

SUMMARY OF MAIN REPORT

'ONLY A CASUAL...'

How Casual Work affects Employees, Households and
Communities in Australia.

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Table of Contents

MAIN FINDINGS.....	4
KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT CASUAL WORK	6
DETAILED RESULTS:	7
OVERALL ASSESSMENTS OF CASUAL JOBS.....	7
WHAT UNDERPINS SATISFACTION WITH CASUAL TERMS?	8
PART-TIME WORK, NOT CASUAL WORK	9
ENJOY THE JOB, BUT NOT THE CASUAL TERMS.....	9
WHAT PEOPLE DON'T LIKE ABOUT BEING CASUAL	9
FLEXIBILITY – FOR WHOM?.....	10
THE DIMENSIONS OF FLEXIBILITY.....	11
THE PREFERENCE FOR PERMANENCE.....	11
CASUAL WORK IS NOT A PATHWAY TO PERMANENCY	12
RESPECT	13
ONLY A CASUAL	14
A GOOD BOSS	14
BULLYING	14
MARGINALISED AT WORK.....	15
PERFORMANCE.....	15
SURVEILLANCE	16
VOICE.....	16
PAY	17
LOW HOURLY RATES, UNDERCLASSIFICATION AND THE LOADING	18
THE CASUAL LOADING: DOES IT COMPENSATE?.....	18
TRAINING AND PROMOTION	19
BEING SICK.....	19
HAVING A HOLIDAY	20
HEALTH.....	21
RELATIONSHIPS, SOCIAL LIFE AND COMMUNITY	22
FINANCIAL PLANNING.....	23
WELFARE, TAX AND SUPERANNUATION	24
CASUAL WORK IS REMAKING THE TERMS OF WORK.....	24

MAIN FINDINGS

- This study reports on the experiences of 55 casual workers. These casual workers were randomly selected from a pool of 136 current or past casual workers who responded to newspaper calls for their participation, to flyers distributed by their employers or in their workplaces or at university, or were drawn from a random sample of members of the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association, along with ten names offered by four other unions.
- There are three types of casuals in this study, in terms of overall views of casual work: the positive, the ambivalent and the reluctant.
- The majority are reluctant casuals: sixty-five per cent (or 36 of the 55 interviewed) are negative about being casual. Many are very negative.
- A quarter are – overall – positive about being casual. Most of these are students, younger people or women with dependents. All are part-time. Most have a back up source of income – a partner, parent or pension – and most are at certain stages in their life cycle. While they are positive about being casual now, they did not want to be when they had kids and a mortgage, or they do not want to be when they finish studying.
- Not all students or mature age carers are positive about their casual terms. Two key conditions drive satisfaction: real say over working time through a 'reciprocal negotiating' relationship with the employer, and a back up source of income. Often both are present amongst positive casuals.
- While flexibility is often taken as the defining characteristic of casual work, it is far from the only criteria taken into account by casual workers when assessing overall experience.
- The experience of casual work is multi-faceted. Issues affecting overall assessments include flexibility for the worker; predictability of pay and hours; respect, say, training and promotion at work; sick and holiday pay; and impacts on health, home and community.
- Some employees find that being casual gives them flexibility. Twenty-three of those we interviewed – or 42 per cent – feel that they had some flexibility and say over their work patterns. Some value it highly.
- The majority do not have flexibility: 32 or fifty-eight per cent see flexibility as something their employers get, but they do not.
- Flexibility has many dimensions including predictability of ongoing work, days of work, total hours, start and finish times and breaks. Many casuals have surprisingly little capacity to influence these aspects of their casual work, despite the promise of casual flexibility. Many feel on call, more than in charge of their working time.
- Three-quarters of interviewees would prefer to be permanent. Some have tried to become so, without success. Some are in a long-term casual ghetto.
- For many, casual work is not a pathway into permanency.
- A good boss emerges as very important to satisfaction with casual work. A good relationship with this boss is critical to real flexibility for most.
- Depending on a good boss for some employee control and say is seen as a precarious and unreliable means of protection. Many casuals want to see an improved floor of rights, along with their enforcement.

- Many casuals work in fear of dismissal, assuming they do not have rights to contest unfair dismissal. Some do not know when they have been effectively dismissed: they wait for the call for a next shift that does not come.
- The loss of respect and workplace citizenship – voice, communication, training, promotion, inclusion – emerge as very important aspects of casual work for workers.
- Casual pay holds many hazards: for many it is variable by the week, and over the year. It is sometimes accompanied by long gaps, lacks minimum call in times and is drained by work expenses.
- Low hourly rates and under-classification mean that many casuals look to the casual loading to get them to a liveable hourly rate. Their hourly rates are often lower than those they work alongside.
- Three-quarters of interviewees receive the casual loading; a quarter did not or do not know what it is.
- Of those who receive it, seventy-one percent feel that the loading did not adequately compensate for the difference between being casual and being permanent.
- Many casuals go to work sick. When they are sick they weigh up 'how sick, how injured, and how poor'. Illness is a moment of real hazard, putting health at risk and sometimes ongoing employment when they refuse work. Some do not get a second chance.
- Some casuals can take a holiday when they want and value the flexibility highly. Many others have few holidays because they cannot get away, lack funds, or are fearful of not having a job when they return.
- Casual work sometimes has positive effects on health, but more often it is mentioned as a negative: undermining self-esteem and contributing to worry and stress over money and predictable work. Some are depressed and, at the extreme, have suicidal thoughts.
- Casual workers often do not report injuries or find their hours cut if they do.
- Casual work has effects beyond the individual. It affects children, partners, friendships, households and communities. Planning for events is difficult. In some cases it makes relationship formation difficult.
- Trouble with financial planning, borrowing and saving for retirement are amongst the significant financial costs of casual work.
- Casual work leaches commitment to work and affects productivity as some casuals hang back from expressing their views at work or are excluded from contributing.
- Many casuals would like to see better opportunities for conversion to permanency, access to paid sick and holiday leave, protection from repetitive rolling contracts, better protections from arbitrary dismissal, more respect and better terms for those employed through labour hire.

KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT CASUAL WORK

This study asks – and offers some answers – to five key questions about casual work:

1. Are casuals really ongoing employees? Is true insecurity exaggerated?

It is true that some casuals turn out to be long-term employees under their casual terms. But for many, this is far from permanent work - with equivalent rights - just by another name. For the majority in this study, ongoing casual work is not disguised or de facto permanent work. Long-term casuals feel that they work under second rate terms in their workplaces and the injuries of marginal status and low respect are compounded by low pay, poor conditions and lack of access to basic workplace rights. Formal rights – like rights to pursue unfair dismissal – are far from practical rights in the minds of many long-term casuals. Some lack knowledge of these rights, and many lack the practical power to exercise them.

2. Are casual jobs 'good' jobs or 'bad' jobs?

Many casuals like their jobs. But this does not make them 'good' jobs in their minds. The majority want to change the terms of their employment to permanent conditions, seeing these as superior to the unpredictable terms and lack of true flexibility and say for casuals. In the minds of the majority of those in this study, their casual jobs are not 'good' jobs.

3. Do casual jobs meet employee preferences for flexibility?

In some cases, yes - especially for some students and some women with dependents - in particular, those with back-up sources of income and bosses who negotiate with them in a reciprocally flexible relationship. But a majority of those in this study do not feel their jobs are flexible in ways that suit them as employees. Flexibility functions much more for their employers. Where it exists for employees, flexibility is often conferred by the goodwill of local supervisors. They are greatly valued, but this represents a precarious and unstable basis for flexibility for many casuals.

4. Are casual jobs a pathway to better jobs and to ongoing work?

For some this is true, and for others it is irrelevant as their labour market futures lie in other occupations. However, casual work is a dead-end ghetto for many, especially older and more experienced or expensive workers, who are under-priced or 'out-gunned' by energetic newcomers from the reservoir of casuals that exists.

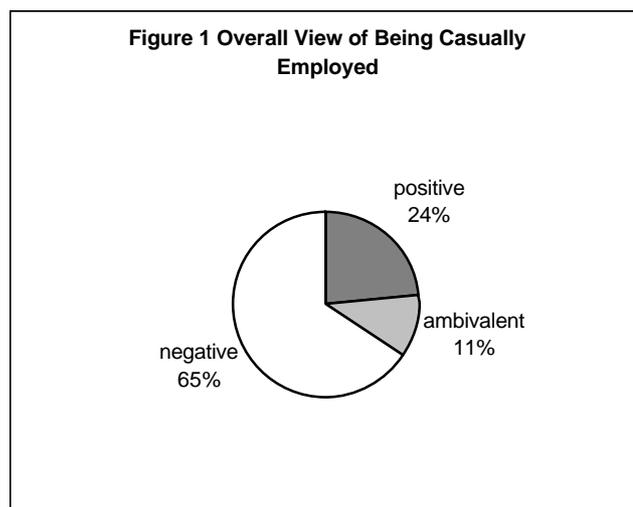
5. Are casual terms remaking work environments in Australia?

This question is suggested by this study. The insecurity of casual work drives insecure workplace citizenship for many casuals. It undermines the exercise of their existing rights and makes them very powerless to control critical aspects of their work lives, like working time and pay. In many workplaces they are the 'shock absorbers' who absorb the pressure of plans that go wrong, cost-cutting, or overload. The fact that over a quarter of Australian workers now work on these terms has implications for workplaces more generally. A lack of say and insecure work for many casuals means that ongoing workers are also affected where a growing number of their casual workmates have little access to training, feel disrespected, and cannot speak up about injuries or hazards or contribute to work improvements. In this way, a growth in casual work casts a shadow over workplaces more generally, affecting productivity, employers and many ongoing workers.

DETAILED RESULTS:

OVERALL ASSESSMENTS OF CASUAL JOBS

Three overall views of casual work are evident amongst the 55 interviewees in this study: positive, ambivalent and reluctant. About a quarter are generally positive about being casually employed. A smaller group are ambivalent: they see both good and bad sides. A much larger group are negative. We call these 'reluctant casuals' because they do not like, and some hate, their casual terms of employment. Two-thirds of casuals in this study do not like this form of employment. These three types are set out in figure 1.



This result challenges the assertion that casuals are in this form of employment because they like it and choose to be. Most in our study do not. The thirteen who are positive about being casual are more likely to be working students or carers with family responsibilities.

It's good and flexible if you have study at the university, things like that. Basically, things change every semester and you're able to adjust when you're working around timetable changes so you don't have to be locked into only be available certain days which a lot of people experience on contracts. However, it is also a pain not knowing sometimes when you're going to be working and sometimes even getting shifts that aren't appropriate for your availability even when you are available. (Chelsea, 20, retail worker)

... I guess when I was younger, I didn't like being a casual worker. It was too unsettling. But now as a mum with children, I need to do casual work because my children are sick quite a lot and the work that I've got at the moment is two days a week. It's fairly set but it's still on a casual basis. But it means that if my kids are sick and I need to stay home, I won't feel guilty about it. If I was permanent part-time or full-time, a) I'd feel guilty about taking time off for my children and b) I think I'd be more likely to lose my job for doing so. (Donna, 41, reception clerk).

Well, I think that it's really difficult for a lot of people, especially people with families, people that are long-term casuals. They have no leave, no right to sick leave, no holiday leave. Myself, I had quite a few times when I had accidents and so on and I still went to work because I just couldn't take the time off. Financially, it was too difficult. There's got to be a better way for people to earn a living and have the right to take sick leave especially when they need to. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)

All of those who are positive are part-time. Only one older man held a positive assessment, while five of the thirteen are relatively young and/or students. Nine of the thirteen live with in a household where their income is not the sole source: either with a parent, partner or pension. Reluctant casuals can be found in all industries, occupations, age groups, and amongst students as well as mature-aged men and women. Some young students need control over their working patterns as well as older women with dependents, who need predictability of income and hours.

It gives you the flexibility but then all of the time you are on call. So if you are busy, they ring you and they ask you to work and if you say 'no, sorry, I'm busy', then you might not get many more hours the next week. They just cut your hours down if you say no and so it's always a kind of threat. (Jayda, 15, retail)

I think it really does make a difference as to your situation in life. I think when I was a student, being casual was fine. When I had taken on a mortgage, being casual was not an option. Being in a relationship with a full-time breadwinner, being a casual is fantastic and it's an escape from the humdrums of home life. But if I was a casual worker and if I was a single mother and I was dependent on an income, being casual would probably not feel as good as it does now. I think it's completely dependent on your situation in life. (Donna, 41, receptionist clerk).

WHAT UNDERPINS SATISFACTION WITH CASUAL TERMS?

Two factors are strongly associated with positive views about casual terms: firstly, those with other sources of 'back-up' sources of income; secondly, those with a good relationship with their supervisors, that ensures reciprocal negotiation and real say over working time. Both of these hold for most casuals who are positive.

Where employees are highly dependent upon their casual earnings, and where they have little effective say over their work patterns, negative assessments are common. One or both of these factors affects most casuals in this study, driving the high level of negative overall assessments.

Satisfaction with casual work is also associated with certain times in the life cycle (for example, when studying, caring or semi-retired). Some of those who are positive about their casual work in retirement years say that this form of employment wouldn't have suited them when they had dependents or a mortgage. Some single mothers find casual work a poor fit with parenting.

At present, the circumstances of casual work often implicitly require that

earnings are either supplementary or fitted to certain life cycle stages. While these situations are sometimes more suited to casual terms (though far from always), casual terms are increasingly extended to, and imposed upon, workers that they fit very ill. Irregular casual work creates a 'lowest common denominator' labour form, shaped out of very specific life-cycle and household circumstances, that do not hold for the increasing number who must accept casual terms or face unemployment. Such terms are increasingly all that is on offer to people who are very far from having back up sources of income, or in temporary life stages that make irregular part-time work a desirable choice.

Based on this study, it is simply not true to say that most casuals prefer to be casual. The reverse is true amongst our sample. The majority do not like their casual terms, many are looking for permanency and those who compare both experiences show a strong preference for ongoing terms of employment.

PART-TIME WORK, NOT CASUAL WORK

Casuals clearly distinguish between what they are looking for from part-time work, and what they get through casual work. Many want to work part-time hours, but do not necessarily want unpredictable hours and income, no training or communication in the workplace, and to be treated without respect - which they name as some of the significant consequences of being casually employed.

ENJOY THE JOB, BUT NOT THE CASUAL TERMS

Many casuals enjoy their jobs. They prefer work to unemployment. However, they distinguish their assessments of their jobs, from their view of casual terms. The significance of an analytical separation of general job satisfaction measures from views about employment terms is clear.

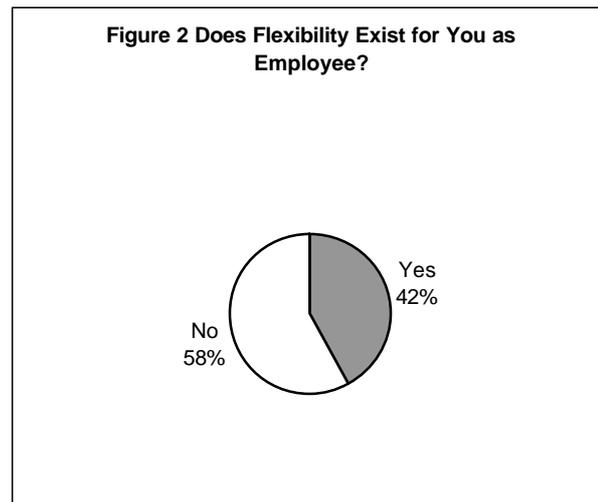
WHAT PEOPLE DON'T LIKE ABOUT BEING CASUAL

Explanations for negative views are multi-faceted. They include the unpredictable nature of working hours, days and income; the need to be 'on tap'; the ways in which casual work makes people feel 'like a dishrag' or 'a stone kicked down the road' and peripheral to the workplace and community; the impact on their households and social life; and the fact that they cannot easily take a holiday or be sick. Some feel 'used and abused'. Issues of respect and exclusionary treatment emerge strongly in casual workers' assessments. Long-term casuals are especially negative about being casually employed. They feel it is unfair, and means low earnings and limited opportunities to save for retirement.

Well I think you are used and abused ... I was always under the impression that casual workers were there for overload situations, emergencies, or whatever but I've been casual for five years now ... 'We'll look at that next year' is the general reply to any request for permanency ... So, yeah, I think used and abused is the best description I can come up with. (Alice, 43, word processor operator, engineering industry)

FLEXIBILITY – FOR WHOM?

Casual work is flexible. But in this study that flexibility emerges more for the employer than for the casual employee. Forty-two per cent of interviewees (or 23) felt they have some flexibility in their jobs: to ask for holidays or to change their hours for example (see figure 2). Many value it highly.



However, more than half of those in this study (58 per cent or 32) felt that there is no flexibility for them. Employee flexibility is a myth in their experience. Instead, their working lives are determined in many cases at very short notice and they feel they have little true flexibility. Losing shifts or working hours is frequently mentioned as a consequence of knocking back work. Rather than flexible terms, many casuals face very inflexible working arrangements that ask a lot of them as employees, but confers little control on them. Many are aware of the irony, given the promise commonly assumed of casual terms.

Oh, I think they have the attitude that we're disposable and if we, you know, if they're not happy with us then they just don't give us another shift. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)

The basic thing I guess is being called in at a moment's notice. Having absolutely no job security and that sort of stuff hasn't been as much of a problem for me given that I've been a student, mainly when I've been working casual hours and Mum and Dad have always been really supportive financially. So it hasn't been a case of, you know, if I lose this job I won't be able to survive type thing. But Mum has always worked as a casual employee and it's been really bad for her and Dad - like the pressure to have to be there all the time or you're going to get the sack, or you're going to get no more hours. And to live with that for years and years is always pretty difficult. And also when I was working at a restaurant for a while - and the whole idea of casual work, where you miss out on your security, however you're compensated through loading - just wasn't happening ... they'll lead you along sort of thing. And I wasn't being paid any loading at all for after 6 o'clock or weekends or even public holidays, New Years Eve all that sort of stuff. So it sort of seems it gives them a window, you know, to basically cheat you out of all sorts of other things. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)

THE DIMENSIONS OF FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility has many dimensions for employees including predictable hours, knowing hours well in advance, having a say about shifts, having a minimum call in time, known finish time, and control of long hours and unpaid overtime. Some try to get control of work patterns and hours by changing jobs or try to earn enough to live on by holding multiple casual jobs.

It is clear that the exercise of real say over working time is very variable amongst these casual workers. Some have a lot of say, but the majority do not. These differences are very dependent upon good relationships with supervisors.

I enjoy actually being a casual at the moment. It gives me the ability to work whatever hours I wish. It gives me slightly higher pay rate which works out at around about two dollars an hour better. And it gives me the flexibility. To be able to move in or move out and take the time off when I really need it. And it doesn't give me that added pressure with bills ... I can take the time off much easier ... At the moment, I can go in and say [to my boss], look, I need next week off for such and such and such, or the week after off for such and such. And she will just roster me off. Save shifts for me for when I come back. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)

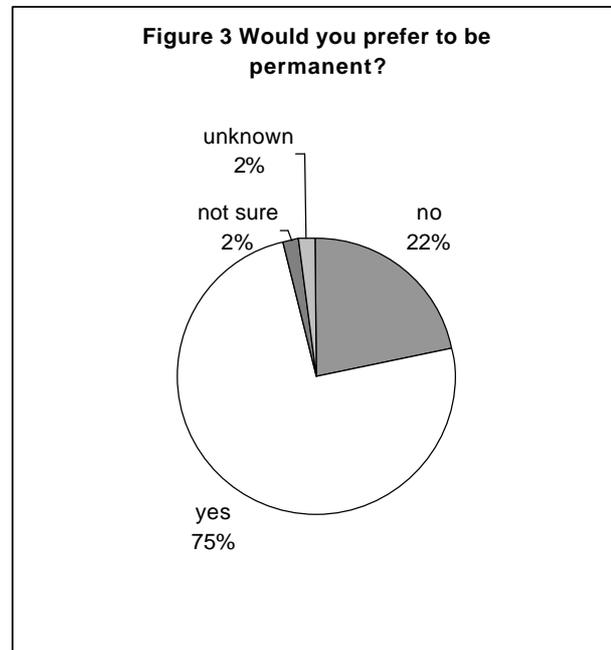
When there's work and they want me, they love me, love me like a rash, and when there's no work, I don't exist. They don't even want to talk to me. I could ring up all I like, if there's no work, they're not interested. (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)

THE PREFERENCE FOR PERMANENCE

Most casual employees in this study would prefer to be permanently employed. These results contradict the assertion that casual work meets employee preferences. Twelve, or less than a quarter of those in the group, preferred being casual to being permanent. However, seventy-five per cent of interviewees would prefer ongoing employment (see figure 3).

This includes many who have some flexibility and say in their casual work patterns. However, they would prefer permanent work for other reasons: integration in the workplace, the chance for training and promotion, more recognition for what they do, and less vulnerability to arbitrary dismissal or loss of working hours. The preference for permanence is strong across age groups, industries, occupations and amongst students and non-students as well as those with dependents and without them. Many part-time employees would prefer ongoing part-time work, rather than casual terms.

Many in this study have sought to convert to ongoing conditions, some with success. Others have not been so lucky. Their motivations are varied: to get respect, income predictability, reduce worry about losing hours or the job, avoid instant dismissal, have a paid holiday, be able to be sick without losing income, have better protection if they are injured and accumulate decent superannuation.



CASUAL WORK IS NOT A PATHWAY TO PERMANENCY

For some, their initial casual work has been a way into ongoing casual work or a road to permanent employment. For others, casual work is seen more as a reservoir than a stream forward, and the reverse is true: their ready availability on casual terms has allowed their employers to retain them on casual terms.

They can just get rid of you. I mean, it might not come down to your work abilities, I mean you might be the best on work abilities, but if you are a bit outspoken about something, they have got the opportunity to railroad you. I mean, if you are permanent staff and you get a boss that takes a disliking to you and they really want to get rid of you and you are on a salary package, well they have got to pay you out. It all comes down to the bottom dollar. The way it is set up, they can give you a day's notice and walk down the road. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)

Employers see it as a vast reservoir of employees. If this one doesn't work out, you get another one. So I don't think it is an opportunity for advancement at all. (Kenneth, 49, manufacturing)

In some cases, their growing experience and skill base has made their prospects for permanency less likely, rather than more, as they become more expensive and paid at higher levels of classification (where internal labour markets of this type exist and are available to casuals). This creates a ghetto for some, or a trapdoor into unemployment for others.

In some workplaces the systems for allocating permanent jobs are arbitrary or unfair - like voting by permanent staff to choose which existing casuals should be converted. Many casuals feel under constant surveillance in relation to their work performance, with the carrot of permanence dangled before them, but little real chance of achieving it.

Getting older, speaking up, or contesting aspects of working life can result not

just in lack of opportunity for permanency, but loss of working hours and loss of the job completely.

Many casuals support the idea of a right to convert to ongoing terms after a period as a casual so that some kind of secure foothold in the workplace is possible, with rights equivalent to those of permanent employees.

We have had several instances where our employer's taken people on full-time and I've missed out on several occasions. The first time was when the permanent people voted for who they'd like to be made full-time. I was working actually [in an area] where I didn't have a lot of interaction with the majority of the workforce at the time so I missed out on that job by three votes. However, the next two times when permanent people were taken on we had a whole interview process ... (George, 40s, technician)

I actually asked my supervisor twice and both times she rejected it. The last time the union asked and they were rejected too. And then all of a sudden these accusations were coming out that I supposedly said, and that's when my hours got dropped and so a couple of weeks after that I left. (Abby, 30s, cleaner)

Occasionally it can for those who are lucky enough, but often due to the arrangement of casual work I don't think people are given the opportunity. Often they've been promised something and they don't ever deliver. Due to not having to pay holiday pay and leave loading and all that sort of stuff but all those kind of more intricate things I don't think that it is always a leg up into full-time work. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)

RESPECT

The question of the treatment of casual workers emerges as a very significant aspect of casual experience at work. While a few casuals feel they are treated no differently from others, many are aware of very different treatment. Most commonly, they mention a lack of respect, of being used and abused: of being 'only a casual'. Others describe their situation as degrading, or very variable: 'they either love me like a rash when they want me to work, or they don't even want to talk to me'.

A number of interviewees feel that they are abused at work. In some cases this is a general feeling of secondary status, of being left 'out of the loop' and of being ignored. Interviewees feel that they are bullied, that their workplace injuries are ignored or dismissed, and that they lack voice at work.

It comes back to the respect thing again. You're working harder to try and earn that respect. You're trying harder to prove yourself. And it goes on. A few of my friends have worked as casuals. After three months, they've been put on permanent. So it's like this three-month probation period. And I think a lot of casuals hope for that. I knew the situation I was in was ongoing. That whole nine years, I was still trying to earn respect. I was still trying to prove myself. That's what it felt like to me, that I had to continually do that to get anywhere in the job. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)

Because not only have you got the stress of you know, the frequency of the work and you know the moment's notice and stuff, but the work environment itself and the culture. Like, I wasn't being treated well at either of those places and my confidence really went down and you know, it was really, really taxing ... I was highly strung all the time. I was just depressed and stressed and you know because both these jobs, I was starting out as a waitress and they're telling me how stupid I was, and telemarketing, you know every single day telling you you're going to lose your job to the whole group. And because I've got a really solid work ethic that really crushed me, I thought if I get sacked I'm going to be devastated you know, that was hard. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)

ONLY A CASUAL

Being 'only a casual...' is mentioned by several interviewees. They are less than proper workers, despite the commitment that they make to their work, in some cases over many years.

I don't want a gold watch or pat on my back if I do something good. But you want someone to back you up, to stand by you, when you know you're a 100per cent in the right [when something goes wrong]. (Bruce, 50s, bus driver)

A GOOD BOSS

In this situation, having a good boss is seen as very important. Some have very good bosses, who look after them, send them flowers when they are sick and give them compensating shifts when they have been ill. But for many, a feeling of vulnerability to the whim and nature of the local supervisor, is very evident. As a result, casuals work hard to 'manage upwards' and keep relationships 'sweet'. They are careful not to refuse tasks or work when it is offered. Falling out with a permanent co-worker or with a supervisor can have disastrous implications for earnings and employment itself.

I think it depends then on how good a negotiator you are, and how good your employer is. When I was working in the service station, our employer ran a family business and he was pretty supportive and I would assume that if he was still running the place then, he would have quite happily converted us to permanent employment. Other employers won't wear that in any way, shape or form because they like to have the total control of the casual where they can hire and fire at will without this threat of having to pay severance pay or unfair dismissal encroaching their power, which seems to be a big concern to employers. (William, 44, call centre operator)

BULLYING

Countering workplace bullying is especially problematic when individual power is weak. There are many examples of the exercise of arbitrary power against individual casual workers, and – short of dismissal – the loss of so many hours work that employment is effectively, though not formally, terminated. The threat of repercussions dogs the working day of many casual

employees.

As a casual worker someone else has got the power ... how many hours work that they give you. So, you know, if you've put them off-side, well you can find that the hours can drop substantially or, you know, if you're on the other side of the coin, you know, if you're in favour, well you know, the work hours can improve. (Wayne, 42, security officer)

So [casual work gives] a security for [employers] but it's also a way of being the bully ... the undercurrent is 'we can get rid of workers when we don't need them'. (Julie, 53, aged care worker)

He was a workplace bully, no doubt about it. And being a casual makes it very hard to approach someone about that ... If you complain about it, you might be the one who goes. (Jeff, 45, maintenance electrician)

MARGINALISED AT WORK

Many casuals, like other employees, enjoy aspects of their work. However, marginalisation of casual workers takes many forms: from not being asked to the Christmas party or picnic day, to missing out on training and promotion and workplace communication. This matters a great deal to casual workers.

We get so little information [from] the employment agency – they don't tell you hardly anything about the children. The other point about this casualisation thing and this contract thing is that they hire people with no skills to work with some of the most difficult children in the state. They've actually put people at risk. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)

It's all part of this thing where they can toy with you however they want sort of, because you're just some sort of a commodity that they've called in, like labour hire you're not an employee any more you're just like this thing that can perform labour so they can call you in whenever, they can get rid of you whenever, they can treat you however they want, it's all part of it. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)

You're sort of intimidated at times because you're going into areas that you may be impinging on others' territory and you need to be very thick-skinned, to put it that way, and very sure of who you are, to be able, to go into the area and say 'look, I'm only here for a short time and this will not impinge on your job'. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)

PERFORMANCE

Many casuals see little difference in the intensity of work of casuals and permanents. However, for others 'the fear factor' and surveillance drives intensive work patterns. Different workers in a variety of occupations and industries report pressure to be seen to be working hard, and to actually work hard in a kind of theatre of competitive performance.

In some cases, casuals do work that ongoing workers do not like. For those in fast food and other sectors, it is important not to stand still, or you may be sent home. In other cases, new casuals are expected to be instantly productive with little support or induction.

It's very competitive. Because you don't know how much money you are going to get every week so if, for example, a team leader asks for anybody who wants to work two hours more tonight because we need to finish the job, all the people fight for two hours. And when [you go to do something] some guy says 'Give me the broom, I do for you.' ... It is like a theatre ... it's a race then trying to demonstrate that you are very good. All the people ... try to demonstrate that they work quickly and they work very quickly, even when the workers don't need to work so quickly ... like a machine. (Theresa, 28, food manufacturing)

SURVEILLANCE

This intensive effort for some is underpinned by a steady sense of surveillance. In some cases, this surveillance is from worker to worker, as they are encouraged to outperform each other, in order to 'win' more hours. A sense of expendability affects some casuals who are keen to have a positive reputation (including in relation to labour hire) so they get another chance next time or tomorrow. Some casuals feel that they can 'never relax', cannot take a break, and 'live on a knife edge of uncertainty'.

Like [casual workers'] records are brought up a lot more: 'Oh, we're watching you', that kind of thing. So in those circumstances, it was more difficult for casuals than it was for the permanent staff ... We're always aware that, yes, we've got to really watch what we're doing because they're watching us more. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire) They would say 'time to lean is time to clean' ... So we were never allowed to be still. If we were seen still, then that meant we were slacking off so it was always drummed into us that, basically if we're standing still, then we shouldn't really be on the shift (laughs) ... Yeah, which, you know, is very stressful and I would come home exhausted and very stressed ... Always, always buzzing, the whole time buzzing, yeah. It was always, always doing something and never standing still, never stopping. Always feeling like I was being watched and if I wasn't doing the right thing, someone would tell me off. (Daniel, 21, fast food)

[Casual's] are too afraid to stand around doing nothing because they can be out the door in an hour ... They have to be busy and they need to look busy. I mean you can be busy and not look busy and they'll give you the arse.

VOICE

Casual status has the effect of silencing the voice of some at work. The price of speaking up can be very high: a 'DCM' as one describes it ('don't come Monday'). This fear of speaking up is mentioned by workers with very different levels of experience and skill: 'you can be gone in a second'. Skills and experience are no protection. Indeed, some experienced and skilled workers are very careful not to offer suggestions about improvements in their workplaces as this is seen as a threat to ongoing workers and supervisors and undermines

employment security. Personal confidence overrides these concerns in some cases, but for the majority of workers in this study, loss of voice at work is a significant price of casual terms. It affects individual voice, as well as the capacity to voice views collectively, including through joining and participating in unions. It also imposes costs on productivity as workers hold back from offering ideas about improvements at work. Many casuals feel that permanency confers voice.

I think when you're in a casual position, if you're very vulnerable and very unable to voice, I don't think that that should actually stop me and it does. It does have that effect because you do feel vulnerable and because you know that you can't sort of stand your ground while things get sorted out because the way it would be sorted out is you wouldn't get another contract. (Dorothy, 53, research assistant)

Absolutely [no say]. Because you're not in with the regular team. You're not having regular team meetings, you don't have access to all the information. You're just given what you get. And I'm the kind of person who needs to have all the information. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)

Being casual, I know it sounds horrible but I don't think you've got much say in it. You do what you're told literally. You sort of do what you're told and you keep your head down. (Darlene, 47, delicatessen assistant).

PAY

Some casuals are happy with their level of pay. They are glad to have a job, to be off welfare – or to earn 'pocket money' as one put it. However, this gratitude does not stop many from seeing difficulties around pay and inequities in pay systems. A central question around pay for casuals is its predictability. You are 'one day away from bankruptcy'. While some have a high hourly rate, their pay over the year can be either low or very unpredictable. Some casuals have elaborate arrangements to deal with the precarious nature of their pay, the gaps and delays in pay, and the fear of losing it altogether. Beyond this, the question of base rates and classification are also very important.

Most of the people who work casual are really very apprehensive about being dismissed. You know, they're like me in respect of financial terms. My status is identical – I don't have much money, I'd have about \$25.00 in cash, would be about the maximum I'd ever have on me, and that's just to have a haircut or whatever. You're only one pay-day away from bankruptcy. You're hoping to Christ that the work that you're doing will finish – the shift will finish – without anybody reporting you. And you won't get into any sort of complicated scenario. And everything about your financial circumstances are determined at work. And because there's no permanent relationship, it's all very uncertain. It's a constant feeling of insecurity, is what you meet with casuals. (Barney, 67, security guard)

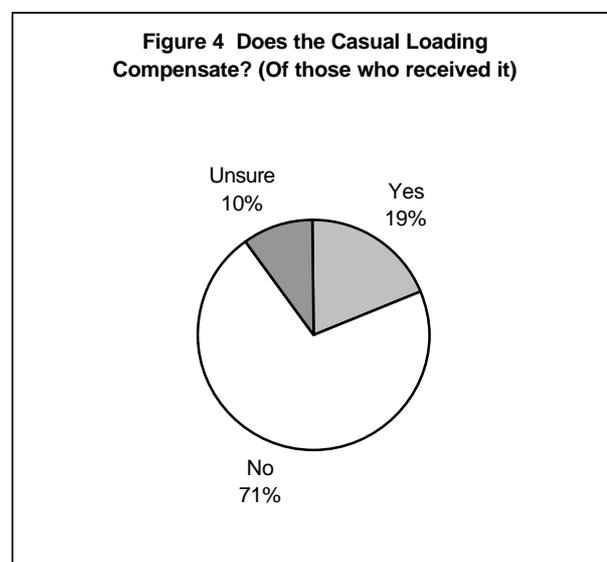
Casual work is not a really good position to be in.. you're subject to a lot of changes and the company you work for could fold up and then you have to go and find another job. And again all I'll be able to find, all that I'd be able to find would be casual employment. So yeah, there's no future in it to be quite honest. (Mario, 65, care worker)

LOW HOURLY RATES, UNDERCLASSIFICATION AND THE LOADING

Many casuals are on much lower hourly rates than the ongoing workers they work alongside. Some are paid as labour hire employees, and in other cases, they are simply under-classified. This makes the casual loading (of 15-25 per cent to compensate for paid sick and holiday leave) a vital part of total pay. Many casuals are very dependent upon it to reach a liveable weekly wage. Without the loading, many would be on very low hourly rates, much lower than those they work alongside or appropriate to their level of skill and experience. This is a very sore point.

THE CASUAL LOADING: DOES IT COMPENSATE?

Three-quarters of casual workers in our study receive the casual loading. Nine did not and another four had no knowledge of it or how it worked. Most casual workers in our study do not believe that the loading makes up for what is lost in being casual. Only eight interviewees felt that the loading compensates for the difference between being casual and being permanent. Thirty (or 71 per cent of those who received it) felt that it clearly did not, while four were not sure (see figure 4).



While some want to stay casual in order to get the loading most in this study do not and see the chance of paid leave, along with the other dimensions of workplace rights and citizenship, as more valuable than a 20 per cent wage premium. In some cases, the shift to permanent work made this very obvious to employees who might have been unsure how to weigh up the benefits. In some cases, employees are unclear about the balance of benefits in relation to sick and holiday pay, and did not know their rights. A good boss who explained the difference and options - where they exist - was obviously of great benefit to some.

However, no matter what their preference, a shift to permanent employment was simply not available to most casuals in this study. Some have 'begged for it' without result. The longest serving casual worker in this study had been employed for 16 years as a packer in a meat plant. She had tried to

become permanent without success. She had suffered serious injury. On the day she left no one even said goodbye. She tried to get long service leave without success and her superannuation was very poor.

I might have preferred the 20 per cent [loading] ... But I think now, having had the experience of permanent part-time work, I can see the benefits of that ... such as knowing when my hours are going to be every week and knowing I'm going to have a job the week after and that sort of thing. (Daniel, 21, fast food)

[The casual loading] was nice in the pay check but no, I would pick permanent part-time over casual any day. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)

TRAINING AND PROMOTION

It is well established that casual workers get less access to on-the-job training, as many interviewees in this study can readily attest. This is an important concern to those who want to be trained to do their jobs well and have the chance for greater job security in the future. The loss of training opportunities is seen as an important aspect of lost workplace citizenship.

Similarly, promotion eludes many casual workers. While it is a secondary concern after getting job security, the opportunity for a career is important to some.

As a casual you're only taught the basics and you're really not part of the team ... You don't feel part of a team and I think you're kind of looked down upon. (Don, truck driver, ex-manager)

[Promotion] in this company where I am in right now? You have more chance of meeting Jesus Christ. (John, 43, salesman)

BEING SICK

For some casuals, the lack of paid sick leave is not a serious difficulty. When they are sick they tell their employer and take unpaid leave.

They were absolutely fantastic. They were really good. I mean, there would be flowers sent to my home like I've had a couple of times where I've been off quite a length of time through operations and things. And there was always flowers sent. While I was in hospital, my night fill captain or management would pop in to see how I was going. (Mary, 47, supermarket night-fill assistant)

For the majority, however, being sick is a real problem. Casual employees carefully weigh up how sick they are in relation to the income they lose if they are ill. They often go to work sick. Sometimes the income they lose is not just the hours they are off sick, but ongoing hours as their employers do not offer more hours to 'the unreliable'.

Sickness is a moment of real hazard for casual workers where they have no income back up. They tend to go to work sick, and their 'presenteeism'

represents an uncosted externality of casual work, for both themselves, their long-term health and that of their co-workers. Paid sick leave is a significant explanation for the majority preference for permanent work.

I do what a lot of casual workers do. You evaluate how sick, how injured, and how poor ... I might not be very sick but I might be feeling rich, so I'll have the day off, and I might be feeling quite sick but extremely poor, and I [go to] work. And I have worked when I've been quite sick because I felt that I have no choice financially. (Kate, 24, pattern maker)

If you're sick they get really pissed off because you're not available. Yes, they just get annoyed. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)

For myself, it was [awful]. And it's not just those long sicknesses. It's kids being sick or parents being sick – you know, elderly parents – not just myself. I see other women come to work all the time leaving their sick kids at home because they had no choice but to work. So it's just really tough. I've sent my kids more times to school than I probably should've. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)

HAVING A HOLIDAY

For a few casuals – a minority in the interviewee sample – the lack of paid holidays is not a problem since they enjoy the flexibility to take holidays when they choose, provided they give enough notice. Many rely on back-up sources of income.

That is the nice part about being casual, you don't have to book holidays - you can go when you like. (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)

On the negative side, five main issues arise around holidays from the experiences of the casual employees: getting a break, having a job when you get back from a break, having enough money to take a holiday, having enough flexibility in the job to take leave, and fitting holidays around demanding work patterns.

Many casuals have few holidays and in some cases, they are called back from them when work demands. Abby's recall from her honeymoon and her two holidays in four years of casual cleaning are not an unusual pattern. Another long-term casual had never had a proper holiday with his 13 year old daughter. Inadequate holidays have many effects upon casual workers, including on their own health, on their families, and on their wider relationships.

When my 13 year old says to me 'Dad, my friend, they're all going on holidays or they're going here' and young Meg, they're going to Queensland with mum and dad for Christmas. I've got to work and I've had to work for the last ten years. My eldest girl's 13 and she's never been taken on a holiday by her mum and dad and that hurts me, you know? (George, 40s, technician)

They'd ring me up and [ask me to come in] - sucker me! - would say 'yeah' just to help

everyone out ... and [I used to] to think that if I was crook one day, well, then they could possibly help me out. But when it come to that situation it didn't work out ... Like on my honeymoon I wanted to have a few extra days off, and they couldn't find anyone to cover for me and so I ended up having to come back early ... And I was just not impressed. (Abby, 30s, cleaner)

[Sighs] haven't really had a holiday [sighs] ... The thought of having four week's annual leave is just a pipedream. (Wayne, 42, security officer)

HEALTH

Some casual workers, enjoy aspects of their jobs, especially the social connections they make, and they find these beneficial for their health and self-esteem. In other cases, the stress of employment insecurity affects mental and physical health, drives long hours or back-to-back shifts, creates health and safety risks at work, and leads to the deferral of health care. Casual status affects the reporting of workplace injuries and recovery from them. Casuals worry about having enough money 'to tide me over'.

It would break me if I had a major illness. (Barney, 67, security guard)

I get very stressed because I don't know when I'm going to work again. I get migraines cause I'm just so stressed: 'how we're going to live, what we're going to do'. I get very stressed. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)

The health effects of casual employment range from deferral of proper health care and health checks, to negative effects arising from stress and worry, through to serious mental health and physical problems. The loss of self esteem, especially – but not exclusively – amongst older men is especially notable. Several mention that they have had suicidal thoughts.

There's always an economic uncertainty around yourself and your position and that economic uncertainty means that – or it can, I suppose, lead to situations where you downplay health issues in the sense that you may choose to delay, to postpone medical treatment or seeking medical treatment simply because you either can't afford it or it's a choice between, 'well I can work today or I can go to the doctor to get that spot on my back checked out...' (Dave, 39, market researcher)

It's a terrible existence, it really is. And as I say you know, I've sat in my shed and I've contemplated the meaning of life, I really have. But I mean I'm too strong for that and I would never leave my wife and my children in such a terrible bloody way but I mean honestly you can get so depressed, you can sit there and ponder the meaning of life. (George, 40, technician)

Casual workers are also affected by injuries at work, which are often unreported. Several examples in the study show direct pressure not to report injury, while in other cases, casuals are simply too busy to report injury or fearful of the consequences. This fear is not always misplaced, as several stories show.

A little bit of self esteem would be nice. ... And you'd have a permanent income, you'd know from week to week what you're getting, how you were going to live. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)

Ease of planning holidays, being able to go on holidays and know that there's still money coming in, being assured that in a further six year's time that I will have approved pro rata long service leave, financial security. I'm more confident in borrowing money to invest it if I wanted to and just generally happier. (Jeff, maintenance electrician)

RELATIONSHIPS, SOCIAL LIFE AND COMMUNITY

Casual work has an impact that extends well beyond the individual employee and their health. It sometimes has positive effects upon individuals, family and households, on relationships and relationship formation and upon social life and community involvement. Working part-time means some casuals can maintain their friendships and enjoy community activities and sport. Engagement in these, however, depends upon two factors: predictability of work (including the days and hours of work and finish times) and the opportunity to refuse to work certain times without fear of loss of future work. Some casuals work in these accommodating circumstances, but many do not.

Unpredictable working hours make planning for family events very difficult: 'everything is just a maybe'. Many casual workers are concerned about the impact of their jobs on their partners and upon their children, and they miss key school and family events because of unpredicted work.

Like my son really went for me the other day, he said 'Mum he says I've got two sets of grandparents my children have and none of you can help us'. I said 'well I'm sorry Mark I'll mind your children if you pay my bills' (Genna, grandmother, aged care worker)

You felt held back because you couldn't really — because you felt like they're going to call me to come in to work, so I can't go and do that. In a way, yeah, maybe it was you feel like you're held back a bit. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)

I really resent the fact that I had no social life, no weekend social life and couldn't spontaneously say to a friend, let's go out for a movie tonight or on the weekend. And the older I've got the more important my friendships are to... (Emma, 24, hospitality)

And I think it changes your sense of responsibility to your friends and to your relationships. You're sort of put in this position where you are forced to prioritise work all the time because it is how you survive. And it is so precarious that if you do say no to shifts they do stop calling you. You know, if you're the person who's first on the list of on-call people and you say no you lose that spot. And so you do learn to prioritise work over the rest of your life which isn't really very healthy ... It makes you learn to live minute to minute, financially and in terms of your activities and your relationships and everything you're doing. Everything is always a bit on call. (Kate, 24, pattern maker)

The stress and unpredictability of casual work can also affect personal relationships. Interviewees across a range of occupations and ages discussed these effects, which were all negative. Some of these effects are experienced within existing relationships, but a significant number are also experienced in relation to the formation of relationships in the first place.

This study confirms that casual employment contributes to delays in forming relationships. Many young people talk about the need to put work before social time in order to be available 'when the phone rings'. They talk of living 'minute to minute' and the cost of this to their early relationships. Unpredictable work makes social participation difficult. As does low income and variable shift and finish times. If work comes up, many feel they must take it. In this context, work dominates social life.

Casual terms sometimes suit sporting involvement. In other cases, unpredictable work times, fear of reprisal for refusing shifts, lack of money for participation, and concern about the effects of a sporting-related injury on earnings constrain sporting activities for casual workers.

FINANCIAL PLANNING

Some casuals with independent sources of income or back-up household income have few financial worries. Financial worries are commonly experienced by other casual workers. These relate to three issues: having a low income, having an unpredictable income, and fear of having no income. Many casual workers find it very difficult to plan their finances, to borrow and to save. Accumulation for retirement is very difficult for many, and older casual workers frequently mention their low retirement earnings and worry about their future.

Because you can't plan for the future knowing that your work could end at any moment. And you can't plan to say well, let's plan our retirement, you can only plan for the next day. It really puts a big hole in your future. (Don, 46, truck driver)

When you're casual you can't plan that 'okay I'm going to do this, this and this' because you weren't sure whether that money was going to be there to be able to do it ... So now I can actually plan ahead if I want to go to Tassie for a trip. Or if we want to go away for a weekend we can actually plan ahead because we know that money is going to be there to be able to do it. (Mary, 47, supermarket night-fill assistant)

I can't get a mortgage, [being casual] means I can't plan to have a break when I need it. Like, my son's getting married in Bali in September and I'm going to go but what that means is saying to people, 'I'm just not going to be here then' and taking the risk that that won't get me a contract in the next semester because I want to be away for a week. So yes, I haven't been able to organise any time out, I can't get a loan. (Dorothy, 53, research assistant)

I was always in a survival mode. I always had at least \$4,000 in the bank, but I always felt that I was in survival, because I never knew what was around the corner. ... It also meant that, in the in-between times, between terms, teachers could only work term time, which is 40 weeks a year. It meant that for the 12 other weeks of the year you had no income derived from teaching. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)

WELFARE, TAX AND SUPERANNUATION

Casual work exists in close relationship with the welfare system. For many it is inter-leaved with unemployment. Negotiating welfare, tax and superannuation with various government agencies is an extra complication for many casual employees – made more difficult because of the irregularity of casual incomes. This shapes the casual work experience for people at both ends of the life cycle. Young students talk about the complex relationship between their earnings and their Centrelink payments. At the other end of the spectrum, the casual earnings of older retired workers are significantly shaped by their intersection with welfare payments and the superannuation and taxation systems. Some describe the tasks of negotiating the family payment, unemployment, and health and transport concession systems as ‘like an extra job’. Even highly skilled mature aged employees find the task challenging, and point to serious problems around the accumulation of superannuation and tax.

I like my work – like all the work I’ve ever done. The problems that I have with it relate to the legislation relating to superannuation, taxation, and Centrelink. Those three things haven’t been thought through from a policy position from the relevant federal government department, and its agencies. There’s a real disincentive, and the income that you get out of it is very low indeed.

It’s a pain in the butt actually. Because I was doing so much work over summer – I did 12 weeks ... I wasn’t entitled to benefits so they cut me off, so now I’m back to where I’ve got to fill in a diary. I’m back to where I started off 18 months ago. And I’m going to have to go through training, with all these other stuff that they insist you do, new staff, which is a real pain in the butt. (Darlene, 49, delicatessen assistant).

CASUAL WORK IS REMAKING THE TERMS OF WORK

Casual work leaches commitment to work. While some casuals love their jobs and give a lot to them, many are cynical because of their treatment and no longer offer ideas and extra effort at work. The price for productivity of pervasive casual work is hard to quantify, but many casuals talk about it. The growing proportion of casual workers in the Australian labour market, with its impact upon working conditions, pay and employee voice, has shifted the terms of power in the Australian workplace affecting not only the casual workers who live under its terms, but the many others who work alongside them, as well as those they live with.

For many workers, the cost of their casual work is measured in their variable pay packets, unpredictable lives, inflexible work patterns and loss of respect and citizenship at work. Beyond casual workers themselves, the presence of a growing proportion of precarious employees in many workplaces has affects well beyond these individuals.

Even being a casual worker, I still give 100 per cent. I still think of the company. And I do my job to the best of my ability. (Klaus, 40s, plant operator)

I think that it would be better if there were less casuals. I think it would make for a

better workplace because if people have more certainty in their job, then they're more likely to be committed and do a better job. (Allan, 30s, ESL teacher).

I think [employers] have come to think and believe the rhetoric that it's more financially in their favour to [employ casuals], whereas I don't believe that at all. I believe having someone who can work in the comfort of knowing they've got an ongoing position can be calmer and probably be more attentive to their job. Not that I'm saying casuals aren't attentive but I spend a considerable amount of time managing my work rather than getting on with it and I think it's short-sighted. (Dorothy, 53, research assistant).

Greater insecurity at work affects many ongoing workers and their workplaces. Precariousness drives a lower training effort, divided workplaces and less individual and collective voice. It imposes costs for productivity, for the health system and across the broader community. It silences workers in workplaces and seriously undermines practical access to collective organisation or even individual voice. This is a high price to pay for flexibility that suits many employers but only a minority of casual workers, based on the results in this study. These costs - not always obvious - affect households, families, children, social life and communities. Some workers in this study see casual work as a return to working conditions – unpredictable pay, no paid sick leave or holidays, fear of reporting injuries – of last century and the century before. They hope that this is not their children's future – or their own.

I don't understand how Australia has developed this kind of system and I think that the government must finish with this. They have to change the way... I think you can find new systems ... Stability, stability means planning of hours and planning of income. And sick pay and holiday pay because these things were our main rights during the last two centuries and now you have lost them. I am sorry but you have lost them! ... I am not so worried because I am leaving Australia, but if I were an Australian citizen I would be very worried about this. People tell me that casual is good because you earn more money. Excuse me, I say to them, you are confused. You are totally wrong. The truth is that you have lost much and maybe tomorrow you are sick and you are on the street because you don't have anything. (Theresa, 28, food manufacturing)

The men who returned from the war, I can just remember them. They were just skin and bone ... And all these people were discussing, they were all saying, 'Well this will all change because there's going to be a proper education system now, and there will be economists, and the world will be so much better'. And that's what I really believed in. I really believed that, we in Australia without the class system as I grew up, really believed that it would be a better place to live. And now, this casualisation is just getting back to that depression era stuff. Where there are a group of people with a lot of money, and there's a hell of a lot of people without – a quarter of the workforce now are casuals. That's just very, very sad. That's the way I see it. (Barney, 67, security guard)