

# THIRTY FAMILIES

Interim Report of the Thirty Families Project:  
The Impact of Work Hours on New Zealand  
Workers and Their Families

A Report Commissioned by  
the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, 2002



NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL OF TRADE UNIONS





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## **KEY FINDINGS**

### **Background of the Study**

In 2001 the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU), concerned by the anecdotal evidence that New Zealand workers were working long and difficult work hours, decided to conduct research into work life balance. The NZCTU identified work hours, leave entitlement and the challenges of balancing work and family as critical factors in work life balance.

The main plank of the New Zealand project was a series of qualitative interviews with workers and their families. The study sought the experiences and stories of thirty New Zealand families. The study's findings would then provide the NZCTU with the basis for a work life balance campaign of public and union member education, lobbying for legislative changes, and bargaining for improved work conditions to establish work life balance for New Zealand workers, their families and their communities.

This interim report provides a snapshot of the Thirty Families project. It highlights one of the three themes of the qualitative interviews: work hours. The report includes an overview of the research project, and material from interview discussions on work hours, including why people work long hours, and the impact of these hours on individual workers, and their families.

### **Number of Hours Worked**

For almost all of the workers we interviewed in the Thirty Families Project, work hours were a major issue with huge implications for individual workers, their families, and their communities. For many workers, the hours were simply too long, with many working an average 45 to 55 hours per week, and some working even longer hours. Almost all of those who regularly worked more than 45 hours per week regarded these hours as long, unreasonable, and with significant negative effects on their own lives, and the lives of their families.

Some workers worked long hours on a paid basis, but many received little or no payment for the extra hours they worked. Those who worked long hours unpaid, were motivated by a commitment to the job, pressure from an employer, understaffing or a combination of these forces. They often felt their contribution was undervalued, not only in financial terms, but also in the lack of recognition for the negative impact on themselves, and their families.



For those who worked long hours with paid overtime, the key issue was control over the extra hours: the capacity to say yes or no to them. Many worked long hours without real control over their hours, and the issue of control affected both those who worked unpaid and paid overtime. Those in the hospitality industry, for example, felt that they could not refuse long hours. Those on building sites commented that they were under pressure to work long (paid) hours or lose their jobs or work in the future. Doctors commented on the fear of a loss of training opportunities if they refused long hours.

In some cases the length of work hours was coupled with significant pressure, and work intensity. Workers in the hospitality industry, in nursing, teaching, social work, in call centres, in the public service and in law, all commented on the constant pressure to complete more and more work, with fewer and fewer workers, resources and time. Many workers said that work was frequently unfinished at the end of the day, and at the end of the week. Workers constantly felt that they "never got on top of it, or to the end of it."

For yet other workers, it was the unpredictability of their working hours, both the length and distribution, which caused them the greatest concern, and the greatest intrusion into other aspects of their lives. Workers commented on work days which ballooned at the end of the day by an hour, or two or three, extra shifts, and unexpected shift changes, or increasingly common, the extension of work into evenings and weekends with the advent of new technology.

For many workers, cell phones, text messaging, e-mail and laptops, have forced work into the home in new ways that lengthen working days and intensify work. Workers, and partners, said that many employers held an expectation that workers were "available" well beyond their "standard" work hours. Some described being expected to have their mobiles on for long periods. For example one engineer described how he was required to have his phone on 'from 6 am to 6 pm everyday... So you haven't even started work and the boss will be on the phone talking to you, he does the same on the way home."

A young lawyer, Megan, said that if she doesn't check her e-mail at home during the weekends, she often misses out on reading important messages from her boss, which often include instructions to read a brief, or prepare a report for Monday. By not reading her e-mail, Megan takes the chance that she won't have done the work by Monday, and thus will be reprimanded by her boss.

### **The Effect of Work Hours on Individuals and Families**

This research highlights the very serious effects of long and difficult work hours on individual workers and their families. Many workers commented on the pressure of long and or difficult work hours, and the impact on their lifestyle, "a work / eat / sleep cycle", and on their health. We heard



numerous stories of workers and partner's who were worried about workers driving home after extremely long work hours, of workers who operate machinery whilst fatigued, and avoidable injuries that occurred at the end of long shifts.

For many workers, their work hours had led to a significant reduction in the scope and level of interaction with friends, family and communities. Less than a third of workers we interviewed were involved regularly in any activities outside of their work, or immediate family, and for these workers, it was primarily church which constituted community involvement. Other workers remarked that they used to be involved in sports teams, social clubs, community groups, but a lack of time had forced them to pull back from these activities and concentrate on their work and their immediate family.

This research highlights the major impact the length of work hours are having on the ability of many workers to balance their work and family. Most of the families in this study were under extraordinary stress - workers and partners were struggling to find some sort of balance between their work, and the lives they shared with their friends and families, and communities, but invariably something, or usually someone, missed out.

Many workers felt anxious or regretful about inadequate amounts and quality of time with their partners and their children. They were concerned about their impact of their hours on themselves and their intimate relationships, particularly the toll taken by tiredness, limited amounts of time, and exhaustion on those relationships.

Women workers and partners were also highly concerned about the extra stress placed on women by the "double shifts" of paid work and domestic labour. Women noted that it was their work lives which were usually fitted in around their caring responsibilities, and that their partner's careers often depended on their provision of a significant level of housework and child care. For women in paid work, in a number of cases working very long hours themselves, the level of unpaid work in the home did not appear to diminish with their increased level of paid work. In this way, all of the women in our study were working extremely long hours, both in the workplace and in the home.

However, long hours are not a problem only for those with child care responsibilities. This study shows that people with other kinds of family obligations are also affected by long hours. In some instances workers without children found themselves being "leaned on to work longer hours where those with families are, in some circumstances, protected by their family responsibilities".

In the end workers in all types of family formations believe that a new expectation has emerged of long hours which affect not just those with children and families, they affect all workers.



## **Development of a Long Hours Culture**

Overall this study reveals that long hours are an entrenched and widespread experience across many occupations and industries in New Zealand. Many interviewees felt they had little real choice in determining or changing their hours. Some have tried to take control by changing jobs, going part-time, taking demotions or changing employers - and sometimes these strategies have worked. However many feel that they have little power to control or reduce their long hours. These hours have created, de facto, a new standard for work hours in "workplaces that are hungry for their contribution."

There are a number of forces which combine to establish a culture of long hours. Some workers want higher incomes through paid overtime, and there are examples where this income is firmly built into household budgets. For others, their paid overtime is not voluntary. In the building industry and in medicine, for example, there is extensive evidence of workers feeling under strong pressure to work overtime.

Many workers we interviewed were not being paid for their overtime. They are pulled into long hours because they want to get the job done or because their supervisors and employers demand it. Teachers want to do their jobs well for their students benefit, doctors and nurses are committed to their patients. However, schools and hospitals appear to be sites of "entrenched patterns of unpaid hours". The commitment of teachers, doctors and nurses, provides fertile ground on which to under staff work places and run lean budgets. The real dollars that are saved, however, do not come without costs to the individuals who work them, their families and friends and the larger community.

Many workers described their workplaces as places where long hours are entrenched, where refusing them meant being tainted as a poor worker, destined for negative treatment, redundancy, undesirable tasks, or the failure to be offered further work. New technologies like the mobile phone have fastened the development of this culture of long hours, enabling work to move more easily into the home and private lives of workers.

The development of a culture of long and unreasonable hours in many workplaces provides a strong argument for change. Legislative, regulatory and contractual change is required in order to weaken the hold of long hours in many workplaces, and lead to a better, and more reasonable balance between work and life for workers, and their families, in New Zealand.



# **FOREWORD**

**By Ross Wilson,  
President,  
New Zealand Council of Trade Unions**

## **Work/Life – tackling the big issue for workers**

The CTU has undertaken this research because of the increasing level of concern among union members about the negative impacts of long working hours on health and safety and family life.

As the largest democratic organisation in New Zealand with almost 300,000 affiliated union members, the CTU seeks to raise this concern for public debate.

It is becoming increasingly clear that there is strong public support for regulation of excessive working hours, and the introduction of family friendly workplace policies. People want to get some balance back into their lives.

The first part of the Thirty Families report graphically illustrates the negative effects of excessive working hours.

The CTU intends to present this report to the incoming Government as evidence that excessive work hours prevent workers spending time with their families and playing a role in their communities.

On behalf of New Zealand workers and their families and communities the CTU will seek a concrete commitment to addressing the issue from the Government.

For our part, the CTU will work with our 33 affiliated unions to promote collective bargaining to attack excessive working hours and to enable workers to spend quality time with their families and be part of their communities.

Throughout the year we will co-ordinate a Get A Life! campaign across unions to achieve a quality of life at work and outside of work.

Achieving a balance between working life and private life is necessary for the health of our society. Long working hours deny people the opportunity to relate to family and friends and to contribute to community life.

I hope this research report will contribute to a long overdue debate and the real changes – both legal and through collective bargaining - needed to achieve a modern workplace environment which recognises and values workers' family and community responsibilities.



## Introduction

*"When I took this job, the boss warned me that when it got busy, the hours could be long. I didn't realise that he meant it would always be busy, and I would always be working long hours. Sometimes when I'm in my office at 9 or 10 at night, I think about going back to University and becoming a perpetual student, or maybe, best of all, chucking this bloody job in and going on the dole."*

*Megan, 28 year old Lawyer*

*"I work a split shift, from 1 pm to 4 pm, then again from 1 am to 4 am. When I can, I do other manual work, like lawn mowing, cleaning gutters, stuff like that. I do that in the mornings, or evenings, depending on when they want me to be there. All up I work 48 hours regular, and then maybe, say, 10 to 12 hours extra a week. I don't do much else in between. Just eat, sleep, watch TV. I see the family on Sundays."*

*Gerry, 52 year old Truck Driver*

According to anecdotal evidence, the standard 40 hour working week is a thing of the past. Many New Zealand workers are working much longer hours per week, while many struggle to work enough hours to pay for themselves and their families. There is a growing body of research on the changing patterns of work hours in New Zealand. The 1999 Time Use Survey conducted by Statistics New Zealand found that while the majority of paid work is still done between 8 am and 6 pm, Monday to Friday, there were an increasing number of workers who were working outside these hours. Some work throughout these hours plus additional hours at night and in the weekends, and some work wholly outside of these "standard" hours. The Ministry of Women's Affairs has also conducted research on the changing patterns of women's work hours, in particular, the distribution and length of their paid and unpaid work.

Despite this increase in quantitative research, there has been a distinct lack of qualitative research on the impact of the changing patterns of work hours on individual workers, their families and their communities. Little is known of the challenges faced by families attempting to maintain relationships whilst members are working long, or perhaps irregular work hours. Little is known of the child care arrangements made by families in which one or two parents are working long hours. Even less is known about what legislative, regulatory, bargaining or cultural factors workers believe would be useful in helping them establish work life balance, for themselves, their families and their communities.



As the length and distribution of work hours have become increasingly important to workers from all sectors of society, so too the issues of work life balance have become important to the union movement which advocates for better working conditions for workers. In Australia, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) has been at the forefront of research on work hours and work life balance. In 2000 the ACTU launched a major research study, entitled the Fifty Families Research Project. The study analysed just over 50 families who experience work hours that are 'unreasonable': including very long hours, irregular shift work, unpredictable hours, or combinations of these.

The Fifty Families study explored what these unreasonable work hours were doing to Australian workers, their families and their communities. The study concluded that the majority of workers and their families are negatively affected by unreasonable hours, and significant changes must be made in order for Australian workers to achieve work life balance.

In response to the research, in May 2000 the ACTU lodged the "Reasonable Hours Test Case" with the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. The test case was designed to establish a federal measure of "reasonable hours" including; breaks at work, enough daily rest, limits on overtime, maximum weekly hours, compensatory rest and time off, limits on night work, predictable working hours, annual and other leave entitlements, special provisions for young workers, improved maternity benefits, pre natal leave, and child care.

In 2001 the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU), concerned by the anecdotal evidence that New Zealand workers were similarly working long, and difficult work hours, decided to conduct research into work life balance. The ACTU Fifty Families project concentrated primarily on work hours. The NZCTU wanted to look at work hours as part of a broader focus on the work/life pressures faced by workers here. Therefore it concentrated on three areas:

1. work hours
2. leave entitlements and
3. balancing work and family responsibilities

Like the ACTU study, the main plank of the New Zealand project was a series of qualitative interviews with workers and their families. The study sought the experiences and stories of thirty New Zealand families. The study's findings would then provide the NZCTU with the basis for a work life balance campaign of public and union member education, lobbying for legislative changes, and bargaining for improved work conditions to establish work life balance for New Zealand workers, their families and their communities.

This is the first report published as part of the Thirty Families project. It highlights the impact of long hours on workers and their families. Further reports will look specifically at the adequacy of



leave entitlements and current workplace practices in enabling workers to balance paid work and unpaid family responsibilities.

### *Structure of this Report*

This report is divided into the following sections:

1. Overview of the 30 Families research project
2. Number of hours worked
3. Why do People work Long Hours?
  - ? need the money
  - ? under-staffing
  - ? commitment to the work
  - ? in order to keep the job
  - ? nature of the job
  - ? voluntary work expected as part of the job
4. Impacts on Individual Workers
  - ? the Work / Eat / Sleep cycle
  - ? impacts on health and well-being
  - ? impacts on social relationships
5. Impacts on Families
  - ? lack of time with children and partners
  - ? poorer quality of time
  - ? pressure on wider family obligations
6. Specific issues for Women
  - ? high levels of unpaid work
  - ? effects on women's careers

### *Acknowledgements*

We would like to thank all the workers, partners, and families who participated in this study. All of the participants made time in their busy schedules to participate in the research, and contributed their very personal, often very emotional stories, in order to further our understanding of the work life balance issues facing New Zealand workers. We thank them for their time and their willingness to share their experiences and ideas.



We would also like to thank all of the union organisers and union secretaries who helped the CTU establish contact with the workers we interviewed during this research project. Without their help we would not have been able to interview such a wide range of people, from such a wide range of occupations, and from whom we gathered such rich information. We hope that their stories will illuminate the work of the CTU, as well as affiliated unions.



# 1 Thirty Families Research Project Overview

The Thirty Families research project explores the work life balance of a range of New Zealand workers, and their families. The stories emerged from a series of qualitative interviews with individual workers, and where appropriate, interviews with their partners.

The protocol for the research is included as an appendix. This includes an outline of the purpose and approach of the study, and a list of the questions asked. The protocol gave participants a guarantee of the confidentiality of their interviews to the researchers.

## *Conduct of Interviews*

In total 40 primary interviews, and 30 interviews with partners, were conducted over a three month period in January, February and March 2002.

The interviews were mostly conducted in person either in workers homes or if suitable in a workplace. Where the location of workers made a personal interview impossible, telephone interviews were conducted and detailed notes made. Almost all of the interviewees agreed for their interview to be recorded. In the few cases where the worker did not want to be taped, written notes were made of the interview.

In view of the requirement that these interviews be kept confidential, all research materials are kept in a locked facility available only to the researchers, and pseudonyms have been used throughout this study. In some cases, details of workplaces, families or individuals have been modified so that workers cannot be identified.

Two separate sets of interview questions were devised for workers and for their partners. These questions were designed to elicit general information about the interviewee's hours of work, their leave entitlement, and the demands they faced in balancing their work and their family. Further, the interviews sought information on the perceived effects of the hours worked, leave, and demands of work and family, on the individuals, their family and community. Questions were carefully constructed to be open and to ensure a relatively unstructured conversation. In several cases, couples were interviewed together where separate interviews were not convenient. On average, interviews lasted between forty five and sixty minutes.

In all cases the interview questions were used only as a general guide. We aimed to pursue issues of interest to the interviewee in the context of a general discussion. All questions were open ended,



and final questions asked for "further thoughts" or if there was "anything else you would like to say about your work hours, leave or balancing work and family'.

Full interview transcripts were not made, although detailed notes were taken from all interviews. This report uses blocks of direct quotes from these interviews. These quotes have been organised in a thematic way to illustrate particular points.

### *Selection of Interviewees*

The selection of interviewees in the Thirty Families research project was done in the following manner. Using the nine major occupational groups identified by Statistics New Zealand, we used stratified sampling to determine how many workers from each group we needed to interview (as a percentage of a total of thirty families). We then selected workers from large occupations / industries within each strata, and who were represented by a union affiliated to the CTU. Only two interviewees were not represented by a union.

We investigated the possibility of generating a randomly selected group of workers, however, we decided against this method in favour of selecting from union members. This was principally because union generated interviewees was the quickest and most accessible means available to us, but also because we needed the results to illuminate the experiences of workers who would be most directly affected by any changes affected by union education, lobbying or bargaining.

Union organisers were asked to identify a number of workers for whom work hours, leave, and balancing work and family were significant issues. Further, we asked for workers who were generally representative of their occupations or industry, for example, we asked the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) and Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) for the names of women teachers, given the predominance of women in the primary and secondary teaching profession. In a number of cases we sought out workers with specific characteristics, for instance younger workers, to ensure there was a wide representation of workers.

With the names of a range of workers, we then asked each of the workers if they would be willing to be interviewed. We asked each of these workers that were in a relationship for permission to approach their partners for interview. We then approached their partners for permission. Ten workers were either single, or did not wish their partner to be interviewed.

Setting up interviews of workers, along with interviews of their partners, was a challenge, given the long work hours, and busy lives led by many of the interviewees. In a number of cases, the prospect of being interviewed on their work life balance, an issue which led to significant worry and concern for many workers anyway, was daunting. However, many workers agreed to the interview because



they wanted to tell their story, particularly in the hope that changes and improvements might come of it. Once the interviews began, many workers who had been hesitant about sharing their stories, became animated and talked at length. In a large number of cases, partners who also had significant issues in terms of their work hours, leave, and balancing work and family were happy to comment on their partner's work situation, as well as share their own experiences.

As in the ACTU Fifty Families research we did not interview children as part of this research study. This was partly because of limited time, and partly because of specific ethical issues relating to the interviewing of minors. However, the impact of long hours upon children certainly emerged as a key issue of concern to families included in this study, and should be one of the key issues for further research.

### *Range of Interviewees*

In selecting our interviewees we tried to find workers from a wide range of occupations and industries, from general labourers through to highly paid doctors and lawyers. As noted earlier, in selecting the specific worker, we tried to find workers who were typical of their occupation and industries.

Of the 40 primary interviewees, 21 were women, and 19 men. In terms of ethnicity, 25 were New Zealand European, 8 percent Maori, and 7 Pacific Island. In terms of age, 12 interviewees were aged 20 - 30, 9 aged 30 - 40, 13 aged 40 - 50, and 6 aged 50 plus.

The majority of interviewees lived in couple households with children, 18 out of 30 primary interviewees, with 4 in couple-only households, 4 who were single parents, and 4 workers who did not have partners or children. The responses to questions about the impact of work hours strongly reflected the various family structures and arrangements in which the interviewees lived. For example, interviewees with children noted that long work hours were particularly difficult to balance with picking children up from school and care of children during school holidays. Though a number of specific issues emerged, general themes of pressure in balancing work hours and family were common to all interviewees regardless of family set up.



### *Limitations of the study*

These qualitative interviews were designed to enable workers' to identify the pressures paid work has on the rest of their lives. Clearly this is an indicative piece of research, describing rather than quantifying the sorts of work/life issues that workers are facing. Like similar qualitative research projects, its findings cannot be extrapolated and generalised across the New Zealand population as a whole. Its strengths lie in the ability of workers' stories to explain the cumulative impact of paid work on all aspects of their lives. By interviewing a wide range of workers, this report also gives some indication of the extent to which these issues are common concerns.



## 2. Number of Hours Worked

According to the Workforce 2010 report (Ministry of Social Development, New Zealand Government, March 2001) the usual hours of paid work for men and women have been changing. While a majority of both males and females are still contracted to work for 40 hours per week, there has been a significant move away from the 40 hour week towards either end of the hours-per-week spectrum. Many New Zealanders are finding it difficult to work enough regular hours of paid work to look after themselves and their families, while others (many of whom are technically employed for 40 hours per week) are finding themselves working far longer hours, both in the workplace and in the home. There has also been a significant increase in the number of people who hold down more than one job, variously described as "multiple job holders" or "portfolio workers".

Despite this increasing body of quantitative evidence as to the changing patterns of work hours in New Zealand, the research does not answer the critical question of what impact these work hours have on the lives of New Zealand workers, their families and communities. The Thirty Families study, commissioned by the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, is designed as a qualitative analysis of the impact of work hours.

In our interviews we asked workers how many hours they were meant to work, and then how many hours they actually worked. We asked whether they took breaks for lunch (or dinner), for morning or afternoon tea. We asked workers whether they worked at home, and if so, how many hours this added to their regular working week. Finally, we asked them why they worked the hours they did, and what impact these hours had on them as individuals, and on their families.

The workers involved in this study worked a variety of hours, from sales assistants and aged care workers who could not get enough regular work hours, (and depended on extra shifts to top up their individual and family budgets), to the theatre technician who regularly worked 80 hours or more each week. Half of the workers we interviewed worked between 40 and 50 hours per week. These workers included a fire-fighter who was contracted for, and worked, 48 hours per week, 2 day shifts and 2 night shifts in an 8 day cycle, and a carpenter who was contracted for, and worked 44 hours per week including Saturday mornings. For many workers in this group, there was a distinct gap between their contracted hours of work, and the hours they actually worked each week. Both secretaries interviewed in this project, for example, were contracted for 37.5 hours per week, and yet both worked an average 45 to 50 hours per week. One nurse we interviewed was delighted to sign a contract for 40 hours believing it would provide her with significantly shorter hours than she had previously been working. However, she too regularly works up to 50 hours per week.

The gap between the hours contracted, and the hours worked was also marked amongst workers who worked between 50 and 60 hours per week. All three teachers were on contracts which



specified 40 hour working weeks, and yet all regularly worked 50 to 60 hours per week. Some weeks were even longer due to assessment and extra curricular activities such as school productions and camps. Other workers interviewed such as lawyers, a social worker, and computer technicians, all commented on the lengthening of their work week by virtue of cell phones, laptops and e-mail. These enabled their employers to contact them at night, over the weekend, and or while they were on leave. New technology has blurred the division between work and home.

For a number of workers another critical issue was the lack of breaks taken during the work day. Nearly three quarters of those we interviewed did not take regular breaks or rest during their time at work. For many workers, working ten hours per day meant exactly that, working non-stop for ten hours, with little if any rest or downtime, and no lunch or dinner breaks.



### 3. Why Do People Work Long Hours?

#### *Money*

For two thirds of the interviewees money was an important or major factor determining the length and distribution of their work hours. A number of workers noted that they chose to work long hours because they wanted, or in many cases needed, the money to look after themselves and their families.

As Julie, a young secretary noted,

*"Everyone needs money to live on. More money means you can do more things,..... or have better things. Money gives you choices. You might not have the time to do anything with it at the moment [because of working long hours], but later you might be able to buy a house, or go overseas, or pay off your credit card or whatever."*

Several of the interviewees were working long hours in order to achieve exactly those goals. One construction worker, working approximately 60 hours per week, was saving for a house, while Megan, a lawyer in her late twenties, was hoping to pay off her student loan by the time she turned 30.

However, a number of interviewees noted that money and long work hours often formed a vicious circle whereby they worked long hours in order to get a higher pay packet, which they then used to buy a house (or live a particular kind of lifestyle). This required a high income to service, and thus longer and longer work hours. This vicious cycle was alluded to by a number of women, both workers and partners, who said that determining their work hours once they had had children, involved weighing up the huge costs of child care with the wages that could be earned. For a number of women, the net benefit of employment, or full time rather than part time work, was undermined by the financial costs of child care, combined with the emotional stresses of trying to balance work and family.

For several older workers, members of the so-called "sandwich generation", the costs of child care had been replaced with the costs of helping adult children with tertiary study, while also helping out parents with rest home care or home help. Somewhere amongst these financial constraints the workers were attempting to save for their own retirements. For these workers, long hours were necessary, both now and into the foreseeable future, in order to pay for these three costly commitments.



For yet other workers money was critical in determining their work patterns because low wages forced them into longer and longer work hours, in both primary and secondary jobs. As one worker in hospitality noted,

*"I earn enough working as a waitress to cover my rent and food and stuff. But I can't get enough regular hours there so I do my second job [in the kitchens of a large catering company] in order to pay for clothes and going out and stuff. .... I try not to use my [catering] job to pay for rent and regular things, because I never know from week to week how many hours I'll work and how much money I'll get from that job. ... If I got more money from my waitressing, or had a different job I wouldn't have to work such long hours. But I need the money to live on. It's hard, but that's the way it is." (Karen, 24 year old hospitality worker)*

For many of the workers in our study, the money from long work hours, split shifts, and so on, made it easier to cope with (though not always worth) the negative impact of those work hours. These included a lack of time with friends and family, strain on individual workers' health and wellbeing, and lack of time or energy to be involved in any activities outside work or home.

#### *Under-staffing*

Understaffing emerged as another critical factor in determining the length of work hours. We heard a number of accounts of fewer people doing more, as restructuring and budget cuts shrunk workforces and expanded both the nature and length of the work that workers were expected to undertake.

Several workers suggested that their employers were deliberately understaffing particular areas in an attempt to find greater "efficiency", and thus cut wage bills. One cleaner noted that she previously worked in a team of 6 covering a number of wards in a major hospital complex. However, over the past 18 months 3 staff members have left, and management have refused to replace them, leaving only 3 staff to cover the same amount of work that had previously been completed by 6 people.

*"We approached management about it, but they said that the people who left meant that they could "restructure" the way our team worked. They thought that the three of us could do the job without having to hire any extra people. We're all really sorry we worked hard when the other 3 left now. If we'd made lots of mistakes and not finished the work, they would have seen that 3 people can't do all the work. But now, because we worked so hard then, we're probably going to have to work that hard all the time." (Mele, Cleaner)*



Marama, a machine operator in a major processing plant, also noted that covering for other workers during ill health, or when they leave, resulted in a higher workload for a smaller number of workers.

*"It started out that there were 3 of us. Then one guy got sick, and took some time off. That was okay, because the two of us could work the machine, and when one of us was on a break the other one looked after the machine. It was hard when we were busy, but we managed. Then [ ... ] left, and the boss said they weren't going to replace him. So then it was just me and [ ... ]. Now [ ... ] is covering for someone over in another part of the plant, and so mostly its just me running the machine. I can't take breaks ..... I end up staying late most nights ..... I've complained to the boss, but he thinks the number of staff is okay .. maybe for him, but not for me. (Marama, Machine Operator)*

The link between understaffing and work intensification was alluded to by a number of workers, who noted that as the level of work increased, the number of staff often stayed static, resulting in significant understaffing for the new workload. Both the primary and secondary school teachers we interviewed said that growing class sizes combined with new administrative and curriculum demands had not led to any noticeable increase in staff in their respective schools. Staff were simply having to increase their hours to keep up.

### *Commitment to the Work*

A number of workers interviewed said the hours they worked were largely because they loved their job. Many gained meaning and purpose in the work they did, while for others their jobs provided them with the opportunity to use their skills, contribute to society and develop social relationships. One worker who had recently stopped work as a chef noted that the hours, the money and the lack of social interaction made cooking, on appearance, one of the worst industries to work in. However, Liam loved the work, and regarded the lifestyle and work hours as a "necessary evil" in order to do what he loved. Liam's partner Anna was less enamoured with his work, and when the couple had children, she was very keen for Liam to move from cooking into another occupation.

Anna's concern with Liam's work patterns was shared by a number of partners who said that while their partners loved their job, they didn't. The partner of one civil engineer noted that;

*"When he's not working all hours, he's on the phone, or he's thinking about work, or he's talking to his work mates about work ....it's great that he loves his work, but sometimes I wish he spent more time loving me than that damn job." (Liz, partner of a Civil Engineer)*



Many workers also commented on their commitment to their work as a reason for working long hours. Commitment to students, patients and the public was a major justification for the hours worked by teachers, doctors, nurses, and public servants. Yet the length of their work hours in many cases exacted a high toll on the individual worker and their family.

A number of interviewees commented that employers were increasingly taking advantage of their commitment, and using it to lower conditions and increase work hours. Shona, a nurse, remarked that her boss often asked her to stay late in order to look after one patient who just needed that "extra bit of care". Shona's husband was livid that her boss appeared to play on Shona's commitment to her patients by asking her to do extra work that was unpaid, and often took large amounts of time at the end of already long shifts.

*"She does it because she cares. If she didn't care about the patients she'd walk right out there without looking back. But because she does, and the boss knows that, he asks her to do extra work. In fact, he asks all of the nurses to work longer. They're probably saving heaps of money by getting them to do all the extra work for free." (Bruce, partner of Shona, Nurse)*

### *In Order to Keep the Job*

For a significant number of workers, pressure exerted by employers to work long or difficult hours was a critical factor in their work patterns. A number felt that their jobs were on the line if they refused the length or distribution of the hours asked of them. For several younger workers this threat had been made explicit by employers.

Sima, a waitress in a large restaurant, said that her boss regularly rang her up and asked her to work on days she was not rostered, work split shifts, stay late or complete tasks which were not part of her standard duties.

*"She rings me up and asks me to work, and I say yes or no. Well, I don't say no really, the times I've tried to say no because I had something on, like catching up with one of my mates, she said that if I didn't work the extra hours, she would "seriously" look at my regular hours. I can't afford to lose my job, so I just say yes."*

Tess, a sales assistant in a woman's clothing store, also said that her boss had made it clear that when she asks Tess to change her hours (often without prior notice), or work extra shifts, they are demands not requests.

*"My boss is always going on about how many students she could find to do my job, and if I want to make sure I keep my job, I need to do the extra shifts. She's a right bitch about it, but most of my*



*mates who also work in shops, and some as waitresses and stuff, say that their bosses are just the same. We're all too scared of losing our jobs to complain, or say no."*

Alan, a labourer on a large building site, added that in his experience the foreman, not the contract, dictates the work hours.

*"If the foreman says you're working late to finish something like a concrete pour, than you're working late. It doesn't matter if your contract says you finish at 5 or 6 pm, if the foreman says you're working, than you're working. .... I've just had a big barney with my foreman over my work hours. He told us we were all working Sundays in order to get the job finished. But I can't work Sundays because I've got church and then family. When I told him I couldn't work Sundays, he told me I'd work Sundays or I wouldn't work at all. I told him to stuff his job where the sun don't shine. .... I got my union delegate onto it .... I've still got my job, and I don't work Sundays. Foreman hates my guts though ....."*

However, pressure from employers was felt not only by young and or largely casualised labour. Older, highly paid, and highly skilled workers expressed concerns that their jobs were also dependent on the "uncritical acceptance of long hours, split shifts, and other unreasonable hours". For some, the concern was that refusing to work long hours would result in being given less challenging work. For others the concern was about the future: the possibility of being turned down for promotion, being denied special requests (such as leave), or not being given training or chances to extend their skills and work.

### *So-called Nature of the Job*

The notion that work hours are long, or difficult because of the nature of the job was highlighted by a number of interviewees. One theatre technician who routinely works 80 hours per week commented that long work hours were common, and existed because of the highly specialised nature of jobs within the theatre world.

*"The hours are long when there's a show on, but you just have to do it that way. Each tech has to be there for the whole pre-production, performance and pack out. You can't change people half way through because all the codes and sequences have to go on, you need one person in charge of it all. .... When our hours were getting up to 90 hours per week, OSH came to check it out. They said we were working too long, and it was a health and safety thing. The bosses told OSH to f... off. They said they didn't understand what we were doing, and how the hours couldn't be changed because of the nature of the job. But since then we're only working 70, 80 hours per week, so maybe the OSH thing was good."*



Other interviewees who worked in the dairy industry, forestry, and horticulture, also said that the nature of job meant long hours for some periods with periods of down time, or under-employment during the year. All of these workers felt that such was the nature of the industries in which they worked, that little could be done to challenge or change their work hours - either by themselves, their union, or even legislation.

#### *Voluntary work expected as part of the job*

For a number of workers unpaid overtime has become an entrenched and non-voluntary part of the work contract. For example, work beyond the classroom has always been an accepted aspect of teaching. The expectation is often articulated by school management, but can often come from teachers themselves who believe it is an integral part of being a teacher.

*"When I started at [.....] school I was told by the principal that I got the job because I was willing to organise two extra-curricular activities for the school ..... the other candidates for my job were only willing to do one. I love teaching music, the kids get such a kick out of it, and its a fantastic thing to watch them perform in front of their parents and friends. Taking the netball team is hard though, we have practice before school one morning a week, and then I'm down at the courts on Saturday as well. It takes up so much of my time. I guess it adds an extra 10 hours to my working week. It's expected though ... by the Principal, and all the other teachers ..... we're all doing our bit for the kids, inside and outside of the class room." (Kay, primary school teacher)*

The notion of "doing your bit" was also commented upon by a number of workers in the banking and corporate sectors. One bank teller said that her bosses encourage all workers to participate in charitable and community activities such as cleaning up the local park or helping out at the local city mission. These activities are usually held on weekends, with workers wearing the company's merchandise. According to the bank, the activities are completely voluntary. However, they are regarded as essential to "team building", one of the criteria in staff performance assessments within the bank. Megan, a lawyer at a large corporate firm, noted that activities such as sports teams were also "voluntary" in her company, however, they were similarly regarded as essential to team building, and good workplace relations. Such activities became yet another drain on limited time for individual workers, and their families.

The expectation of staff to use their own time to help out their employers was striking illustrated by the situation of the three call centre operators we interviewed. All three described the "theft of time at the edges" by their employers.

*"I was really keen to work in a call centre because I'd heard the hours were good and you just go in, do your thing, and then leave. You don't take your work home. When I started I thought that I*



*would be answering calls from 8.30 am to 5 pm, with one hour for lunch and then two fifteen minute breaks. Sweet. But it turns out you have to be at work earlier than that, and stay way afterwards in order to log on, and log off the computer.*

*It takes me about 10 minutes to log on in the mornings, and then anywhere from 10 minutes to 30 minutes in the afternoon, depending on the kind of calls I had that day. My official work hours are counted from when I take my first call to when I take my last call. I worked out that each week I work about two and a half hours of extra unpaid time. It sucks." (Clifton, 26 year old call centre operator)*



## 4. What Impact Do Long Work Hours Have on Individuals ?

Long work hours had many impacts on workers. When workers were paid for their long hours, many appreciated the money. Others felt that the money was poor compensation for the effects on them, especially where they had worked these hours for long periods, or had families. Others found satisfaction in getting their jobs done, or seeing their clients / patients / students' appreciation. But for many the effects of long hours were extraordinarily negative; the lack of time for anything other than work, the pressure of long and difficult work hours, the impact on their general health and wellbeing.

### *The Work / Eat / Sleep Cycle*

One of the most common themes amongst workers we interviewed was the belief that they were caught in a "work / eat / sleep" cycle. Their lives consisted primarily of their work, everything else; relationships, family, spending time with friends, being involved in community activities were extra, to be fitted in where possible, though often not at all.

One theatre technician who regularly works 80 hours plus a week described it like this;

*"I'm at work from 8 in the morning until 10 or 11 pm most nights. When I get home I grab something to eat, maybe have a shower, and then crash into bed. In the morning I get up and do the same thing. On my "weekends" I'm usually working, but if I do have a day off I don't really know what to do with myself. When I've got time to do more than just work, eat or sleep, I feel a bit lost."*

Several dairy workers also described the work / eat / sleep cycle which governs their lives.

*"You want to do more than just work, eat and sleep, but most of the time you're too shagged to do anything else. When you're not at work, you're at home trying to relax, and mostly you just fall asleep. Some of the guys try and keep up with their kids and spend time with their wives and all, but mostly everyone just works their arses off, and then catches up with their families on their days off."*

A young doctor also described the costs of the work / eat / sleep cycle;

*"I was out with some friends recently and they were telling me how great it was that I'd come out for dinner, given how busy I was and how I never had time for anything any more. I told them to stop being stupid, but it made me stop and think .... I looked back over the last year and realised that this was the first time in about 6 months I'd been out for a meal, usually I just grab food on the*



*way to work, or on the way home or at the hospital cafeteria ..... I suddenly realised how much my life revolves around my job ..... I never see anyone who isn't a doctor or a patient, I never do anything for fun, I just work and eat and sleep. My life has nothing else in it."*

### *The Effect of Long Work Hours on Health and Wellbeing*

For those workers caught in a work / eat / sleep cycle, the pressure of long, and difficult work hours has major implications for the quality of their lives, in particular their health and wellbeing.

In one striking example of the costs of long work hours, one worker, Joanna, was told by her doctor to cut her hours, or face a physical and emotional breakdown. Joanna is a young policy analyst working for a large government department in Wellington. When she began her job Joanna was told she was expected to work between 40 and 45 hours per week, however, when some projects were on, her hours may increase slightly. Joanna was happy with the hours to begin with, and enjoyed her job very much.

As she gained more experience Joanna was given greater responsibility and began taking the lead on some projects. In order to meet some of the tight deadlines for her project Joanna began to stay late regularly, and often came in at the weekends. Soon she was working 60 to 70 hours per week, and her health was clearly suffering.

*"My health started to unravel bit by bit, so I didn't notice at first. I put on some weight, maybe 6, 7 kilos, my teeth started looking yellow because of all the coffee I was drinking. I had bags under my eyes because I wasn't sleeping very well .... I was constantly worrying about everything. If it wasn't the pressure of deadlines at work it was whether I'd left the oven on at home. I started losing my temper with small things, like my partner's habit of dropping wet towels on the floor. It drove me up the wall. We started arguing all the time. That just made my stress worse.*

*One day it was just all too much and I burst into tears at work. I sobbed and sobbed and sobbed. I just couldn't handle it any more. The hours, the pressure, the responsibility was just killing me. I went to the doctor and he said I was in real danger of physical and emotional breakdown, it was like something out of a movie, 'woman on the verge of a nervous breakdown'.*

*When I went to work on the following Monday I told my boss I had to cut my hours or I'd have to quit. She told me she'd been concerned about me for some time, and they'd help me make sure I only worked my 45 hours per week. My partner now comes to pick me up from work each night to make sure I'm not working late ..... I'm starting to feel more in control, and even in a short space of time my health is starting to pick up. I've still got a way to go, but believe me, I won't be working like that again."*



Another striking example of the pressure of long hours was provided by the teachers interviewed in this research. All three teachers, representing the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors, said they faced a constant battle to maintain the quality of their teaching, as well as their physical and mental health.

*"Sometimes you get so tired with all the work - the teaching, the assessment, the lesson planning, the extra-curricular stuff you're doing, that you just can't face going to school. The thought of standing in front of 30 kids is more than your mind and body can bear. It's a horrible feeling not wanting to teach kids ..... something you've wanted to do all your life, and you trained so hard to do ..... but you're just too tired, too burnt out to actually do it." (Kay, primary school teacher)*

Lindsay, a secondary school teacher with additional leadership responsibilities, noted that holiday periods were necessary for teachers to catch up on work and teaching preparation. Holidays were also the time for many teachers to recover from the complete exhaustion and fatigue she, and many other secondary school teachers, experienced each term. Lindsay said,

*"Holidays are meant to be about spending time with your family, and winding down. You're meant to come back to work refreshed and rejuvenated and eager to start work again. Most teachers come back to work fatigued, because the holidays aren't long enough to recover from the sheer burn out and exhaustion that teachers now face all the time."*

The health effects of long hours was of major concern to workers we interviewed and their partners. These effects included physical symptoms like high blood pressure, fatigue, constant tiredness, and poor sleeping patterns. Several interviewees listed depression as an outcome of their hours, along with moodiness, "being grumpy" and being short tempered. A wide range of workers identified vulnerability to illness as an effect of long hours. Doctors, nurses, teachers and factory workers all felt that their immunity was compromised by tiredness.

*"If you work long hours all the time, you're going to be exhausted all the time, and your health will be at risk, all the time". (Vijay, Doctor)*

For many partners, the effects of the long work hours could be seen over a period of time, and many tried to point out the dangers to their partners. As Anna said,

*"I told him that he couldn't keep up the pace for much longer, or something was going to give. His health, our marriage, our family. When we didn't have kids he got tired, but then with the hours at work on top of spending time with the boys, he just got so exhausted. He had trouble getting out of bed in the morning. He was always tired and irritable, I'd never seen him so moody. I was the one that told him to make a choice, his job, or his health and our family."*



### *The Effect of Long Work Hours on Social Relationships*

For a number of workers, the length or distribution of their work hours played havoc with their social relationships and social lives. Many workers spoke about the steady decline in the number of friends they had, and or the time they spent with them. Others commented on the friction in some relationships due to constant reshuffling and rearranging time meant to be reserved for friends. One journalist attempted to map the changing nature of her social relationships;

*"When I was at University I had heaps of friends. I was always out with mates from class, my flatmates, friends from my netball team, sometimes my work mates. Most of my twenties I had this big circle of people I spent time with. The relationships were important to me and I tried hard not to let work get in the way of nurturing those relationships. But as I've moved up the ladder at work, my hours have lengthened, my responsibilities have increased, and the relationships have just fallen away. Without time and nurturing, they've just withered and died.*

*I look around me now and all my friends are work mates, I never see anyone I went to university with, I don't have time to play a sport or be a member of a club, so I don't have those social contacts either. One day you just look around and see how much work has taken over your social life."*

For other workers it was both the length of their work hours as well as the distribution of them that had such a detrimental effect on their social relationships. For shift workers such as Marama, a machine operator, Peter, a fire-fighter, and Teau, a meat worker, their work hours often fell at times ill conducive to maintaining relationships with friends not also doing shift work.

*"I've got mates I've tried to keep up with since starting this job but it's just too hard. When I'm not working they're working, and when they're free I'm at work or asleep. Besides, if you're mates are shift workers as well, they understand what it means, that sometimes you're just too tired to do anything and you just want to hang at home, and not do much." (Marama, machine operator)*

*"I don't really have any friends outside of the station. I mean we have friends, couple friends that we know through my work or Jackie's work, but all my friends are fire-fighters as well. That's what happens when you've been a shift worker for as long as I've been. It's just so much easier when you know what kind of work you both do, and you're both working the same kind of hours. Even then it can be hard, between work, and life at home with Jackie and the kids, I don't really see much of my friends anyway." (Peter, fire-fighter)*



*"We do things with other members of the church, family dinners and such. Some of the guys at work go to our church, and so I see them on Sundays. But no, I don't really have time for friends. Long work hours ..... I try and spend time with my wife and my kids ..... I don't have extra time for others." (Teau, meat worker)*

For workers in this study, the lack of time for friends was mirrored by a marked lack of involvement in activities outside of work or family. Workers from all occupational groups described giving up sport, and or hobbies because of lack of time. They came home from work exhausted, or they could not predict when they would be available. What time workers did have outside of work they prioritised to spend with their families, and involvement in sport or clubs came a very distant second. As a result, many workers felt they didn't have any connections to the community in which they lived. As Jude, the partner of a computer technician noted,

*"I want my kids to have the kind of social network I had when I was a kid - where you knew your neighbours and played with their kids, and you knew the names of the teachers and doctors and shopkeepers in your suburb. My kids won't have any of that ..... we're both too busy with work and family to spend time with people outside of our very small group. We just haven't built up those kind of relationships. It's quite isolating in some ways ... I think the fabric of the community is pretty thin, and it's getting worse."*



## 5. What Impact Do Work Hours Have On Families ?

The length of work hours have many effects on families. Some were undoubtedly positive. For those who were paid overtime for working long or "unfriendly" hours, higher remuneration helped families "get ahead" by helping to pay off mortgages, pay for child care or children's activities such as sports gear or school trips, or family holidays.

But overwhelmingly, when asked about the impact of their hours on their families, most interviewees highlighted the negative effects. First and most obviously, long hours meant less time at home.

### *Lack of Time with Family*

A lack of time was critical for workers in all types of family formations, including workers without children or partners. For these workers, time with family members such as parents, siblings and extended family, was also limited. However, the negative impact of long and difficult work hours on family life appeared to be felt most strongly by those with partners, and children (of all ages). Limited time at home corroded intimate relationships, and relationships with children.

For many workers, the time that was "left over" from their work was usually of limited quality, since workers were stressed or tired from long work hours. Time with partners or children was also of limited quality because it was usually at the very end of the day when partners or children were asleep, or at work or school themselves.

Some parents commented that they did not see their children for any length of time, their time together was often in passing, as household tasks were done. One cleaner noted that she had several "lots" of time with her children throughout out the week, but this time was spent getting them ready for school, dropping them off or picking them up from school. She saw them in passing as she went out the door to her two cleaning jobs, one in the early morning, and one in the early evening. If her children were involved in after school activities (as she and her husband encouraged them to be), she could average two lots of 30 minutes with her children each day.

Another striking story of a lack of time with family was that of Teau, a meat worker in his late 40s. Teau had recently moved off the chain into the laundry due to a recurring injury.

His official shift times are 3pm to 2am, but three 15 minute unpaid smoko break and an unpaid meal break of half an hour are compulsory and leave him actually finishing later to make up the required working time of 10  $\frac{3}{4}$  hours.



Teau works four days on and two days off.

*"Don't like my work hours. Too long. We supposed to work from 3 pm to 2 am, but because of the breaks on top, not part of our "working minutes", we're at work from 3 pm to about 4 am. ....  
When I get home in the morning I put my feet up, tired from standing all shift. Cup of tea and some food. I wind down and then go to bed 'bout 5. Sometimes if I haven't seen my wife for a few days we make a time for me to get up earlier in order to chat, talk 'bout the kids, talk 'bout money, that sort of stuff. I don't really see the kids during my shift, until I get my two days off, but if they're on school days, I don't get to see them until the afternoon. You try and fit a week's worth of time into two afternoons - they tell me what they're doing at school, my son tells me about his rugby team, who's playing well, who's not. Sundays we all go to church, I go even if I'm working that afternoon. I go to sleep in church sometimes, and I snore. I sit at the back if I think I'm going to fall asleep."*

A number of other workers commented on the lack of time with their children, and the difficulties they faced in keeping up with what the children were doing. One dairy worker, working long hours combined with being a non-custodial parent, described how difficult it was to keep up with his two children,

*"I want to know what they're doing, who their friends are, but if the gaps between when I see them are too long, then things start to fall through the cracks. My little boy was doing a project at school on earth worms, and we were going to collect them together. But I never finished work in time for us to collect them at night, and by the time my weekend came around, his project had already been handed in."*

#### *Lack of Quality Time - the Effect on Relationships*

For many families the impact of difficult work hours extended beyond a lack of time. The quality of time spent with families was also compromised. For nearly two thirds of our interviewees, lack of quality time with families was a major concern. Many felt that their family time was marred by stress, bad moods, tiredness, short tempers and the effects of general exhaustion. "Moodiness" and "grumpiness" were repetitive complaints from workers, and their partners.

Those who worked in the so-called "caring professions" - teaching, medicine, and social work, as well as those who combined long hours with shift work, in particular felt that their families were affected by the mood they brought home from work. As one doctor put it,



*"If I've lost a patient at work during the day, I can't go home and play happy families as though nothing has happened. But by the same token, I can't not play happy families, because they're my children, my partner, and they deserve to see me happy, and happy to see them."*

Almost all couples felt that long work hours and a lack of quality time negatively affected their relationships, particularly their relationships with their partners. Tiredness emerged as the enemy of intimacy, with couples struggling for time and energy to talk, and to spend enjoyable time together. Many couples reported getting into arguments because there was so little time to talk to each other, and express how they were feeling. In addition, many couples reported getting into arguments over who was doing what in terms of paid work, unpaid work, and relationship work, such as organising family time or couple time.

As one general labourer put it;

*"I come home from work and try and put my feet up. I've been on the go all day and I just want to sit down. But she's there asking me to help put the kids to bed or set the table or whatever ... I just want to sit down. We argue about it ..... she says I don't do enough around the house, but I think I'm working long hours in order to pay for the house and the kids. It's probably not fair though, she has a job as well, and often works late, and then she does most of the stuff for the kids. I think being a guy means it's easier sometimes, you do long hours at work, and then come home. Women, some women, do long hours at work, and then come home and do most of the house stuff."*

Arguments were not the only symptom of strain on relationships, a number of interviewees commented on the lack of intimacy which occurred due to long or difficult work hours. Both workers and their partners commented that tiredness, lack of time, moodiness and the existence of tension around hours in many households affected sexual intimacy. Some "grabbed their chances when they could, with sex on the run", while others simply accepted that their sex lives had decreased. "We're both just so tired that when we go to bed we go straight to sleep. Forget fooling around." Several workers had developed ways in which to keep the sexual intimacy alive, by scheduling "dates" with their partners. One builder described these dates;

*"We both work long hours, I'm out of the house from about 6 in the morning until 7 at night. My wife works from 3 pmish until 9 pm, when she gets home I'm usually in bed asleep. On the weekends we both work Saturday mornings, so Saturday afternoon and Sundays we spend with our son [Matthew]. We take him to the park and do big jigsaw puzzles and things."*

*About 6 months ago Nic and I realised that we never had any real time together as a couple, we were certainly never having sex, so we came up with the idea of having dates during the week. On a Thursday night our son goes to his grandparents house, and Nic and I get off work early. We go out for dinner, or catch a movie or just have a few drinks at the pub. It's nice. Sometimes we talk about*



*Matthew, but we have a rule, we don't talk about work. When we go home we watch TV, or go to bed. ... By the time we go to bed we're both really relaxed and we feel close to each other again, like we did before Matthew, before the crazy work hours. It's not about the sex, its about the closeness."*

However, for a number of interviewees the lack of quality time, the stress and moodiness, the arguments and lack of intimacy, had led to pressured relationships and in some cases, relationship breakdowns. One doctor was quite matter of fact about the reason for the break up of his first marriage.

*"We were both working very very long hours as doctors. We never really saw each other ..... and when we did it was in passing, or when we were both conked out at home. We were like flatmates rather than husband and wife. You can't keep a relationship going like that. My second wife only accepted my proposal on the basis that I worked less than 60 hours per week. She said she didn't want our marriage to end up the way my first one had. It's been easier the second time around because I'm not a registrar any more, and though she was working long hours as a lawyer, we both made a pact to keep our work hours under control. We both want to make our marriage work, and no job is worth endangering that."*

#### *Effect of Work Hours and Family Obligations*

Several workers we interviewed commented that the demands of their work hours were only part of the obligations they were under. For a number of workers, predominantly Pacific workers, the church and family added obligations for individual workers to meet.

One university lecturer described the tension between the work demanded of her, both in terms of hours and intensity, with the demands of her family.

*"I work 50 to 60 hours per week, depending on marking. Last semester was better because I didn't have so many courses to teach, but the hours are generally pretty grim. It's worse I think because I'm just starting out - I need to prove myself in the academic world, so the hours are long, and the work is relentless - teaching, marking, admin, research. Especially admin. ...*

*I spend Sunday with my family - we go to church, I look after my nieces and nephews, and spend time with my parents. Because Sunday's taken up I tend to work 10 hour days Monday to Saturday. My mother's constantly telling me not to work so hard, and spend more time with the family, but she doesn't understand that I have to work this hard, that's just the way the job is if I want to do well, if I want to get promoted. What's worse, she doesn't understand that sometimes spending time with my family is like a job, its another thing I have to do, it's like another 10 hour working day."*



Several workers remarked that the obligations of church and family were not well understood, or even respected by their (largely) pakeha employers. As Mele noted;

*"When a family member dies it often means taking them back to the Islands. If you've only got three days bereavement leave then you're in a really tight spot. You can ask your boss for time off, but they don't necessarily understand that you might need two weeks to go back home and organise the funeral, and spend time with the old ones. .... But it happens with the small things too. In my family we're all shift workers, but we have to manage it so that there's always someone with the kids. You take your turn looking after them, nieces, nephews, cousins, little brothers and sisters. It doesn't matter if you haven't got any kids of your own. You have to take your turn looking after them. That's hard if you had to go to work. What do you put first ? Your work or your family ?"*



## 6. Specific Issues for Women

### *Unpaid Work*

For many women in this study, long or difficult paid work hours were often combined with long hours of unpaid work looking after children and doing housework. For women, the long or difficult hours of their partners had major implications for their overall workload. A number of women described themselves, in effect, as single parents. They did all the cooking, cleaning, care of children, chauffeuring, bill paying and financial and emotional work of parenting alone. Sue, the partner of a horticulture worker noted,

*"I'm the mother and the father. The kids come to me for everything. Washing, cleaning, help with school work, taking them to school, to their friends places. I do all that. I look after the household, I even do the stuff that you'd normally think a man would do, mow the lawns, fix the plumbing. I can't get him to do it because he's never here. He's always working. It's like being a single mother, with someone who comes to visit every now and then."*

Another partner described herself as a computer widow, a wife who never saw her husband when he was at work [approximately 50 hours per week], or when he was home, and tucked away in his study.

*"He comes home and plays with the kids. By the time he gets home from work they're usually in their pyjamas watching TV. They jump up and rush to the door when they hear the car pulling into the driveway. The kids are always happy to see him, probably because he gives them lollies, and big bear hugs, and throws them over his shoulder. He doesn't realise I've had them all afternoon when they've been fighting with each other, and messing up the house, and whining about having to go to bed so early. For him, the kids are something out of a story book, all well behaved and polite. It's me that gets the reality." (Jude, partner of a Computer Technician / Programmer)*

The burden of unpaid work also fell heavily on women who were working in the paid workforce, many of them working long hours themselves. A number of these women described their lives as containing two jobs, their "double day". An aged care worker outlined her day;

*"My husband leaves the house at about 6 am for work. I get up about 5.30 am to get breakfast ready for the kids, and make school lunches. I often try and get some washing done, but if it looks like rain I don't bother. If there's time I'll get something out for dinner, but most of the time it's just a trial getting three kids ready for school. I drop them off at their grandparents house at about 7 am in order for me to get to work by 7.30 am. I'll work until 2.30 pm and then come home to do*



*housework, and look after the kids when they get back from school. I'll cook something for tea, and when my husband comes home about 5 pm we try to eat together.*

*At night I leave the kids with my husband and I go back to work to do another shift, usually from 5 pm until 8 pm. When I get home I usually fall into bed. The days are long, and I get so tired. I'm on my feet all day, looking after people - the kids, the old folks, my husband. On my birthday my husband runs around after me, he does the housework and makes a special dinner. Its wonderful. I wish I had a birthday once a week ! [laughs]" (Nera, Aged Care worker)*

### *The Effect On Women's Careers*

A number of women we interviewed spoke of the accommodations they had made, or were planning to make, in balancing the work hours of their partner with their own paid work and their families. For example, Sarah constantly changes both the length and distribution of her work hours in order to accommodate the very long hours worked by her lawyer husband Tim. Sarah is hoping to go back to full time work when their children are older, but in the meantime her paid work comes a very distant second to supporting her family.

For other women, their partner's long hours reshaped their own life cycle of work, with some women deferring their involvement in challenging paid work to late in their working lives. Elspeth, a social worker in her 50s, and Robyn, a nurse also in her 50s, both commented that their careers began advancing relatively late just as their partners careers were beginning to wind down. In the previous ten to fifteen years, both Elspeth and Robyn had taken on much of the responsibility for raising their children, and working part time in order to facilitate the careers, and work hours of their partners.

For two young women we interviewed these choices still lay ahead of them. One policy analyst, Rachel, was pregnant with her first child, and has been discussing all of the options with her banker partner Jamie. Rachel was sure that in the foreseeable future she would take the primary responsibility for juggling family and work responsibilities. In order to pay for Rachel to stay at home looking after their child, Jamie will be increasing his work hours from an average of 45 hours per week to 50 hours plus each week. In the future Rachel would like to work part time, moving up to full time when her child (or children) are at school. However, until then, Rachel will continue to alter her work life to accommodate that of her husband. For Rachel, choosing children and family is likely to be at the expense of her career.

*"You see some women trying to do it all - have a great career, be a fantastic mother, have a great relationship with their partner ..... I don't think I can do it all ... I think I'll just have to concentrate on being a stay at home Mum for a while. It's a big deal for me, I'm going to go from a good salary*



*to depending on Jamie for money ..... by the time I get back into the paid workforce I'll have sacrificed several years of work experience and training. It's difficult for women to do it all, to have it all. It's certainly much more difficult for women than men."*

