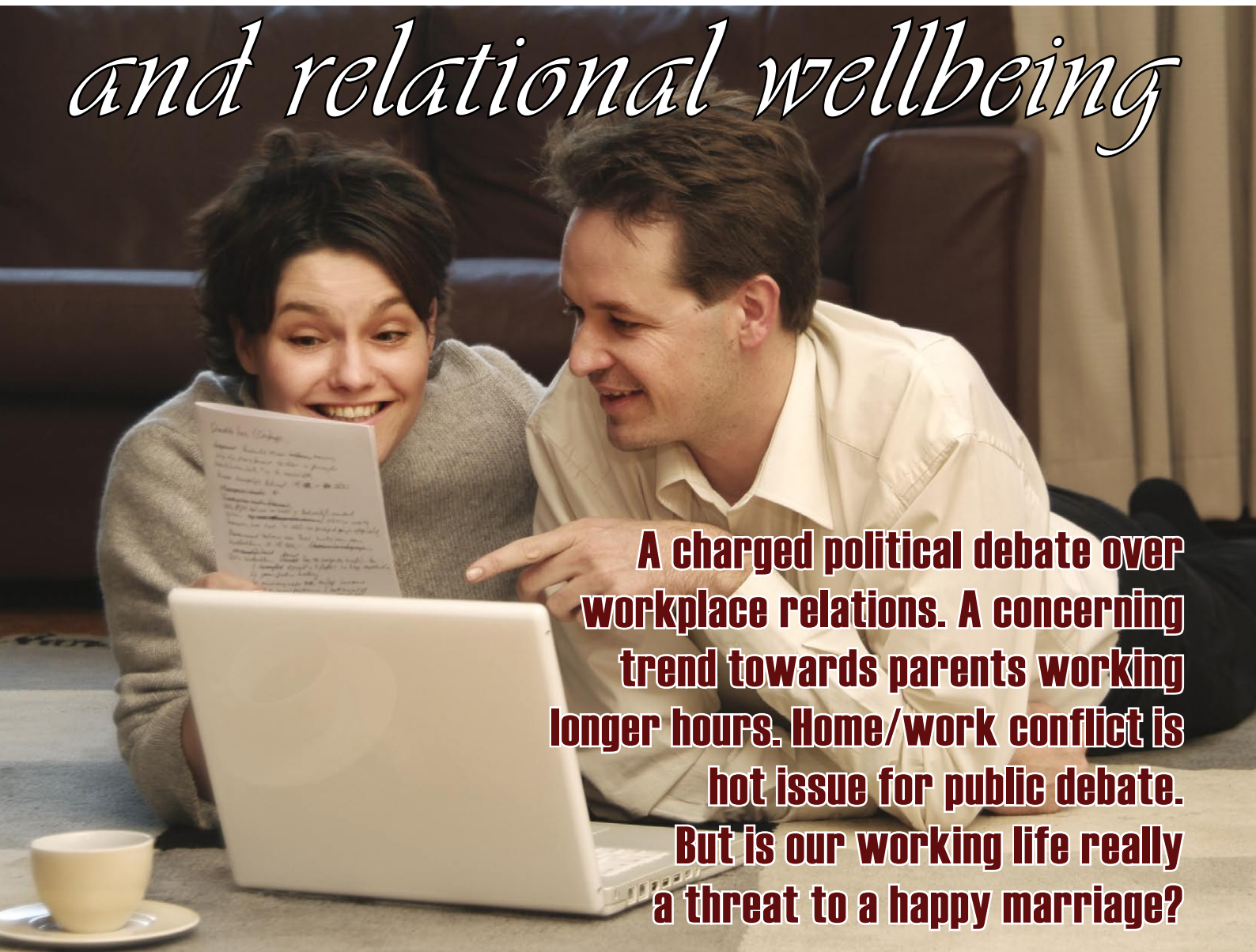


HOME/WORK CONFLICT

and relational wellbeing



A charged political debate over workplace relations. A concerning trend towards parents working longer hours. Home/work conflict is hot issue for public debate. But is our working life really a threat to a happy marriage?

Research by JEREMY HALCROW, ANDREW CAMERON and TRACY GORDON shows that home/work conflict is linked to marital insecurity, discord, and a lack of intimacy. And for Christians the implications should be particularly troubling.

Introduction

Concern has been growing in recent years about the way changes to Australian working life is impacting family well-being. Australian families are bearing the brunt of longer hours of paid employment as well as the trend towards both parents working full-time.

The most significant social change that has impacted family life, since the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, has been the surge in the workforce participation of women. Since 1966, the proportion of women who are married or in a de facto marriage and also in the labour force has almost doubled (from 29% to 57% in 2001). Likewise close to 60 per cent of couple parents with dependent children are now dual earners (ABS 2001).

More recently this trend has been coupled with the shift towards longer working hours.

The 20th century was characterised with a gradual reduction in the working week, thanks to the struggle of the labour movement, changes in technology, and the feminisation of the workforce. Yet since the turn of the new millennium, key researchers are expressing increasing alarm at the extraordinarily rapid reversal of work hours in recent years. (Healy 2000, Weston 2002, Hamilton 2004)

For example, Weston, traces the battle of the labour movement over half a century to reduce the 50 hour working week as it stood in 1900. By 1948, a "40-hour week" for full-time workers had been adopted by the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration and all state industrial tribunals. By the late 1970s married women's entrance into the workforce was gaining momentum, and as Weston argues, this saw either a 35-hour or 38-hour weeks become standard in many industries.

However, the 'standard' working week has been significantly eroded in the past 15 years. The proportion of men in the workforce who were working 45 or more hours per week increased between 1986–87 and 1998–99, while the proportion working 35–44 hours fell. (Weston 2002)

Furthermore, researchers have shown that job insecurity has increased with levels of casual and contract work rising dramatically. Between the late 1970s and late 1990s the proportion of the workforce engaged on a casual or self-employed basis rose from just over a quarter (27 percent) to around 40%. (Buchanan 2004)

Perhaps most interesting is the recent hypothesis put forward by the Australia Institute's Clive Hamilton in his book *Affluenza* (2005), Hamilton suggests that the trend towards longer working hours is actually driven by our own unhealthy addiction to overconsumption. And he goes on to argue that the pressure we feel to work longer and longer hours to achieve higher and higher material goals, actually comes at the overall cost of our own wellbeing. Hamilton's suggestion that there is a connection between Australia's culture of materialism and overworking, casts an uneasy shadow over any moves to further increase workplace flexibility.

Indeed, the recent decision by the Federal Government to alter the industrial relations legislation has further energised this debate. Will further deregulation of workplace relations lead to longer working hours or more people working non-standard hours? And to what extent do these factors harm the wellbeing of Australian families and/or marriages? Is the Government's confidence that workers will make choices that seek the best interest of their family life actually misplaced? And to what



extent should we consider the cost to the community as a whole, if many Australians are making damaging decisions about home/work balance.

Is this a political debate?

It is important for researchers in such a politicised context to be open about their ideological assumptions. Clearly, this research project has been funded by the Anglican Church. For some people this will raise questions about the wisdom - or even the right - of the Church to speak out in the midst of highly charged political debate.

Three points should be made in response to such concerns.

Firstly, this project was conceived before the industrial relations debate took shape. It is not a polemical exercise, but grew out of our genuine interest as Christian researchers and ethicists to objectively explore those factors impacting family well being.

Secondly, the ethical teaching of the Bible does not speak from what could be commonly described as either a 'left-wing' or 'right-wing' perspective. So in that respect a Christian perspective on workplace relations, at least in its assumptions, should be a less biased perspective than most.

Finally, for Christians it is not merely a political debate but part of our calling to pursue God's blueprint for just relations between people. That said, it should also be emphasised that while the Bible compels Christians to speak out about social issues, this should be done humbly, and not in a way that implies Christians have direct access to the mind of God. Nevertheless Christian theology - drawn from the biblical narrative - may present some unique ways of seeing the connections between human beings, their family relationships, and work.

1. Work is good. Work is an activity of God himself, part of his created order, and our work will continue even as we enter God's perfect new creation that corrects the workplace injustices of this world.

2. We have been created in the image God and our creativity mirrors his. The strong link between work and creativity in the Bible suggests that Christians:

- a) should favour increasing ordinary workers ability to influence decision making within their workplace;
- b) oppose workplace structures that are dehumanising.

3. Work is intrinsically linked to rest. Work cannot properly be understood unless we note the operation of 'rest' throughout the Bible: God rested in creation, the Sabbath institution, the concept of the promised land, Jesus teaching about himself as the 'gateway' to rest, and the promise of the new creation. In the Bible, work exists in order that there might be rest.

4. God made human beings for relationship. The Bible says human beings are made for community, as particularly exemplified in the marriage relationship. Christians should not absorb current individualistic political and economic thinking that treats workers as individual units of labour disconnected from their family and social context. Rather we should uphold work practices that support healthy marriages, community and family life.

5. Sin has entered the world corrupting all aspects of work and home. Sin warps our view of our work and relationships. Some workplaces are exploitative. We struggle to get the balance right between work and home. Family life is sometimes dark. We make career choices that harm our relationships.

6. We are called to mutual love. While sin will continue in our world until it is crushed at the end of time by God, Jesus Christ taught that by loving God and loving our neighbour we can have more equitable relations. There are some key aspects of this teaching that relate to work:

- a) to exploit those under your authority is to also insult God;
- b) those in power (employers) should be servants of their employees, not the other way around. In fact the parable of the Good Samaritan suggests that it is only by caring or

loving another person that we can come to know them as a fellow human being;

- c) workplaces should operate under systems of mutual respect and justice - employer to employee, employee to employer, as well as between employees.

This paper within the wider research landscape

Nearly all recent Australian research has focused primarily on one of three aspects of the home/work balance debate:

- **general perceptions of how Australians are coping** (Cummins 2003, Hughes 2004)
- **the trend towards extended work hours** (Thornwaite 2002, Weston 2002, Weston 2004)
- **parenting** (Dempster 2003, Gray 2000, Kruesmann 2003, Hand 2002, Russell 1999, Venn 2003);

General surveys of well being and insecurity continue to emphasise the significance of home/work balance as an aspect of their lives that deeply concerns Australians. This issue has been shown to rate as one of the most pressing personal issue for Australians, with only outside factors such as the environment and terrorism rating higher in a scale of insecurity (Cummins 2003).

Overview of our research data

According to the 2002-2003 Wellbeing and Security Survey (WSS) almost half of those surveyed (45%) report that work regularly conflicts with their home life.

To clarify, this question is a 7 point scale where only the extremes are labelled: '1 never' and '7 All the time'. We cannot know the precise meaning of responses to the intervening numbers: only that respondents are locating themselves closer to one or other extreme. We felt the following labelling most accurately reflected the way the question was asked: 1=never, 2-4=sometimes, 5-6=often and 7=always.

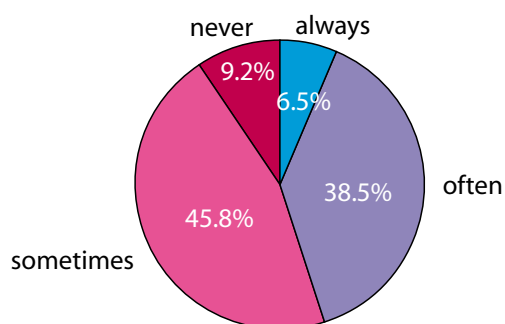


FIGURE 1

Q

how often does work conflict with your home life?

When looking at the relational well-being indicators, about 1 in 9 people report serious concerns about the level of security (11.9%) or intimacy (13.7%) in their relationship. Likewise, only 11.4% of people (FIGURE 2) are seriously troubled with the way their partner treats them and more than 65% think their partner treats them well or very well.

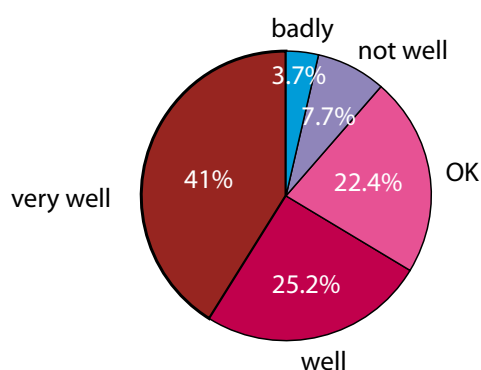


FIGURE 2

Q

how well does your partner treat you?

So it is somewhat surprising to see how narrowly focused research into this area has been. There seems to be something of an assumption amongst key researchers that home/work conflict is being driven by extended working hours and so the link between long work hours and aspects of family wellbeing has been the focus of a number of studies. (Thornwaite 2002, Weston 2002, Weston 2004). Our paper will indicate that workplace casualisation and working non-standard hours, along with working longer hours, each make a contribution to home/work conflict.

Hours in paid employment and relational wellbeing

Using the trend towards extended working hours as the starting point does not appear to have thrown up many helpful insights for these researchers. For example, other researchers found that there is no evidence that fathers who indicate high satisfaction with very long hours have poorer family relationships than fathers with high satisfaction at working standard hours (Weston 2004). However, the strength of the 2002-2003 Wellbeing and Security Survey (WSS) is its ability to measure home/work conflict. Our analysis will show the connection between long work hours and home/work conflict, and in turn, the link between home/work conflict and poor relationship outcomes (see appendix).

Nevertheless it is worth noting that some US researchers (Crouter 2001 cited by Weston 2004) have concluded there is little evidence of a direct link between long work hours and the quality of a marriage. Rather, Crouter provides evidence suggesting that the impact of long work hours on a marriage depends on the way the spouse feels about these long hours. Some spouses may see the longer hours as part of a shared sacrifice to achieve common goals or feel that the benefits of long hours, such as higher income, outweigh any negative repercussions.

It is true that the link between long work hours and poor marriage outcomes is not a direct one. But our research shows that longer work hours does contribute to home/work conflict.

Parenting

Parenting has been the other major area of study into the impact of work/home balance on family life. It is no surprise that researchers have found that dual income parents spend less time with their children (Venn 2003). The Australian Time Use Survey shows that working full-time reduces the amount of time available for both men and women to care for children.

According to a more focused research paper (Kruesmann 2003) into the experience of working mums, work is having a detrimental impact on the well being of a significant minority of these women. More than 40% of working mothers say they are missing out on the rewarding aspects of being a parent, while 35 per cent say working leaves them too little time or energy 'to be the kind of parent I want to be' (35.5 per cent)

There has also been a significant amount of literature looking at the particular struggles for working mothers coping as their husbands fail to pick up more of the family's domestic duties. (Dempsey 2000; Russell 1999; Weston 2002 citing Bittman and Matheson 1996). This discussion is particularly pertinent to this paper's finding that women who experience high levels of home/work conflict are also more likely to report conflict with their spouse over gender roles.

Less work has been done to look at the impact of work demands on fathering. However a survey of Australian dads (Russell 1999) found that many fathers see being accessible



to their children as "the most important aspect of their role". A small qualitative study from Melbourne further explored these perceptions (Hand 2002), finding that while some fathers make a conscious choice to pursue career goals, there is also a desperate cry from many fathers who feel they are failing to meet their family obligations because of a strong workplace culture that frowns on men taking time out for family. These latter comments are a sad echo of our findings that men who experience high levels of home/work conflict are more likely to experience marriages lacking in intimacy.

Boundaries of this paper

In contrast to this spread of literature on the conflict between work and parenting much less has been said about this paper's particular area of interest - the impact of workplace pressures on marriage relationships. If relationships are harmed then there are public policy implications. A focus on the needs of working parents in isolation has seen theorists place greater emphasis on promoting the benefits of workplace flexibility. (eg Thornwaite 2002) But while encouraging workplace flexibility may mean a parent can start work late to drop off a child at school, it may work against overall family wellbeing. If parents are staggering their working day so that one cares for the kids in the morning, and one in the evening, when do they get shared time? A question mark certainly hangs over the impact of greater workplace flexibility on marital well being.

Yet, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of our research in this paper. As our findings touch on spousal conflict, it must be acknowledged that there are psychological factors that lie outside our field of vision. There is little doubt that "explosive" behaviour patterns, such as shouting, hitting and throwing objects, are especially detrimental to a marriage. And indeed, elsewhere psychologists have shown that a couple's mode of handling conflict is a critical factor shaping the quality of their relationship (Weston 2002 citing Clements 1995 and Wolcott 1997).

That said, there has been a dearth of Australian research into relational wellbeing and spirituality. The twin research project to this paper - *Christian Spirituality and Relational Wellbeing* (Cameron et al 2005) - found that both Christian belief and church attendance were linked to higher levels of relational wellbeing. This paper further explores the link between relational wellbeing and Christian spirituality in relation to home/work balance. This question is particularly important because church membership can provide a social safety net for parents struggling with home/work conflict. Researchers in the US help flesh out this picture further with their exploration of how different religious affiliations impact on the nexus between female workforce participation and gender roles. (Becker 2001, Lehrer 2004)

2002-2003 Wellbeing and Insecurity Survey

This paper reports on an interrogation of data from the 2002-2003 Wellbeing and Security Survey (WSS). The WSS was conducted by researchers from Edith Cowan University, Deakin University, Anglicare NSW and NCLS Research. It consisted of a 352 question survey instrument completed by a random sample of 1517 Australians.

The WSS provides individual questions on four aspects of relational wellbeing:

- >> Insecurity/Security: "How likely is it that your relationship will continue until death?" A scale from unlikely to certain.
- >> Distance/Intimacy: "How intimate is your relationship?" A scale from cold to very warm.
- >> Discord/Harmony: "How well does your partner treat you?" A scale from badly to very well.
- >> Gender roles: "How easy do you find it to agree on roles in your relationship?" A scale from very difficult to not difficult.

Furthermore, the survey also asked specifically about home/work conflict, allowing us to cross-tabulate this against the above relational wellbeing indicators as well as a number of other factors including health, income, work hours, work hour preference, gender, age, support from friends and family, household type and Christian spirituality.

In relation to our research into work/home conflict and spirituality, as non-Christian religious groups form a tiny proportion of the Australian population it is not possible to use a general survey such as the WSS to look at non-Christian faith groups such as Muslims, Jews, and Buddhists. In order to determine Christian belief, this paper employs a six question scale developed by Kaldor (2004). This issue is discussed in more detail in our paper *Christian Spirituality and Relational Wellbeing* (Cameron 2005)

Work pressure, relational wellbeing and conflict over marital roles

Our correlational analysis found a weak but consistently negative connection between home/work conflict and all the relational wellbeing indicators (see appendix). Across the four wellbeing indicators we analysed a wide range of factors (including health and household income), only Christian belief had such a consistent connection to all the relational wellbeing indicators as home/work conflict. (Christian belief is a focus of our other paper *Christian Spirituality and Relationship Wellbeing*). So it is difficult to dismiss the connection between home/work conflict and poor relational wellbeing outcomes.

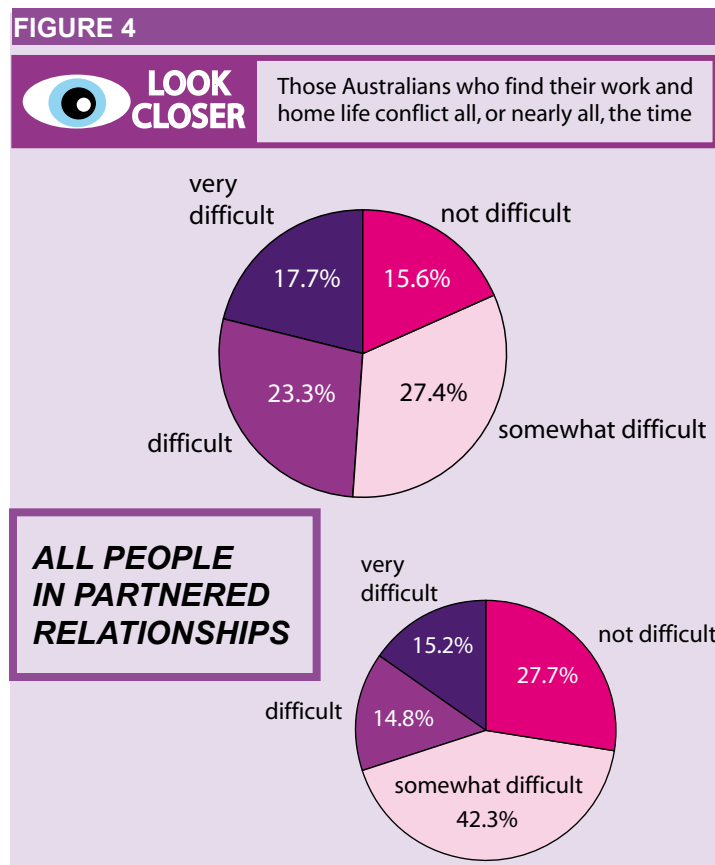
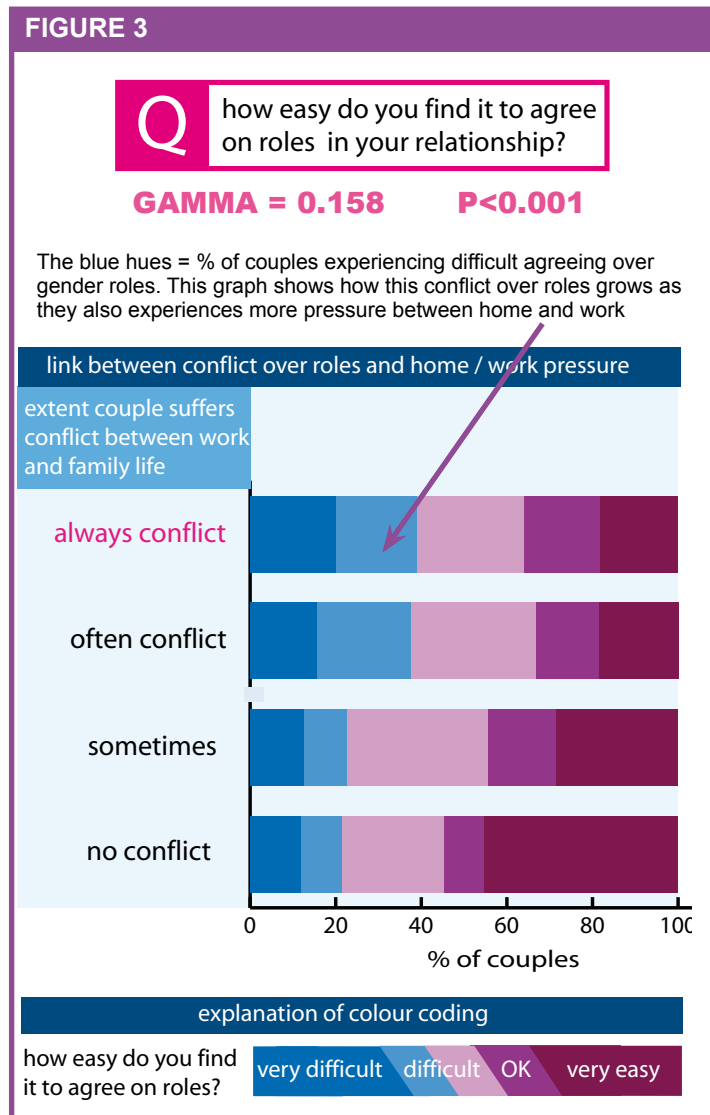


FIGURE 5

home/work conflict

V
(cross-tabulated)

Q

how well does your partner treat you?

GAMMA = 0.130

P < 0.01

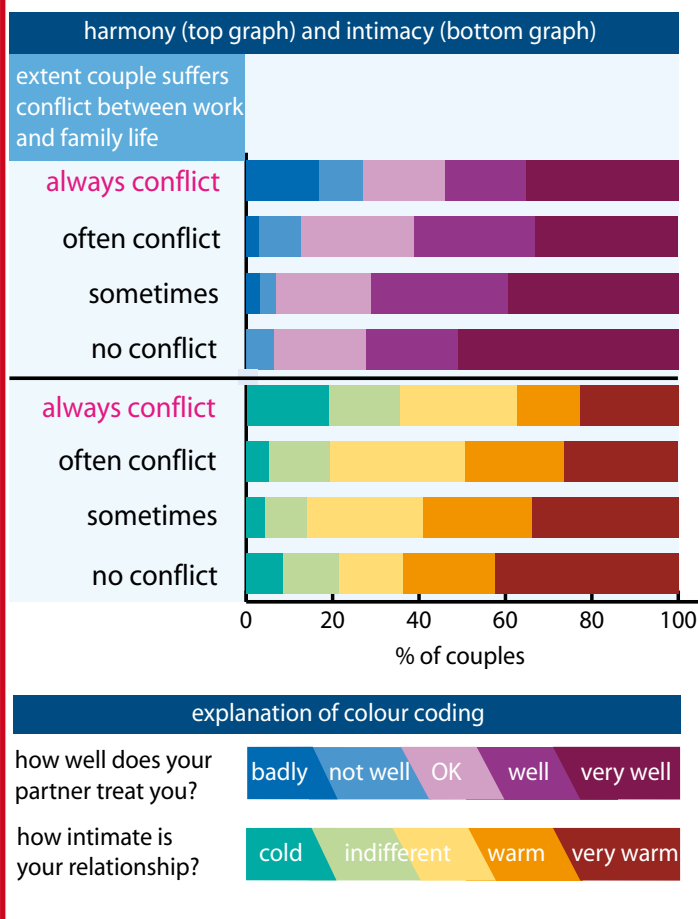
AND

Q

how intimate is your relationship?

GAMMA = 0.139

P < 0.001



In some way this result is not surprising. The four relational wellbeing indicators are strongly intertwined, with either a strong or very strong connection between all of them. For example the connection between the discord question and the intimacy question produced an extraordinarily strong Gamma analysis result of 0.842. This may suggest that a troubled relationship enters a vicious downward spiral with the damage to each aspect of relational wellbeing dragging the marriage further towards disaster. Turning to our discussion of work/home conflict, it is interesting to speculate that work pressure would need only influence one aspect of relational well-being to impact every aspect of the relationship over time.

Of the four relational wellbeing indicators, the connection between work/home conflict and conflict over gender roles was the strongest, (gamma: 0.158; $p < 0.001$) This makes a great deal of sense. It is easy to picture the way work pressures first impact on the wellbeing of relationship around arguments on how to split domestic duties such as cleaning, cooking and child care between the spouses.

Indeed it should be noted that gender roles is the aspect of relational well being that Australians are struggling with most. The pie chart on right (FIGURE 3) shows that across the whole sample population some 30 per cent of people find it 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to agree about roles in their relationship. In contrast, across the other three relational wellbeing indicators those experiencing real problems hovers around 1 in 9 Australians (see FIGURE 2).

However those Australians who find their work and home lives conflict regularly report even greater difficulty agreeing with their spouse about roles in their marriage or de facto relationship. (FIGURE 4) The WSS shows that for this group the number experiencing difficulty agreeing on gender roles balloons out to 41%. In comparison for the whole sample population 30% experienced difficulty.

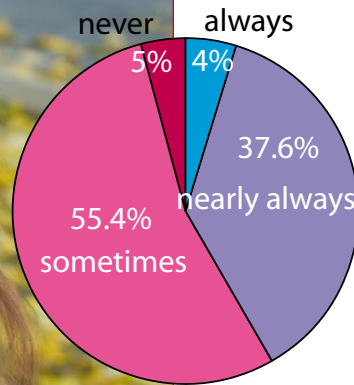
As discussed previously, the connection between work/home conflict and marital discord is underlined by the fact that it is linked to all the relational wellbeing indicators. The link to 'intimacy' and the question 'how well does your partner treat you?' is particularly noteworthy.

The colour bars (on left FIGURE 5) are an attempt to depict this connection graphically. The top graph clearly shows that, as home/work conflict increases, so too does a person's sense that their partner treats them 'badly'. In fact 16.7% of people who believe their work always conflicts with their home life also believe their spouse treats them badly. In stark contrast, of those who don't experience home/work conflict, absolutely nobody said their partner treated them badly. (gamma = 0.130; $p < 0.01$)

Likewise, at bottom, we see the orange and deep red bars growing as we move down the chart, indicating how the intimacy of a relationship improves as home/work conflict disappears. Indeed the vast majority of people who don't experience home/work conflict have a warm or very warm relationship (63.9%) while just 37.5% of people who always experience home/work conflict have a warm relationship. (gamma = 0.139; $p < 0.001$)

Marital discord, home/work conflict and Christian spirituality

While, apart from Kaldor (2004), there is very little Australian research into spirituality and relational wellbeing, that is not the case in the US. In fact a number of researchers have looked in depth at the links between family, work and religious adherence. Of particular interest to our discussion was the finding that conservative Protestant believers make a sharp distinction between male and female social and economic roles, encouraging the traditional division of labor within the



**P = 0.2
NO STATISTICALLY
SIGNIFICANT
DIFFERENCE TO
GENERAL POPULATION**

home/work conflict

(cross-tabulated)

Christian belief

“It is very clear that Christian spirituality is not a factor in ameliorating home/work conflict.”

being. (The link between Christian belief and relational well being indicators tends to have correlations in the moderate range above 0.2 and as high as 0.33 for relational security. See appendix).

For example, 16.1% of people with no or very low Christian belief find it difficult to agree on roles with their partner or spouse. In comparison only 6.5% of people with very strong Christian belief have the same level of difficulty. ($p = 0.003$; $\gamma = 0.233$). However what is worth noting for this discussion is that Christian belief, despite being strongly linked to all the relational wellbeing measures, is **not linked** to lower levels of home/work conflict.

household when young children are present (Lehrer, 2004). Consistent with the view that Bible-based churches provide institutionalised moral support and psychological rewards to mothers who stay home with their young children, a plethora of research has found a lower level of female employment amongst evangelical Christians in the US. (Lehrer 2004 citing Heaton and Cornwall 1989; Sherkat 2000, Chadwick and Garrett 1995; Lehrer 1995, 1999a). Along similar lines, young women who believe that the Bible is the inerrant word of God are more likely than their non-evangelical counterparts to be housewives early in their life course. While there are significant differences between the Christian cultures of the US and Australia, it does not seem unwarranted to assume Bible-believing Protestants in Australia will share some of these characteristics with their American brothers and sisters.

So how did strongly Bible-believing Australian Christians fare in the WSS data. As it turns out there is no statistically significant connection between a strong belief in the authority of the Bible and either conflict over gender roles or home/work conflict. At around 5% of the WSS sample perhaps these believers are too small a group to show up. Yet to quickly jump to this conclusion does not seem entirely warranted when we look at the wider sample of strong Christian believers and frequent church-goers.

It will undoubtedly surprise some (secular) commentators how strongly Christian belief is linked to relational well

So does that mean that Christian marriages are suffering as a result of home/work conflict? The short answer is ‘yes’. Look at the pie chart (above) which shows the level of home/work conflict endured by people with very high levels of Christian belief. On face value very strong Christian belief may appear to give people some very marginal benefit. Yet this difference is being driven by age as the data shows that older age cohorts are more likely to exhibit Christian beliefs. In fact nearly 30% of strong Christian believers are over 60, while this age group makes up just 20.2% of the overall survey population.

So it is very clear that Christian spirituality is not a factor in ameliorating home/work conflict, despite having a significant connection to relational wellbeing indicators including ease of agreement over gender roles. In fact our analysis found that the connection between home/work conflict and the other major indicator of Christian spirituality - frequency of church attendance - was even weaker and even further from being statistically significant.

This begs the question - why is there not a stronger connection? Committed Christians are part of wider church support structure that can help out with child care and other domestic duties when the going gets tough. Indeed, evidence of this support structure shows up in the data with a greater per cent of strong Christian believers saying they receive support from friends compared to non-believers. ($p=0$; $\gamma=0.107$)

However other research has clearly shown that it is close family members, such as grandparents, not friends, who make

that regular commitment to informal child care that enables working parents to cope. (Dempster 2003)

A further, though speculative suggestion, is that evangelical Australian Christians are much more enmeshed into mainstream workplace culture than those in the US. There is a strong 'fundamentalist' Christian culture in parts of the US that does not exist in Australia. Indeed, many Australian evangelical Christians remain in mainline Protestant denominations. In the US research has shown that 'mainline' Protestants and Roman Catholic mothers have become increasingly focused on workforce participation over recent decades (Lehrer 2004).

All this should greatly concern church leaders. It is interesting to speculate that home/work conflict and dual income parenting is contributing to the decline in regular church-going. Previous research has shown a connection, although weak, between long work hours and less frequent church attendance (Bellamy 2002). Likewise if Australian Christians are drifting towards an 'individualistic' view of their career, this too may be having an impact on declining church attendance. Indeed US researchers have found that for both men and women involvement in church is strongly linked to (what these researchers dub) 'familistic' attitude – they see religious involvement as very important for their kids and as something done a family – rather than having a 'individualistic' attitude to the benefits they gain from their spiritual life and their work. (Becker 2001)

To explore these theories further it would necessary to look at different Christian groups in more detail, as well as look at the workplace participation rates for women from other faith groups. While the WSS is unable to explore differences between Christians and other faith groups, as a starting point for any future research into this issue, it is worth noting that US researchers have found that the overall commitment of Jewish women to labor market activities is stronger than for Christian women. (Lehrer 2004 citing Hartman 1996).

Gender differences

There is no statistically significant difference between the genders when it comes to the degree to which they feel their work conflicts with their home life. The difference seems to be how they feel home/work conflict effects their relationships.

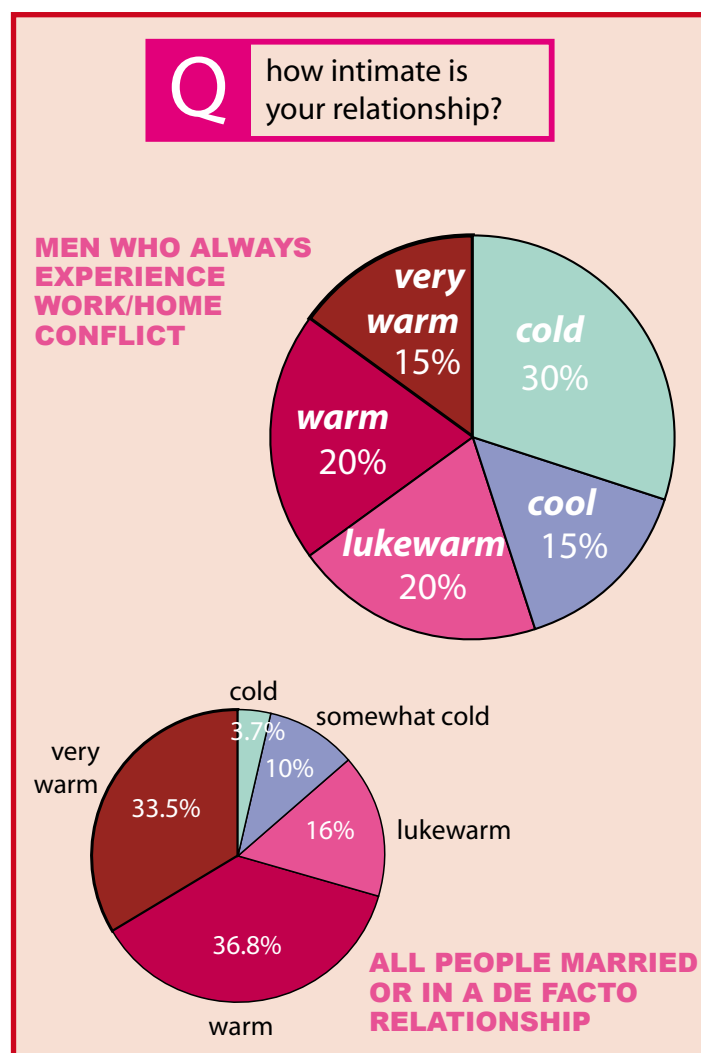
...impact on men: low feelings of intimacy

There is a notable link for men between home/work conflict and experiencing a cold marriage that is not apparent for women. (men: $p=0.003$; $\gamma = 0.162$; women: not statistically significant).

Likewise, men who believe their work always conflicts with their home life experience a greater drop in intimacy with their partner than do women. Nearly a third of these men have cold relationships compared to just 10% of women who likewise say they always experience home/work conflict.

In fact this result for the men is quite shocking. Look at the large pie chart (right) and compare it with the smaller pie chart. We see that 45% of men who always experience conflict

between home and work rate their marriage as seriously lacking in intimacy. In comparison only 13.7% of the overall survey population experienced such a low level of intimacy with their partner.



...impact on women: conflict over roles

A number of researchers have shown that working mothers continue to carry most of the family's domestic responsibilities, and although there is some evidence to suggest that fathers want to play a more active role in their children's lives, they are not picking up other domestic duties such as cooking and cleaning (Dempsey 2000; Russell 1999; Weston 2002).

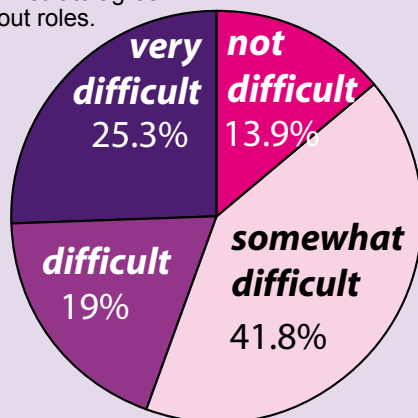
So it is far from surprising that gender roles are a significant issue for those women who regularly experience conflict between their work and home life. There is a stronger link between these factors for women (gamma: 0.181) than men (gamma: 0.136).

To make the same point another way, 23.2% of women who 'always' or 'nearly always' find their work and home life conflicting also find it 'very difficult' to agree on roles with their spouse. In contrast only 13.6% of men who have this degree of home/work conflict find it 'very difficult' to agree on roles with their wife (or de facto partner).



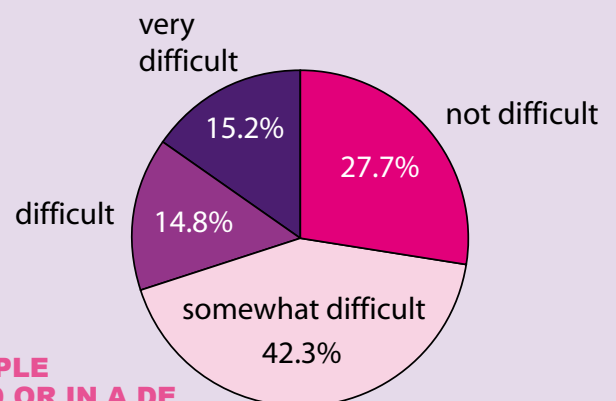
The contrast between these two pie charts shows the extent to which women experiencing high levels of home/ work conflict find it more difficult to agree with their spouse about roles.

WOMEN WHO REGULARLY EXPERIENCE HOME/WORK CONFLICT



Q

how easy do you find it to agree on roles in your relationship?



ALL PEOPLE MARRIED OR IN A DE FACTO RELATIONSHIP

Home/work conflict - an issue for high income-earners?

The Beatles sang, "You can't buy love", and that seems true for many high income earners. Our findings (right), that the vast majority of high income earners (66%) always or nearly always experience home/work conflict, fits neatly into a wide body of research into this issue. High income earners appear to gain personal wellbeing directly from their careers, but the time pressure of their jobs, has flow on negative effects for their marriage. (Weston 2002). Such a process is consistent with the thesis that extended hours can be personally rewarding but also costly for relationships which are of central importance to personal wellbeing. A vicious cycle may develop, whereby men, in particular, avoid escalating relationship difficulties by spending more time enjoying their work.

Gamma = 0.149 P < 0.001

How often does work conflict with home life?

<i>personal income</i>	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
Under \$4999	20.7%	48.3%	24.1%	6.9%
\$5000-\$19999	9.3%	52.3%	28.1%	10.3%
\$20000-\$39999	11.5%	46.4%	36.2%	5.9%
\$40000-\$59999	8.6%	44.4%	41.4%	5.6%
\$60000-\$99999	3.0%	41.3%	49.7%	6.0%
\$100000 or more	-	34.0%	55.3%	10.6%

Long hours in paid work and work casualisation

The theory that very busy, high-income professionals are most at risk of home/work difficulties appears to be born out when we look at our chart that compares work hours with home/work conflict. As predicted, those who work more than 50 hours a week suffer most.

However an additional insight of our research is that those who work part-time (30-34 hours a week) also do badly. There has been some discussion recently about the effects of workplace flexibility especially the stress caused by the casualisation of lower skilled jobs. (Buchanan 2004). Contrary to the stereotype, casuals are not just young students, but many are women with caring responsibilities and there has also been dramatic growth in casualisation amongst mature age, blue collar workers. Significantly around 70% of casuals have been shown to be working under 35 hours per week. (Buchanan 2004).



Gamma = 0.199 P < 0.001

How often does work conflict with home life?

hours at work	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1 to 19 hours	12.9%	51.5%	30.6%	5.0%
20 to 29 hours	11.7%	51.3%	31.5%	5.4%
30 to 34 hours	12.3%	41.5%	33.9%	12.3%
35 to 39 hours	14.1%	51.7%	27.4%	6.8%
40 to 44 hours	7.9%	48.9%	39.8%	3.5%
45 to 49 hours	4.2%	34.8%	59.3%	1.7%
50 or more hours	1.6%	33.3%	48.0%	17.1%

Work hours preference

Most studies that have cast an eye over the issue of preferred work hours have found that workers want to work less hours. A study by Weston (2004) of fathers working long hours found that over half of dads working more than 48 hours per week would prefer to work fewer hours. More general studies of full time workers, have likewise found a preference for reduced work hours amongst both men and women. (Thornwaite 2002)

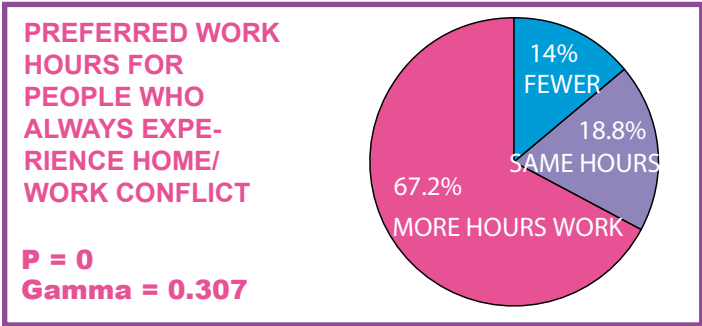
So it is very significant that our research points overwhelmingly in a different direction - people who 'always' experience conflict between home and work, want to work more hours not fewer (see graph on right which shows that 67.2% want more hours work), despite the negative impact this choice will have on family life. In fact the desire to work more hours is one of the factors most strongly linked to home/work conflict (gamma = 0.307) .

The data presents no one conclusive reason to explain this result, as those workers who 'always' experience home work/ conflict are split between part time hours (under 35 hours = 29.7%) standard hours (35-45 hours = 34.4%) and extended hours (more than 45 hours = 35.9%).

So while it is understandable that casual workers may find the personal benefits and security of a permanent job with more

hours very attractive, this explanation can not hold for the other two thirds of the sample. The result may also be partly explained by the high income earners thesis outlined above - although the research clearly indicates that is not just high flying businessmen who experience high levels of home/work conflict.

This result seems also to support Clive Hamilton's thesis in *Affluenza*. Many Australians feel trapped on a consumer treadmill - heavily in debt - and so feel that working more hours is the only way to get ahead and save their family life in the longer run, although it is clearly harming their relationship with their spouse in the present. Not much literature has looked at this aspect of the home/work balance debate, although at least one qualitative study acknowledged that financial pressures are driving some fathers to believe they need to work long hours. (Hand 2002).



Conclusions

The possibility that Australian marriages are being harmed by workplace pressure should be a matter of great concern. Work pressures on family life has increased since the 1990s. When women first began participating in the workforce in the 1970s, this led to a reduction in standard working hours. However in the past 15 years, some full-time workers are back to working over 50 hours a week. These pre-1990s levels have wiped out many of the gains of the labour movement. Other issues such as Sunday trading and the increased casualisation of low skill and blue collar jobs have also added to the pressure on family time.

Our interrogation of the 2002-2003 Wellbeing and Security Survey (WSS) found that nearly half of Australians (45%) report that work 'always' or 'often' conflicts with their home life. The connection between home/work conflict and poor relationships though weak, was particularly notable because it was one of the few factors linked to poor outcomes across all four of our relational wellbeing indicators: security, intimacy, discord and gender roles. As a result, it is very hard to dismiss the significance of the link between home/work conflict and unhealthy marriages.

While there is no evidence that either men or women experience poorer relationship outcomes because of conflict between home and work, there is a notable difference between the genders in how this conflict changes their experience of the marriage. For men, work pressure is more strongly linked to less intimacy, while for women it is more strongly linked to an inability to agree on roles in the marriage.

An additional insight of our research is that those who work part time (less than 35 hours a week) also do badly. This might be a pointer to the neagative effects of workplace flexibility especially the stresses caused by the causalisation of less skilled jobs. Adding to the recent debate over the Federal Government's industrial relations reforms, any evidence that workplace pressure may already be harming Australian family life will be of great public interest as we approach the next Federal election.

Research from the United States indicated that evangelical Protestants might be insulated from the level of work/home conflict experienced by the rest of the population. Their strong belief in the Bible has led them to retain traditional workplace arrangements and gender roles. We also found a significant connection between strong Christian belief and positive relational wellbeing outcomes (Cameron 2005). These pieces of evidence led us to expect that strong Christian belief and belief in the authority of the Bible may limit home/work conflict.

We could not have been more wrong. We found absolutely no connection between home/work conflict and strong Christian belief, or frequent church attendance or belief in the authority of the Bible. This was surprising particularly as retirement-age Australians have stronger levels of Christian belief, and this age group are out of the child raising age group where the impact of work pressure on family life is greatest. In other words, when we correct for age the result for Christians looks even worse.

This result may trouble church leaders. It appears that even the most conservative Australian Christians are enmeshed into mainstream work practices, which we have seen harm married life. The picture grows even darker when we consider Clive Hamilton's Affluenza thesis, which may suggest that Australian Christians are as wedded to overconsumption and materialism as their neighbours.

This is what our research data suggests:

- a) home/work conflict is a factor outside the relationship itself with the most significant link to unhealthy marriages. It is linked to poor outcomes across all four relational wellbeing indicators.
- b) home/work conflict becomes worse as Australians become more wealthy with those who earn over \$100,000 the worse off. Linked to this is the fact that those work more than 50 hours a week experience the highest levels of home/work conflict.
- c) despite the apparent damage being done to their marriages those people experiencing high levels of home/work conflict are far more likely to want to work longer hours not less. In fact 67.2% of people who always experience home/work conflict want even more hours work.

How do we make logical sense of these facts? Perhaps Clive Hamilton's thesis provides something of an answer. Our materialistic mindset makes us believe that if only we could work harder and earn more, we can buy our way out of our relationship struggles and into nirvana. The facts clearly present the tragic delusion of that fantasy. Indeed if we earned less and worked less, our lives would be relationally richer.

The weakness of Hamilton's work is that he offers not antidote to our spiritual malaise. We trust that when our findings are read in tandem with our *Christian Spirituality* paper (Cameron 2005), readers find some hope. Australian Christian theologians will have to rediscover how the Bible assists people to unravel this terrible structural problem. Individuals and families might need to rediscover thankful contentment and rediscover how the Christian gospel frees them from unsustainable materialistic lifestyles. They might also need to ask God for moral courage to resist more extreme workplace demands. God may also be calling Government leaders to another kind of moral courage; resistance to the delusion that economic growth is the sole route to our society's wellbeing.

Acknowledgement

The 2002-03 Wellbeing and Security Survey conducted by researchers from Edith Cowan University, Deakin University, ANGLICARE (Diocese of Sydney) and NCLS Research was made possible by a grant from the Australian Research Council, together with the support of ANGLICARE (Diocese of Sydney), the Uniting Church in Australia NSW Board of Mission and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The research has been jointly supervised by Professor Alan Black, Professor Robert Cummins and Mr Keith Castle. The research team included John Bellamy, Philip Hughes, Peter Kaldor and Sue King. The authors are particularly grateful to Dr John Bellamy from NCLS Research for his advice and guidance as we undertook this project.

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Appendix

How strongly linked are various factors to marital discord?

CONFLICT OVER ROLES IN MARRIAGE/DE FACTO

Gamma correlations (ordinal factors)		Cramer V correlations (category factors)	
			VERY STRONG
.548	>> How spouse treats you		STRONG
.495	>> low levels of intimacy		
.476	>> Feel insecure in marriage/defacto		
.233	>> no / low Christian belief		MODERATE
		0.106 >> present marital status (eg divorced, currently defacto)	
.183	>> work/home conflict (women)	0.096 >> been a single parent	WEAK
.158	>> work/home conflict (all people)	0.086 >> had a defacto relationship	
.144	>> no / low Christian belief (men)		
.101	>> poor health		
VERY WEAK CONNECTION: weaker belief in authority of the Bible (all people); stronger belief in authority of the Bible (women); church attendance; gender; NO STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT CONNECTION: hours in paid employment; want fewer hours work; household income			

HOW WELL DOES YOUR SPOUSE TREAT YOU?

Gamma correlations (ordinal factors)		Cramer V correlations (category factors)	
.842	>> Intimacy of relationship		VERY STRONG
.773	>> Feel secure in marriage/defacto		
.548	>> Less conflict over roles		STRONG
.210	>> Christian belief	0.151 >> present marital status (eg divorced) 0.114 >> household type (ie w/ children etc)	MODERATE
.159	>> health	0.095 >> been a single parent	WEAK
.130	>> home/work conflict		
.100	>> church attendance		
VERY WEAK CONNECTION: had a defacto relationship; personal income; fewer past partners			
NO STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT CONNECTION: gender, past gay relationship; stronger belief in Bible; hours in employment; experienced a blended family; household income; want fewer hours work			

What factors are more strongly linked to home/work conflict?

HOME AND WORK CONFLICT

Gamma correlations (ordinal factors)		Cramer V correlations (category factors)	
			STRONG
.307	>> want more hours work	0.122 >> household type (ie w/ children etc) 0.120 >> present marital status (eg defactos)	MODERATE
.199	>> hours in paid employment		WEAK
.181	>> conflict over roles (female)		
.169	>> poor health		
.162	>> lack of intimacy in relationship (male)		
.158	>> conflict over roles (all)		
.149	>> personal income (middle - upper)		
.139	>> lack of intimacy of relationship (all)		
.130	>> Spouse treats you badly		
.119	>> Fell insecure in marriage/defacto		
VERY WEAK CONNECTION: household income; support from family; support from friends; NO STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT CONNECTION: gender; Christian belief; stronger belief in Bible;			

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**The Relational Well Being papers are a joint project of
Anglican Media Sydney and the Social Issues Executive, Diocese of Sydney**

The project was only possible with cooperation and assistance of the joint-research team from Edith Cowan University, Anglicare and NCLS Research behind the 2002-2003 Well Being and Security (WSS) database

