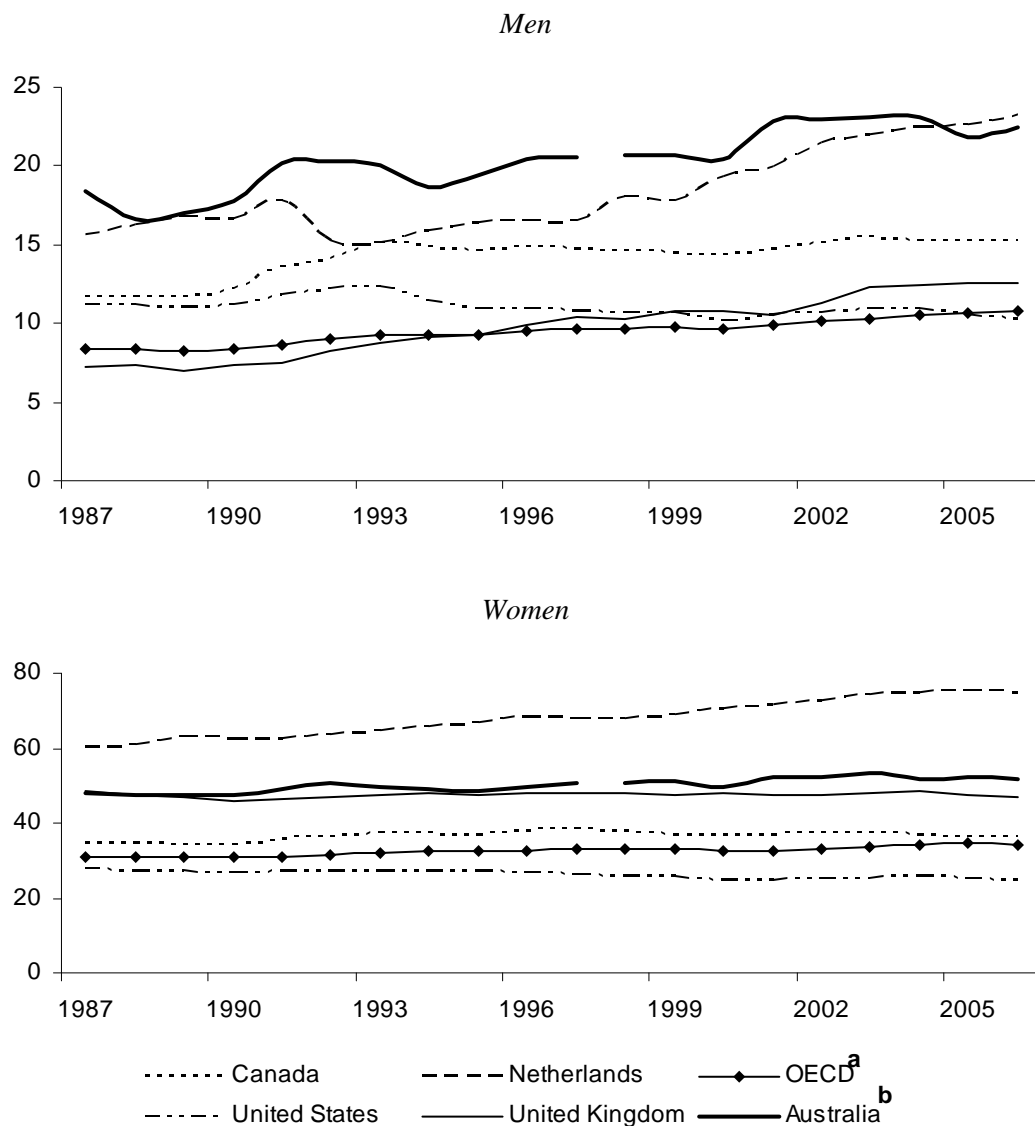
## Historical trends in part time work for men and women

Since the 1980s, Australia has shown trend growth in the male part time employment share of the workforce (figure 2.4). Australia's national part time employment share for men was the third highest among OECD countries in 2006.

Throughout the period 1987–2006, Australia has also had a high but stable share of part time employment among employed women compared to other OECD countries. It has yet to reach the levels found in the Netherlands, and is in a similar range as the United Kingdom.

**Figure 2.4 Part time work as a percentages of male and female workers, 1987–2006**

Common 35 hour cut-off, per cent of the total workforce



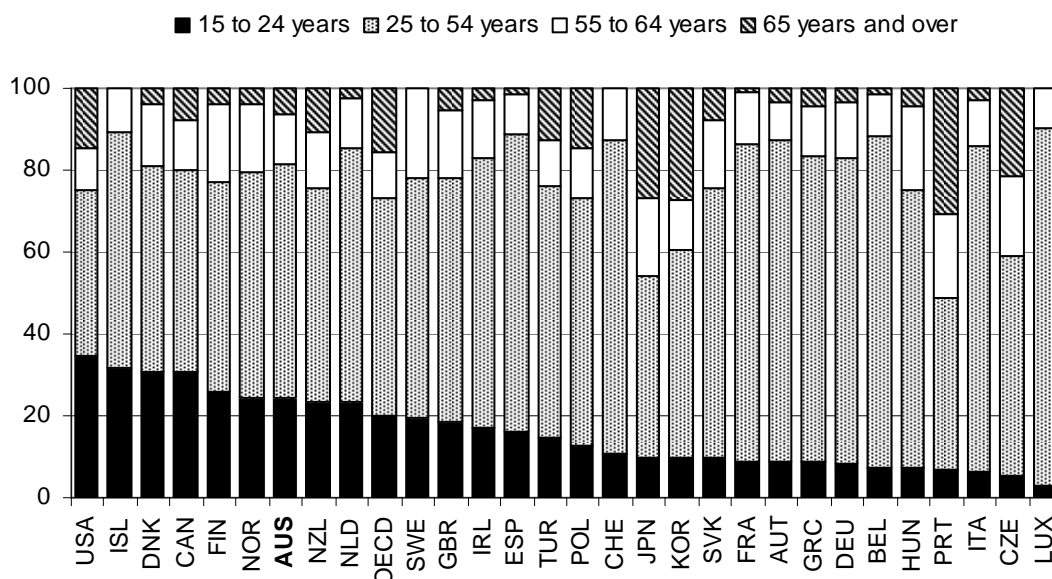
<sup>a</sup> OECD average is based on countries for which data were available in from 1987–2006, and is weighted by workforce size. Countries include Australia; the Netherlands; the United Kingdom; Denmark; New Zealand; Sweden; Canada; Japan; the United States; France; Belgium; Germany; Ireland; Italy; Luxembourg; Portugal; Greece; Spain. <sup>b</sup> Data for Australia refers to the national definition of part time work. Australia experiences a series break at 1997–98 in the OECD data, due to the inclusion of persons older than 65.

Data source: OECD (*Usual Hours Worked by Weekly Hour Bands*, 2007).

## 2.3 Comparisons based on age

OECD countries differ in the age composition of their part time workforce. Figure 2.5 shows the breakdown of the part time workforce with respect to four age groups in 2006, with full results presented in table A.5. The United States ranks highest in terms of the percentage of its part time workforce aged 15–25 years, while Portugal and Japan have the highest proportion of their part time workforce aged over 55 years. Australia is above the OECD average for all age groups except for those aged 65 years and over.

Figure 2.5 **Age composition of part time<sup>a</sup> workforces, 2006**  
Per cent of part time workers



<sup>a</sup> Part time work based on a common 35 hour cut-off. OECD average is based on 29 countries for which data were available in 2006, weighted by workforce size.

Data source: OECD (*Usual Hours Worked by Weekly Hour Bands*, 2007).

### Age specific part time work rates

For each of the OECD countries, part time employment shares of the workforce differ considerably between different age groups. OECD rankings for part time employment shares also differ between age groups. This suggests that part of the cross-national variation in the use of part time work is explained by forces that are age-specific.

For workers aged 15–24 years in Australia, the rate of part time work was 52.5 per cent in 2006. This ranked Australia 4th among OECD countries, with the Netherlands (68.9 per cent) and Denmark (61.3 per cent) being the highest users of youth part time work. Full results are presented in table A.6.

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Australia ranks fairly highly among OECD countries in terms of part time work for ‘prime age’ workers aged 25–54 years. In 2006, 34.1 per cent of the Australian prime age workforce worked fewer than 35 hours per week. This represents a larger proportion than in both Switzerland (24.2 per cent) and the Netherlands (29.6 per cent). Across the OECD, part time work rates tended to be lower in this age group than in others.

Australia shows different trends and rankings for the prevalence of part time work for people aged 55 years and over. Australia ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> in regard to part time work for people aged 55–64 years, behind the Netherlands and Switzerland. Australia ranks 11<sup>th</sup> for workers over 65 years.

### *Age and hour bands*

Age does not uniformly influence the number of part time hours worked. Figure 2.6 shows for each age group the share of the workforce working a particular range of hours. In Australia, a U-shape is evident in the 1–19 hour band — that is, higher shares of younger and older workers working short hours compared to prime age workers. Australia shows a relatively flat pattern for the 20–29 hour band, and the 30–34 hour band.

This outcome is also apparent in such countries as the Netherlands, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Norway and Denmark. In contrast, both the United States and Canada exhibit U-shaped patterns for each weekly hour band. Japan shows very similar U-shapes for the 1–19 and 20–29 hour bands but not for the 30–34 hour band.

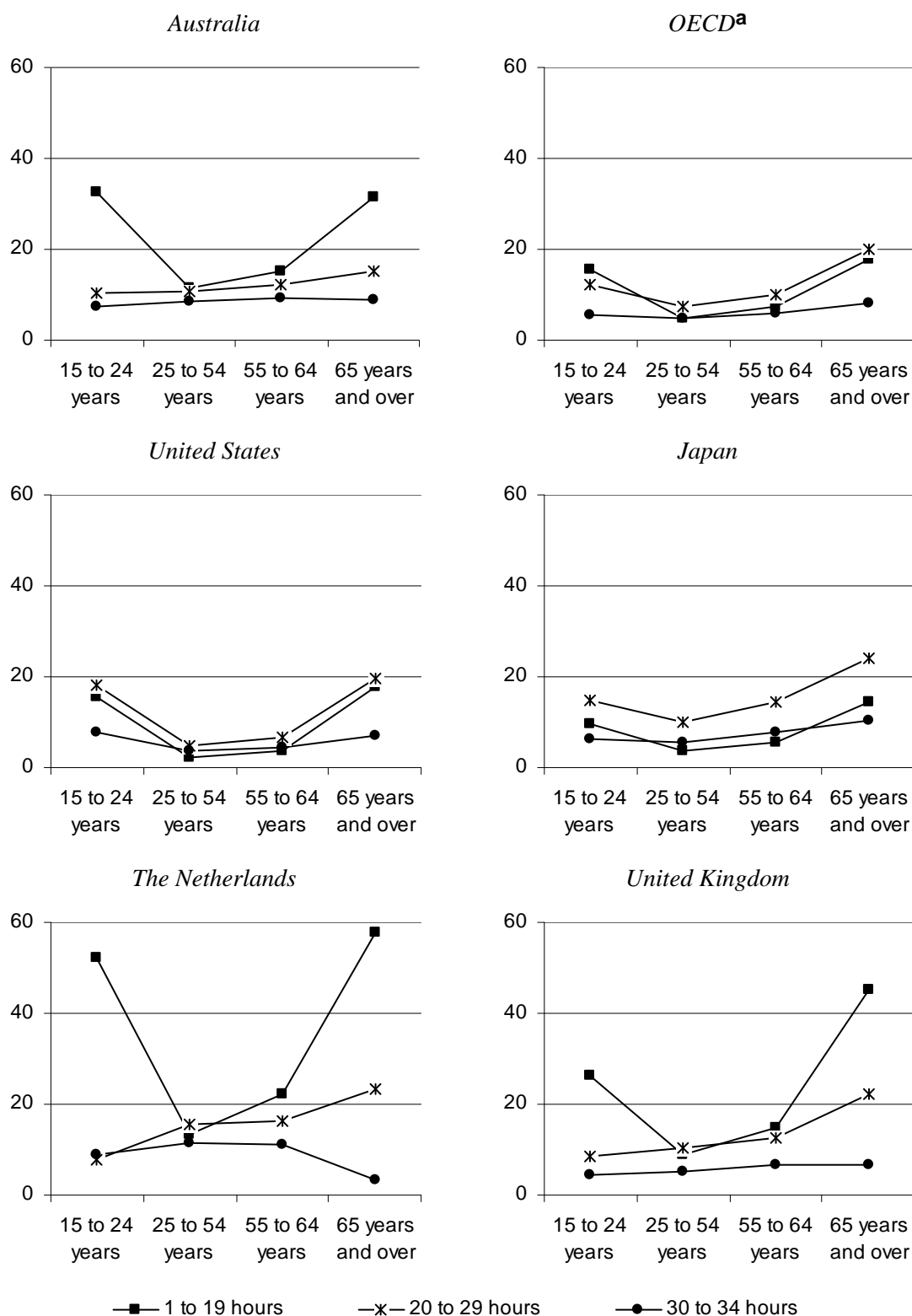
For Australia, this means that the differential effect of age on part time work is of the greatest magnitude in the 1–19 weekly hours band. This effect is essentially unobserved for the 20–29 and the 30–34 hour bands. As such, the internationally high proportions of part time work among younger and older Australians occur largely in the 1–19 hour band.

Further, Australians of all ages are more likely to work 1–19 hours per week than to work 20–29 or 30–34 hours. This contrasts with the United States and the average of the OECD, where persons aged 25–64 years are more likely to work 20–29 weekly hours than 1–19 hours (figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6 also shows that Australia, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands rank furthest above the OECD average for two particular groups: persons working 1–19 hours and who are aged between 15–24 years; and persons working 1–19 hours aged above 65 years.

Figure 2.6 **Weekly hour bands and age groups, 2006**

Per cent of workers in each age group that falls into each hour band



<sup>a</sup> OECD average is based on 29 countries for which data were available in 2006, weighted by workforce size.

Data source: OECD (*Usual Hours Worked by Weekly Hour Bands*, 2007).

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### *Age, gender and part time work*

An analysis of OECD data indicates that, for the majority of OECD countries including Australia, part time work is most common among younger workers (aged 15–24 years) and older workers (aged above 55 years). Figure 2.7 shows that the relationship between part time work and age is U-shaped for men. This is consistent with the theory that a person’s desired hours of work may change according to the stage of their life.<sup>4</sup>

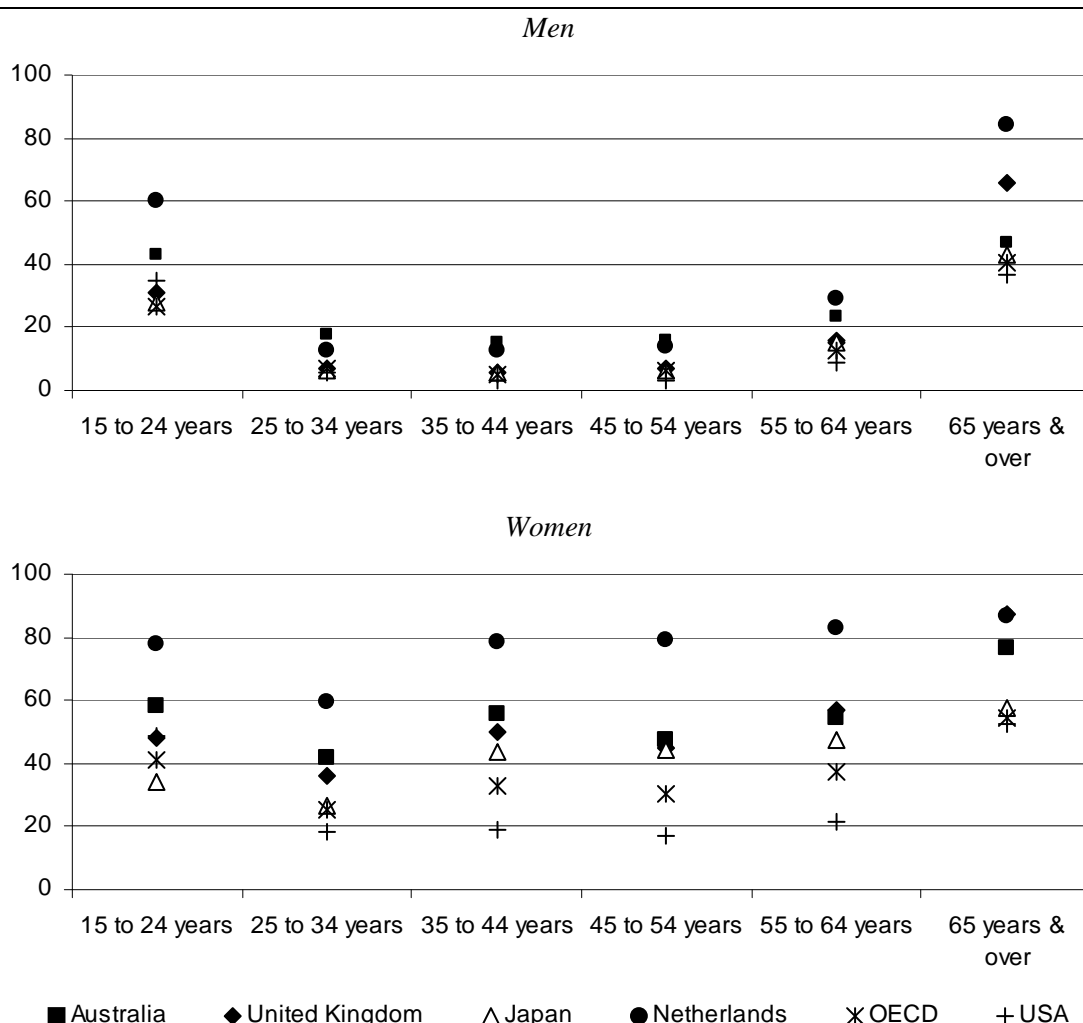
In some countries, part time work rates for women are also high during years that are likely to involve child rearing — for Australia, that is the 35–44 year group. Figure 2.7 shows that for countries including Australia and for the OECD average, the relationship between age and part time work rates is W-shaped. This pattern is not evident for women in the United States.

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<sup>4</sup> For countries that measure part time work based on all jobs held, the observed U-shaped pattern reflects the trade-off between work and leisure at different ages. For the majority of OECD countries who measure part time work based on the main job, the U-shape may also reflect a movement away from full time jobs and towards a reliance on at least one part time job at different ages. Since the percentage of multiple job holders is generally low in each of the OECD countries, the two measures are likely to reflect broadly similar phenomena.

Figure 2.7 **Part time work<sup>a</sup> by age groups, 2006**

Per cent of workers by age



<sup>a</sup> Part time work based on a common 35 hour cut-off. OECD average is based on 29 countries for which data were available in 2006 and is weighted by workforce size.

Data source: OECD (*Usual Hours Worked by Weekly Hour Bands*, 2007).

## 2.4 Adjusted comparisons

Across OECD countries, part time employment shares of the workforce tend to differ by age and gender. Specifically, part time work appears to be relatively more common among younger persons, among older persons, and among women in general. As such, cross-national comparisons of overall part time work shares will also reflect the differences in age and gender structures between workforces.

It would be useful to account for differences in age and gender structures when conducting international comparisons of part time employment shares. The analysis in this section employs a methodology based on Abhayaratna and Lattimore (2006),

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and discussed fully in section A.2 of Appendix A. Essentially, the data for all OECD countries are adjusted to reflect the same underlying age and gender structures that exist in Australia. At the same time, each country retains its own gender-specific and age-specific part time employment shares.

As in Abhayaratna and Lattimore (2006), this analysis improves the comparability of data by accounting, at least in part, for different data collection methodologies used across the OECD. Where applicable, this analysis imputes data for some age groups, for defence personnel, and for women on paid maternity leave. This is also outlined in Appendix A.

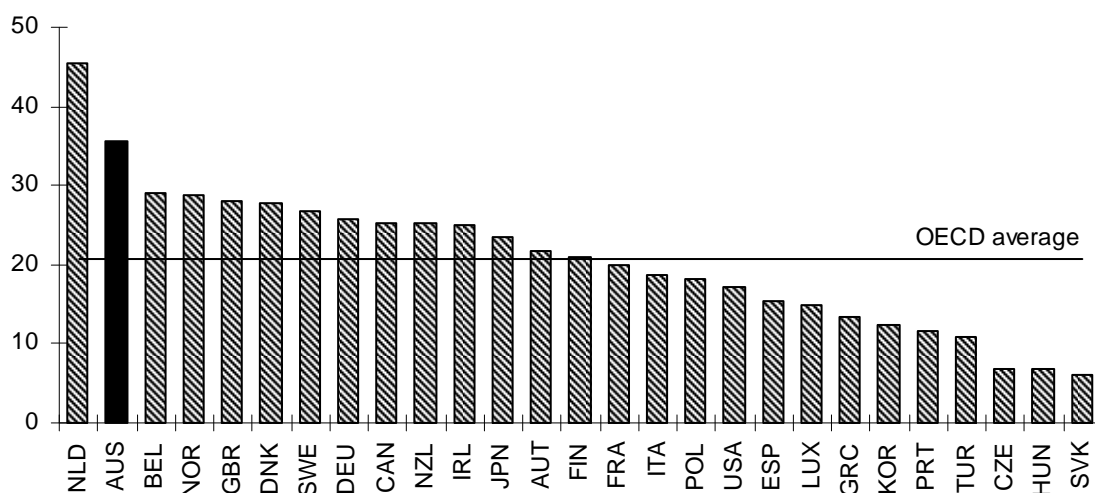
It is important to note that while this analysis may improve the comparisons of part time work, the adjustments do not provide more accurate estimates of part time work rates for the individual countries. Furthermore, the analysis does not consider any indirect effects of changing the age and gender structures of the workforce, nor any effects across time.

The adjusted comparisons result in slight changes to the unadjusted comparisons of OECD countries. These results are presented in figure 2.8, and in more detail in table A.7 in Appendix A. Australia's ranking is not changed by the adjustment process — its part time work rate is higher than all other OECD countries except for the Netherlands. Some countries experience marginal shifts in ranking, and in their part time work rate. This suggests that differences in age and gender structures between workforces do not explain a large part of the cross-national variation in part time work rates, nor Australia's ranking among OECD countries.

With the exception of Finland, countries that were above (below) the OECD average remained so. The part time rates of Finland and Poland were the most heavily affected by the adjustment process, rising by 3.4 and 4 percentage points respectively.

Figure 2.8 **Adjusted comparison of part time work rates<sup>a</sup>, 2006**

Per cent of the workers



<sup>a</sup> Part time work is defined as fewer than 35 weekly hours. For Poland and Korea, the data refer to actual hours. For all other countries, the data refer to usual hours. OECD average is calculated using all countries listed above, weighted by workforce size.

*Data sources:* Based on ABS (2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2008a); OECD (2007a, 2007b, 2008a); Eurostat (2008a and 2008b); Statistics Canada (2008); US Census Bureau (2004); Statistics New Zealand (2008); EOWA 1998); UN (2005a, 2005b) and Department of Defense (2005).

## 2.5 Linking the present analysis and past evidence

The analysis of data in this Chapter has shown that the prevalence of part time work differs significantly between OECD countries. Part of this difference may be due to differences in the measurement of part time work, or due to differences in age and gender structures within each workforce. However, these aspects do not appear to account for the majority of the cross-national variation in part time work rates.

Moreover, cross-national differences in part time work rates are not found to change dramatically in the short term. In other words, many of the rankings are consistent over time, with the prevalence of part time work being historically higher in some countries than others. This suggests that part time work cultures are largely country-specific, and are determined to a significant extent by factors which are slow to change. These slow changing factors may be of an institutional, attitudinal or regulatory nature.

The following section outlines a group of studies that are representative of the current cross-national research on part time work. It is by no means exhaustive, but it highlights the complexities involved in explaining the cross-national variation in part time work usage.

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## Explaining cross-national differences in part time work rates

A range of micro and macroeconomic factors can influence the desirability of part time work for individuals or firms. As such, differences in policy settings, institutions and economic activity between countries may help to explain the relative rates of part time work.

### *Macroeconomic factors*

Macroeconomic factors are potentially important determinants of the observed cross-national differences in part time work rates. Buddelmeyer, Mourre, and Ward (2004) examined several macroeconomic factors as potential determinants of part time work. They used a macro panel dataset covering 20 OECD countries, including Australia, for the years 1993–98. They specifically investigated the effect of the business cycle and structural characteristics on part time work.

Buddelmeyer, Mourre, and Ward (2004) found that, across the group of countries, the shares of part time work tended to be negatively affected by the business cycle. That is, part time work rates tended to rise during or shortly after recessions, and decrease during recoveries. The effect of the business cycle on part time work rates was particularly pronounced for young and male prime age workers. And, although business cycles had a significant effect on part time work rates, this effect was fairly limited in magnitude.

Further, Buddelmeyer, Mourre, and Ward (2004) found the cross-national differences in part time work rates to be related to structural and institutional characteristics. For instance, they found that part time work rates are significantly higher in countries where employment protection legislation is particularly stringent for workers on permanent contracts. They maintained that where the recruitment or dismissal of employees is made more difficult by such legislation, employers tend to hire part time workers to achieve greater flexibility of production.

### *Microeconomic factors*

Bardasi and Gornick (2000) investigated the effects of several microeconomic factors on part time work. They used the Luxembourg Income Study to identify potential determinants of part time work for women in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy and Germany. A multinomial logit model was used, which considered the probabilities of three employment states: working part time; working full time; and being economically inactive. The potential determinants included age, education, the presence and age of children, the presence of adult dependents, and the amount of other income in the household. Each of these determinants was found to be relevant in some degree.

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Bardasi and Gornick (2000) found that in each country, women were increasingly likely to work part time or to be economically inactive after having a child. The child's age was found to influence whether a mother works full time or part time. This age effect was strongest in Germany and the United Kingdom, significant in the United States and Canada, and very weak in Italy. And while the presence of inactive adult dependents generally decreases the probability of working at all, it sometimes has the opposite effect when the dependent is aged 65 years or over. Bardasi and Gornick attributed this to the use of elderly dependents as babysitters.

Bardasi and Gornick (2000) also considered the effect of other household income on employment decisions. They found that for Italy, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, women's employment habits were not significantly affected by the levels of other income in their households. Only in Germany did part time work among women become more common with increases in other household income.

Bielenski, Bosch and Wagner (2002) investigated the determinants of working hours in 16 European countries.<sup>5</sup> In a cross-national regression of men and women combined, they considered such determinants as age, household income, family structure, job characteristics and work attitudes. Working hours were found to be positively related to age, male gender and household income. People tended to work longer hours in manual jobs, or jobs with managerial duties. The presence of children in the household had relatively little effect on adult working hours, which was attributed to the fact that the sample contained both men and women.

Bielenski, Bosch and Wagner (2002) also conducted similar analysis for individual countries. They found working hours to be significantly lower for older and younger people than for those in the 'middle years'. This pattern was most significant for Denmark, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden and Norway.

The single-country regressions of Bielenski, Bosch and Wagner (2002) also showed that dependent children had little effect on working hours for Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Spain, Sweden and Norway. This was attributed to childcare provision either in the private market or by the family unit itself. In several other countries, the effect of dependent children on working hours differed between mothers and fathers and by the age of the child.

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<sup>5</sup> The countries included: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Norway.

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While Australia was not included as a sample country by either Bardasi and Gornick (2000) or Bielenski, Bosch and Wagner (2002), their studies showed that cross-national differences in part time work rates are likely to be associated with a combination of microeconomic factors. These include motherhood, the age and number of other household dependents, job characteristics and the level of household income.

Drawing on these studies, the differences in part time work rates between countries appear to be related to both micro and macroeconomic factors. Such factors relate to the economic climate, institutional arrangements, family structures and individual responsibilities. And while they are found to influence the rate of part time work within each country, these factors cannot fully explain the extent of variation between countries.

## 2.6 Summary

This Chapter compared the prevalence of part time work in Australia to that of other OECD countries. Because the available data are often not directly comparable, it can be difficult to make accurate comparisons. However, as far as Australia is concerned, the different measures of part time work are suggestive of broadly similar patterns. Australia has a relatively high prevalence of part time work in proportion to overall employment for both men and women. Indeed, the data indicates that Australia has one of the highest rates of male part time work in the OECD. Part time workers in Australia are also more likely than in other countries to work either 1–19 hours per week or 30–34 hours per week.

Part time work in Australia is dominated by women but, because of unusually high male part time employment, to a lesser extent than in most other OECD countries. OECD countries generally had female majorities in their part time workforces, regardless of the overall prevalence of part time work. The literature shows women tend to rely more part time work, often due to family commitments. And, while many countries have experienced large increases in female participation and employment in recent years, the impact on part time work rates has varied.

Like most OECD countries, the prevalence of part time work in Australia is higher for younger people (aged 15–24 years) and older people (aged 55 years and over). Similar to the Netherlands, this age effect in Australia is strongest among people working fewer than 20 hours. In most countries, age effects also differ for men and women. For Australia and the OECD on average, women have a higher rate of part time work around the ages 30–34 years.

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Although part time rates for each country differed with age and gender, the overall comparisons were similar when age and gender structures of the workforce were accounted for. This suggests that most of the cross-national variation in part time work rates is explained by other factors.

A number of other factors are likely to be important in determining the prevalence of part time work in each country, as evidenced in the literature. Factors such as family structure, the level of household income, and the sharing of family responsibilities are likely to affect people's ability or need to work part time. The availability of part time jobs is likely to be affected by macroeconomic conditions, as well as institutional and industrial arrangements. The role of these factors in the Australian context are explored in following Chapters.

