

**Working long hours, job satisfaction and job search activity:
A longitudinal investigation**

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ABSTRACT

Long hours of work are a common complaint in Australian workplaces so in this paper we investigate the immediate and cumulative impact of long hours of work on employee reports of job satisfaction and job search activity. Using data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, we find that employees who work long hours are more likely to report lower job satisfaction and be more likely to undertake active job search. Using hours of work as a tool to promote employee productivity therefore comes at a cost so organisations need to decide if the benefits of increased productivity outweigh the costs of lower employee job satisfaction and the turnover of employees.

Key words: work intensification, job satisfaction, job search, working time

INTRODUCTION

Australians are working long hours: the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) estimated that the average number of hours worked by full time Australian employees is higher than in all other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries with the exception of Korea (Campbell, 2001). Organisations that intensify work through the extension of working hours are attempting to achieve higher levels of productivity from an existing workforce, but there are limits on the extent to which employees can work longer and harder (Green 2004). The consequences for employees, particularly in the form of higher levels of stress have been extensively researched though the consequences for organisations are less well understood. Two consequences that are of importance to organisations are job satisfaction and job search activity. Job satisfaction has been used as a measure of employee well being (Green 2004) and has also been associated with employee productivity, turnover, and safety (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Employees who undertake a job search are also more likely to leave the organisation (Hom et al 1992) and organisations who lose valuable employees face a series of direct and indirect costs.

The initial focus of this paper is on the immediate (or cross sectional) effects of long work hours (referred to as 'long work hours') on job satisfaction and job search activity using waves 1 (collected in 2001) and wave 2 (collected in 2002) of the HILDA survey. The HILDA data is an indefinite panel data set. Therefore, in our subsequent analyses we examine the cumulative effects of long hours of work (referred to as 'sustained long hours of work'). We examine the reactions of employees who

responded in both waves and reported working 41 or more hours per week in *both* wave 1 and wave 2. Distinguishing between the immediate and the cumulative effects is important because a feature of work intensification is the requirement to work at a high level over an extended period of time. The absence of ‘time for recuperation and revitalisation’ (Peetz, 2003: 127) may therefore lead employees to express dissatisfaction with long hours of work in both the short term but especially over the longer term.

LONG HOURS OF WORK: EVIDENCE, CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Average hours worked by full time employees in Australia has increased from 38.2 hours per week in August 1982 to 41.3 hours in August 2001 (Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) 2002: 31). There has also been a change in the distribution of working hours. In the 1970s the majority of employees (51.2%, Wooden, 2000: 136) worked between 35-40 hours per week, the traditional measure of a standard workweek (Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT) 1999). By 2003 only 30.2% of employees worked a standard week. The number of employees working longer than a standard week (41 or more hours) grew from 28.2% in 1970 to 30.2% in 2003 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, catalogue number 6203.0, various issues). Further, only 7% of employees now work all their weekday hours between 9am and 5pm and less than half of the Australian workforce works a Monday to Friday schedule (Watson et al 2003). Employees do not actively seek long hours of work as surveys of employees consistently demonstrate a preference for fewer hours (ACTU 1999; ACIRRT 1999; Bearfield, 2003; Peetz et al 2003).

Pressures for longer hours of work can be traced back to the general increase in competitive pressures on organisations. In response, organisations have sought to reduce costs and increase productivity through downsizing and the use of new production techniques (e.g. just in time and lean production). The numerically reduced workforce is expected to maintain existing output levels making it harder to get all the work done in standard hours. Time pressures from clients (Peetz et al 2003), fear of losing a job (Burchell et al 1999) and ambiguous performance targets (Peetz et al 2003) have also driven the

increase in working hours. In the public sector the application of tight budgetary rules, the application of private sector management techniques and the multiple and conflicting demands of stakeholders, has been associated with escalating work loads and long hours of work for university academics (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004).

The shift to enterprise bargaining has been associated with a growth in working hours (Watson et al 2003). ACIRRT (1999: 102) pointed out that under enterprise bargaining employees, in order to achieve a pay increase, had to trade off 'many long held conditions, particularly arrangements related to their hours of work'. Changes that were negotiated as part of this process included a re-definition of start and finish times and the introduction of annualised salaries. Further, Wooden (2000) has shown that there is a higher incidence of long hours of work at workplaces that make extensive use of individual contracts. Changing working hour requirements is attractive to employers as working an existing workforce longer is more cost efficient than taking on new employees (ACIRRT, 1999).

Long hours of work can have negative implications on employee attitudes and behaviors such as job satisfaction and turnover (Allan, 1997; Bakker, Demerouti, deBoer, & Schaufeli, 2003). Increased hours of work effort is likely to reduce employee welfare (Green and McIntosh 2001). Green (2004a) reported that employee job satisfaction decreased over the same time period that work pressures increased. An important organizational outcome is voluntary turnover and Peetz et al 2003 has found that 43% of 'long hour' employees were more likely to want a job elsewhere. In the following analysis we build on these studies by examining the impact of sustained long hours of work on job satisfaction and job search activity. An employee may be prepared to put in extra hours on a short-term basis, though over time they may react differently.. Furthermore, it is unclear whether employees who endure high hours of work over an extended period of time respond by undertaking active job search. Accordingly we make the following predictions.

Hypothesis 1: Long work hours measured in Wave 1 will have a negative impact on job satisfaction in Wave 1. Employees who report working longer hours in Wave 1 will report lower levels of job satisfaction in Wave 1 than employees who report working fewer hours.

Hypothesis 2: Long work hours measured in Wave 2 will have a negative impact on job satisfaction in Wave 2. Employees who report working longer hours in Wave 2 will report lower levels of job satisfaction in Wave 2 than employees who report working fewer hours.

Hypothesis 3: Sustained long work hours will have a negative impact on job satisfaction at Wave 2. Employees who report working longer hours in Wave 1 *and* Wave 2 will report lower levels of job satisfaction at Wave 2 than employees who report working fewer hours across the two time periods.

Hypothesis 4: Long work hours measured at Wave 1 will have a positive impact on job search activity in Wave 1 . Employees who report working longer hours in Wave 1 will report higher levels of job search activity at Wave 1 than employees who report working fewer hours.

Hypothesis 5: Long work hours measured at Wave 2 will have a positive impact on job search activity at both Wave 2. Employees who report working longer hours in Wave 2 will report higher levels of job search activity at Wave 2 than employees who report working fewer hours.

Hypothesis 6: Sustained long work hours will have a positive impact on job search activity at Wave 2. Employees who report working longer hours in both Wave 1 *and* Wave 2 will report higher levels of job search activity at Wave 2 than employees who report working fewer hours.

The model of employee turnover proposed by Mobley (1977) suggested that job dissatisfaction preceded job search activity and there is empirical support for this aspect of the model (for example see Hom et al 1992). That is, employees with low levels of job satisfaction are more likely to look for another job. Therefore our final hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 7: Job satisfaction will mediate the relationship between work hours and job search activity. Employees who report higher levels of job satisfaction and sustained long work hours will report lower levels of job search activity than employees who report lower levels of job satisfaction and sustained long work hours.

TABLE 1
Variable descriptions (n=2276)

Variable	Description	Wave 1 Mean (sd)	Wave 2 Mean (sd)
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Dependent variables			
Job satisfaction	All things considered, how satisfied are you with your job? 0 = totally dissatisfied, 10 = totally satisfied	7.75 (1.69)	7.59 (1.72)
Job search	Have you looked for a job in the last four weeks? 1 = yes, 0 =no	.11 (.31)	.13 (.33)
Control variables			
Age	Continuous variable for age last birthday	39.69 (10.62)	40.65 (10.63)
Gender	Dichotomous variable where 1 = male, 0 female	.67 (.47)	.67 (.47)
Dependents	Number of children resident at least 50% of the time, 0 to 8 resident children	.91 (1.14)	.91 (1.14)
Marital status	1 = partnered (legally married or de facto); 0 otherwise	.73 (.45)	.73 (.44)
Education	1 = Highest education attained is a degree or better; 0 otherwise	.31 (.46)	.32 (.47)
Paying job	In order to be happy in life it is important to have a paying job, 1= strongly disagree; 7= strongly agree. Attitude questions were asked in wave 1 only	5.34 (1.73)	5.34 (1.73)
Union	Union members=1, 0 otherwise	.38 (.49)	.38 (.49)
Job control	I have a lot of say about what happens in my job: 1= strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree	4.64 (1.75)	4.54 (1.71)
Complex job	My job is complex and difficult. 1= strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree	4.43 (1.77)	4.35 (1.79)
Private sector	Employee is employed in a private sector workplace = 1, 0 otherwise	.61 (.49)	.61 (.49)
Job security	I have a secure future in my job. 1= strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree	5.23 (1.59)	5.19 (1.58)
Use skills	I use many of my skills in my current job; 1= strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree	5.72 (1.34)	5.54 (1.40)
Tenure	Years with current employer	8.32 (8.31)	9.06 (8.16)
Workplace size	Categorical variable where 1 = less than 5 employees, 2 = 5-9 employees, 3 = 10-49 employees, 4 = 50 or more employees	4.45 (2.22)	4.63 (2.20)
Management 1	Generalist manager =1, 0 otherwise	.02 (.15)	.02 (.15)
Management 2	Specialist managers = 1, 0 otherwise	.08 (.26)	.08 (.26)
Management 3	Managing supervisors =1, 0 otherwise	.01 (.08)	.01 (.08)
Management 4	Farmers and farm managers = 1, 0 otherwise	.04 (.19)	.04 (.19)

METHODS

Participants: We use data from Wave 1 and Wave 2 of the HILDA Survey. AC Nielson conducted fieldwork for Wave 1, during the period between August 2001 and December 2001 and Wave 2, a year later (Watson and Wooden 2001). The HILDA survey is derived from a large national probability survey of households. In wave 1 interviews were obtained at 7682 households, which in turn generated a sample of 15,127 persons eligible (aged 15 years and over) for interview. Of this group 13,969 were successfully interviewed. A year later all responding households from wave 1 were re-contacted. Interviews were again sought with all household members aged 15 years and over, including persons who did not respond in wave 1 as well as any new household members. In total, interviews were

completed with 13,041 persons from 7245 households. Of this group almost 12,000 were respondents from wave 1, which represents almost 87% of the wave 1 individual sample. As Burchell (1999:7) points out, many of the pressures facing organisations are borne by the core (full time, permanent) workforce, making it appropriate to limit our analysis to this group of employees. This was achieved by limiting the study to those respondents who completed both waves of the HILDA survey and were employed full time (as an employee) with the same employer in both waves of the survey. The application of these limitations and accounting for missing data results in an effective sample size of 2,276. At Wave 1, the average age of respondents was 39.69 years, 67% were female, 38% were a member of a union and 31% had gained a degree or better (see Table 1).

Measures: Job satisfaction was measured at two points in time (i.e., Wave 1 and Wave 2). Overall job satisfaction was measured with the question ‘all things considered, how satisfied are you with your job?’ Respondents indicated their level of job satisfaction on a ten-point scale (10 = totally satisfied).

Job search was measured in Wave 1 and 2 with the question ‘have you looked for a job in the last four weeks?’ Respondents replied either yes or no, thereby generating a dichotomous variable. Long work hours was operationalized using the question ‘including any paid or unpaid overtime, how many hours per week do you work on average over a usual 4 week period in all your jobs? This includes any work done at the workplace and at home’, as reported by the employee. Policy debates in Australia on hours of work distinguish between standard full time hours (being between 35 to 40 hours per week) and excessive hours (i.e., hours in excess of 41 hours per week). We adopt this definition in the analyses for waves 1 and 2 of the survey: employees who reported working 41 or more hours per week were coded 1, 0 otherwise. Of particular interest is the effect of sustained high hours of work on job satisfaction and job search activity. Employees who worked in excess of 41 hours per week in *both* wave 1 and wave 2 were defined as reporting sustained long work hours (equal to 1) and all other employees were coded zero. Fifteen control variables were included to account for demographic, situational and occupational effects. The demographic controls are age, gender, number of dependents, marital status, importance of having a paying job, union status and education. The situational controls are job control, the complexity of the job, sector of employment, job security perceptions, use of existing skills, tenure

and workplace size. We include four controls to account for being employed in a managerial occupation. Details on all the variables used are reported in Table 1.

TABLE 2
Job satisfaction and long hours of work

Variables	(1) Job satisfaction (Wave 1)	(2) Job satisfaction (Wave 2)	(3) Job satisfaction & sustained long work hours
Independent variables			
Long work hours	-.2581***	-.1711**	
Sustained long work hours			-.2915***
Control variables			
Age	.0105***	.0161***	.0163***
Dependents	-.0040	.0367	.0371
Education	-.2248***	-.2376***	-.2196***
Gender	-.2656***	.0259	.0524
Marital status	-.0358	-.0058	-.0013
Union	.0307	.0384	.0406
Paying job	.0677***	.0626***	.0621***
Job control	.1571***	.1908***	.1930***
Complex job	-.1032***	-.1221***	-.1180***
Job security	.2311***	.2742***	.2736***
Tenure	-.0069	-.002	-.0014
Private sector	.0675	.0538	.0683
Use skills	.2282***	.2285***	.2299***
Workplace size	-.0394**	-.0057	-.0070
Management 1	.4495*	.1883	.2080
Management 2	-.0495	-.1314	-.0945
Management 3	.4746	.1271	.1668
Management 4	-.0757	-.2874	-.2686
Constant	4.7903***	3.729***	3.6895***
Pseudo R ²	.1797	.2112	.2152
N	2276	2276	2276

Method of analysis: We use hierarchical multiple regression analyses for the analyses on job satisfaction (waves 1 and 2) and logit regression for the analyses on job search (also in waves 1 and 2). The steps in the analyses are the same for both dependent variables. In the first step we include the demographic, occupational, and industry control variables along with hours of work (extensive work intensification) drawn from wave 1 of the survey. In the second step, (see column two of the results) we repeat the analysis using data drawn from wave 2 of the survey. In step three we repeat the analysis with the wave 2 variables (instead of wave 1) though include a new measure of hours of work (referred to as sustained long work hours).

RESULTS

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted that long work hours measured in Wave 1 and wave 2, respectively, would have a negative impact on job satisfaction in Wave 1 (Wave 2). The results provide support for the hypothesis (See Table 2 Column 1 for Wave 1 and Column 2 for Wave 2). Hours in excess of 41 were significantly and negatively associated with job satisfaction in that time period. However the effects of long hours of work may also be cumulative. Employees at first may be willing to work long hours to complete important pieces of work but when long hours of work become the norm they may be more likely to report lower levels of job satisfaction, as predicted by Hypothesis 3. This hypothesis was supported (see Column 3 of Table 2). Employees who reported 41 hours or more in both wave 1 and wave 2 reported a significant and negative relationship with job satisfaction. Hypotheses 4 and 5 predicted that long work hours measured in Wave 1 and Wave 2, respectively, would have a positive impact on job search activity in Wave 1 (Wave 2). The results provide partial support for this hypothesis (See Table 3). At wave 1, while the coefficient between long work hours and job search is positive, it did not reach significance at conventional level ($p < .05$). Rather it reached significance at the 10% level (column 1). In wave 2, the direction of the relationship was maintained but is not significant (column 2). Hypothesis 6 predicted that sustained long work hours would have a positive impact on job search activity measured in Wave 2. This hypothesis was supported (See Table 3, Column 3). Sustained long work hours had a positive and significant relationship with job search activity (column 3). Our final hypothesis investigated the relationship between job satisfaction and job search activity. We applied the four criteria of the Baron and Kenny (1986) model of a mediated relationship. The results of the first criterion are reported in column 1 of Table 4 and demonstrate that sustained long hours of work are significant in predicting job satisfaction. Criterion 2 requires that job satisfaction is significant in predicting job search activity, which in fact the case as shown in column 2 of Table 4. Criterion 3 requires that sustained long hours of work are significant in predicting job search activity, which is demonstrated in column 3 of Table 4. The fourth and final criterion to demonstrate that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between sustained long hours of work and job search is reported in column 4 of Table 4. When both job satisfaction and sustained long hours of work are run against job search activity, job satisfaction remains highly significant while sustained

long hours of work falls both in size and becomes almost statistically insignificant. The results show that sustained long hours of work reduces employees' feelings of job satisfaction, which in turn sparks active job search, which support hypothesis 7.

TABLE 3
Job search and sustained long work hours

Variables	(1) Job search Wave 1	(2) Job search Wave 2	(3) Job search & sustained long work hours
Independent variables			
Long work hours	.2663*	.2274	
Sustained long work hours			.4181***
Control variables: demographic			
Age	-.0209***	-.0309***	-.0314***
Dependents	.0884	.0154	.0160
Education	.5026***	.4847***	.4662***
Gender	-.0216	-.2979**	-.3412**
Marital status	.3972**	-.0765	-.0797
Union	-.1734	-.1025	-.1072
Paying job	-.0660*	-.0847**	-.0858**
Control variables situational			
Job control	-.0617	-.0580	-.0628
Complex job	.0235	.0421	.0332
Job security	-.2671***	-.2795***	-.2814***
Tenure	-.0371***	-.0410***	-.0504***
Private sector	-.3869**	-.2881*	-.3159*
Use skills	-.1514***	-.0988**	-.1006**
Workplace size	.0072	.0062	.0073
Management 1	-.4195	.1130	.0785
Management 2	.0126	.6138***	.5669**
Management 3	.1157	-.0621	-.1143
Management 4	-.0197	.6326**	.6122**
Constant	1.287**	2.135***	2.2325***
Pseudo R ²	.0808	.1067	.1102
N	2276	2276	2276

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Increased competition, organisational restructuring and enterprise bargaining are some of the causes of long work hours in Australia. Extending hours of work has advantages, including productivity improvements and less uncertainty about the performance of new hires, but there are also many costs associated with this strategy. The present study sought to investigate the immediate and longer-term impact of long work hours on job satisfaction and job-search activity. The results reported here indicate that full time employees who work long hours over an extended period of time are more likely to express job dissatisfaction than those employees who work fewer hours. Furthermore, these higher

levels of job dissatisfaction encourage employees to take active steps to locate alternative employment. Active job search is a precursor to job turnover so organisations face the potential loss of valuable employees. Thus, the costs associated with voluntary turnover may in fact exceed the benefits of working an existing workforce longer hours. Hence, organizations need to carefully reconsider their use of this strategy for addressing competition and globalization. Organisations that maintain appropriate staffing levels and reasonable hours of work may ultimately be more successful than those who experience high levels of job dissatisfaction and staff turnover as a consequence of a short-term focus on employee costs.

TABLE 4
Job search, job satisfaction and long hours of work

Variables	Criterion 1 Job satisfaction (W2) & sustained hours	Criterion 2 Job search (W2) & job satisfaction (W2)	Criterion 3 Job search (W2) & sustained hours	Criterion 4 Job search (W2) & sustained hours & job satisfaction (W2)
Sustained long hours	-.2915***		.4181***	.2565*
Job satisfaction		-.4581***		-.4514***
Control variables: demographic				
Age	.0163***	-.0277***	-.0314***	-.0292***
Dependents	.0371	.0287	.0160	.0276
Education	-.2196***	.4731***	.4662***	.4464***
Gender	.0524	-.2803*	-.3412**	-.3230**
Marital status	-.0013	-.0499	-.0797	-.0549
Union	.0406	-.0643	-.1072	-.0598
Paying job	.0621***	-.0686*	-.0858**	-.0716*
Control variables situational				
Job control	.1930***	.0545	-.0628	.0479
Complex job	-.1180***	-.0007	.0332	-.0121
Job security	.2736***	-.1621***	-.2814***	-.1642***
Tenure	-.0014	-.0536***	-.0504***	-.0539***
Private sector	.0683	-.2626	-.3159*	-.2909*
Use skills	.2299***	.0190	-.1006**	.0139
Workplace size	-.0070	.0018	.0073	.0030
Management 1	.2080	.2704	.0785	.2344
Management 2	-.0945	.6246***	.5669**	.5727**
Management 3	.1668	-.0044	-.1143	-.0445
Management 4	-.2686	.5492*	.6122**	.5181
Constant	3.6895***	3.7512***	2.2325***	3.7985***
Measure of fit	Adj R ² = .2152	Pseudo R ² = .1823	Pseudo R ² = .1102	Pseudo R ² = .1840
N	2276	2276	2276	2276

There are numerous strengths to the current study. First, the data permitted an investigation of working hours over two time periods enabling us to draw conclusions about its impact over time. Second, the study considers two individual outcome variables, job-satisfaction and job-search activity, two

variables that are known to have important consequences for organizations. Third, the study considers the impact of sustained hours of work on these individual attitudinal and behavioural outcomes, permitting us to draw conclusions about the long-term negative impact of increased hours of work. Nevertheless, it is important to note some limitations. These data are gathered from one country, so future research needs determine whether these relationships generalize to countries other than Australia. Furthermore, long hours of work are one form work intensification. Working at a high pace is another form of work intensification (Green 2001), though these data did not permit us to explore the relationship between increased pace of work and various individual outcome variables. Future research should examine the relationship between these two forms of work intensification and its impact on job satisfaction and job search activity.

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