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# THE SPREADING NET: Age and Gender in the Process of Casualisation in Australia

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Casualisation – understood here as an increase in the proportion of employees under a ‘casual’ contract of employment – is a major issue for labour market policy in Australia. Its significance is immediately apparent from the evidence of incidence and trends. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) indicate that the number of employees who were classified as ‘casual’ in their main job<sup>1</sup> almost tripled in the period from 1982 to 1999, rising from just below 700,000 to almost 2 million. Casual density, i.e. casual employees as a percentage of all employees, increased from around 13.3 per cent to 26.4 per cent over this same period (see Figure 1).

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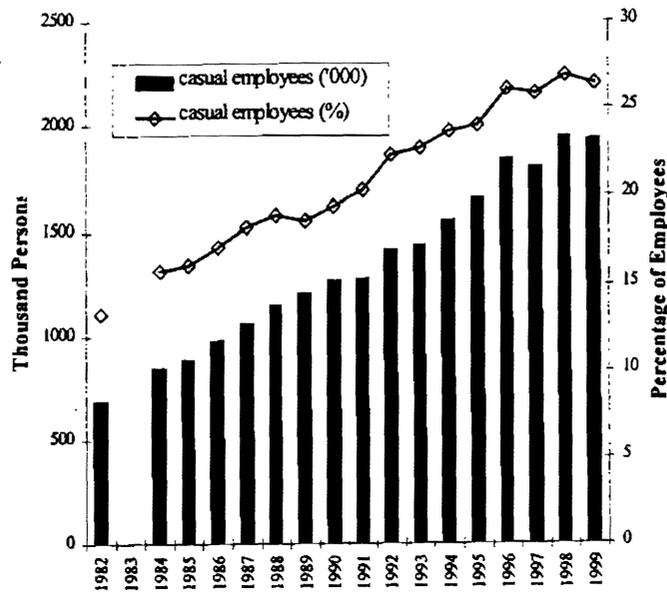
\* Thanks to Mark Wooden, who kindly supplied unpublished data for 1984 and 1993.

<sup>1</sup> In disaggregating the data on employees, the ABS orients its categories to the features of the employment contract and the varied rights and entitlements that accrue according to the nature of the employment contract. Thus ‘casual employees’ are usually defined as ‘employees who were not entitled to either annual leave or sick leave in their main job’, whereas ‘permanent employees’ are defined in opposition to casuals as ‘employees who were entitled to annual leave or sick leave in their main job’ (eg ABS Cat. No. 6325.0, August 1996). Employees are classified into these categories according to their responses to questions about employer provision (in their main job) of paid holiday leave and of paid sick leave. This is a good definition, which captures the common feature that unites the diverse forms of casual employment found in practice – their exclusion from the standard rights, benefits and entitlements granted to permanent employees. It thereby captures a feature that is extremely salient from the point of view of public policy (and indeed from the point of view of the casual employees themselves). For a fuller discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the conventional ABS measure of casualisation see the Appendix.

JOURNAL OF AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY  
ISSN 0156-5826. ISSUE No. 45, JUNE 2000, pp. 68-99.

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Figure 1: Casual Employees, 1982-1999



Source: ABS, Alternative Working Arrangements, March to May 1982, Cat. No. 6341.0; ABS, Employment Benefits Australia 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, Cat. No. 6334.0; Romeyn 1992; ABS, Weekly Earnings of Employees (Distribution) Australia 1989, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1997, Cat. No. 6310.0 and Product No. 6310.0.40.001; ABS, Trade Union Members Australia 1996, Cat. No. 6325.0; ABS, Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership Australia, 1998, 1999, Cat. No. 6310.0.

As Figure 1 indicates, casualisation has unfolded steadily over the past two decades, though with several stutters and sudden spurts of growth. A rapid increase in the early to mid 1990s appears to have been succeeded by a relative slowdown in the late 1990s. Nevertheless, in

aggregate comparison with the 1980s, casualisation appears to have accelerated in the last decade. During the 1980s the increase in casual employment contributed approximately 1 percent per annum to total employment growth. At the same time increases in other forms of employment also made substantial contributions to total employment growth, which amounted to around 3.2 percent per annum. For most of the 1990s the steady increase in casual employment continued to contribute around 1 percent per annum to total employment growth. But this increase unfolded in a changed labour market context – marked first by employment contraction in the recession of the early 1990s and then by a tentative recovery in employment levels. Consequently, the steady growth of casual employment in the 1990s has come to assume a much heavier weight in employment growth.

At the same time as casual employment has been growing, full-time permanent employment has been contracting. There were fewer full-time permanent employees in the workforce in August 1999 than in August 1990, and full-time permanent employees as a proportion of all employees dropped from 73.5 percent to 63.4 percent over these nine years. At the level of the workforce as a whole, casual employment appears to be slowly replacing full-time permanent employment. This is one of the main ways in which the pivotal concept of ‘permanency’, which in Australia, as in almost all advanced capitalist societies, has been the traditional entry-point for employees to acquire ‘industrial citizenship’ (including not only employment security but also a living wage and standardised working-time arrangements) is being weakened.

ABS data suggest that casual employment is most widespread amongst part-time employees, where casual density currently stands at 64.6 percent (Table 1). Casual density is strongest amongst part-time employees working less than 14 hours per week (81.8 percent), but it is also high amongst those working either 15 to 24 hours per week (55.1 percent) or 25 to 34 hours per week (43.1 percent) (ABS Cat. No. 6203.0, July 1999). Casual density is lower amongst full-time employees, but it has expanded steadily since the early 1980s to reach 11.1 percent in 1999 (Table 1).

**Table 1: Casual Employees, by Full-time and Part-time Status, 1982-1999 a)**

Year b)	Full-time Casual Employees		Part-time Casual Employees		Total Casual employees		Employed Labour Force ('000)
	('000)	Casual Density (%)	('000)	Casual Density (%)	('000)	Casual Density (%)	
1982	196.9	4.5	491.4 <sup>^</sup>	63.1 <sup>^</sup>	688.3 <sup>^</sup>	13.3 <sup>^</sup>	6379.3
1983	Na	na	na	na	na	na	6241.1
1984	277.5	6.2	570.7	62.4	848.2	15.8	6466.1
1985	287.6	6.3	599.7	61.9	887.3	16.1	6675.6
1986	325.7	7.0	653.6	63.7	979.3	17.2	6918.6
1987	331.0	7.1	733.2	64.4	1064.2	18.3	7092.3
1988	368.9	7.5	784.0	66.4	1152.9	18.9	7353.4
1989	323.6	6.3	887.0	68.5	1210.6 c)	18.6	7715.4
1990	374.4	7.2	897.4	65.7	1271.8	19.4	7808.1
1991	336.3	6.8	943.7	67.5	1280.0	20.3	7629.3
1992	353.5	7.4	1061.5	67.7	1415.0	22.3	7617.6
1993	404.7	8.4	1030.4	67.2	1435.1	22.7	7621.0
1994	441.3	9.1	1107.8	67.0	1549.1	23.7	7885.7
1995	482.7	9.5	1170.6	65.8	1653.3	24.0	8217.7
1996	559.1	10.8	1282.2	67.5	1841.3	26.1	8319.7
1997	538.4	10.6	1257.1	65.6	1795.5	25.8	8315.5
1998	617.5	11.8	1328.6	65.4	1946.1	26.9	8535.9
1999	576.6	11.1	1355.0	64.6	1931.6	26.4	8731.6

Notes: casual density = casual employees as a percentage of all employees in that group.  
na = not available.

<sup>^</sup> upper bound estimate; and a) the population is persons aged 15 and over (except for 1990, when persons aged 70 and over were excluded).

b) August figures (except for 1991, when the figures for casual employees are for July).

c) the figure for total employees includes 102,200 persons whose full-time and part-time status in their main job could not be determined.

Source: Figures for the employed labour force are from ABS, *Labour Force, Australia*, Cat. No. 6203.0, August issues. Figures for casual employees are from: ABS, *Alternative Working Arrangements, March to May 1982*, (6341.0); ABS, *Employment Benefits Australia* 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, (6334.0); Romeyn 1992; ABS, *Weekly Earnings of Employees (Distribution) Australia* 1989, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1997, ABS (6310.0) and Product No. 6310.0.40.001; ABS, *Trade Union Members Australia*, 1996, (6325.0); ABS, *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership Australia*, 1998, 1999, (6310.0).

Between 1990 and 1999 the number of employed persons rose by just 923,500, and the increase in casual employees (+659,800) accounted for the major part (71.4 percent) of this relatively modest growth (Table 1).

One of the most important aspects of any discussion of casual employment in Australia concerns the division between those casual employees who are engaged on a short-term and/or irregular basis – what can perhaps be called ‘*true casuals*’ – and those casual employees who are largely indistinguishable from permanent employees in terms of their tenure (or the expectations of tenure) and the regularity of their hours – what can be termed ‘*long-term casuals*’ (sometimes ‘permanent casuals’). It is the existence of this latter group that appears as the main peculiarity and problem of the Australian system. Though such employees are used by employers in the same way as permanent employees, they are deprived of the standard rights, benefits and entitlements associated with permanency.

The relative size and trends of growth for these two groups of ‘true casuals’ and ‘long-term casuals’ are difficult to determine. From amongst the available data items, the best pointer to the division between these two groups is provided by (elapsed) job tenure. Thus, the argument that most casual employees are ‘long-term casuals’ is supported by cross-sectional counts indicating that the majority of casual employees have been in their current job for 12 months or longer (eg ABS Cat. No. 6254.0, November 1998; see the comparable figures for ‘self-identified casuals’ in ABS Cat. No. 6359.0, August 1998). Similarly, it is possible to note that the size of this majority is growing, as the number of casual employees who have been in their current job for 12 months or longer increases faster than the number who have been in their current job less than 12 months (ABS Cat. No. 6254.0, February 1993, November 1998). However, an index based on how long the current casual job has lasted is far from satisfactory. It does not directly capture the dimension of regularity. Moreover, elapsed job tenure is only a partial indicator of a long-term job, since only a proportion of those jobs that have lasted less than twelve months will be genuinely short-term jobs, *i.e.* many of these jobs will be *expected* to last a long time. One index of this provided by the recent *Forms of Employment* survey (ABS Cat. No. 6359.0, August 1998), where less than a quarter of all ‘self-identified casuals’ stated that

they did not expect to be with their current employer in twelve months time (with most of these explaining that they intended to leave the casual job for personal reasons).

Casual employment is concentrated in particular parts of the employment structure. However, it has been growing in absolute terms and as a percentage of all employees, in both the private and the public sectors, in all industry divisions, in all occupations, and in all sizes of workplace.

The process of casualisation is significant because of what is known about the conditions of casual jobs. Starting from the common feature of non-entitlement to paid annual leave and paid sick leave, we can also note that casual employees are vulnerable to low pay and numerous forms of labour insecurity (not only employment insecurity but also income insecurity, working-time insecurity and representation insecurity). In official apologies for casualisation (e.g. Reith, 2000), much is made of the alleged counter-attractions of a 'casual loading' on the hourly rate of pay. But quite apart from any discussion of its adequacy, this view is based on the false assumption that all casual employees receive a casual loading. It is likely that this is true only for a minority – and indeed a diminishing minority – of casual employees (Campbell, 1996a: 579-582; Burgess and Campbell, 1998a: 43-44). In short, casual employment is characterised by shortfalls in protection and substantive disadvantages over most of the dimensions of what can be termed 'precariousness' in employment. Though the precise extent of such precariousness varies, casual employment in general can be aptly described as a degraded or precarious form of employment (e.g. Campbell, 1997; Burgess and Campbell, 1998b). Moreover, for most casual employees it appears to act as a trap rather than as a bridge to more secure employment (Burgess and Campbell, 1998a).

A cross-national perspective reinforces the concerns with casualisation. As the major form of non-permanent waged work in Australia, casual employment is often linked in cross-national comparisons to the omnibus category of 'temporary' employment (e.g. OECD, 1996). In such comparisons the extent and growth in casual employment appears as an extreme case of 'temporary' employment, second only to Spain amongst a selected grouping of OECD nations (OECD, 1996; ACIRRT, 1999: 140). Though there are pitfalls in this comparison, it can be useful if care

is taken in the development of the argument (Campbell and Burgess, 2000). The qualifications we need to make do not undermine but rather highlight the distinctive position of Australia, e.g. in that casual employment in Australia has far fewer rights, benefits and entitlements than the varied forms of temporary employment – predominantly fixed-term employment – found in Europe. Moreover, whereas the trend in European countries is towards a mitigation of the disadvantages of fixed-term employment – most recently through the EU Fixed-Term Directive (Vigneau *et al.*, 1999) – the trend in Australia appears to be towards an exacerbation of the disadvantages of casual employment. This suggests that the problem of casual employment in Australia is even more marked than is apparent in this simple cross-national comparison.

Another approach to cross-national comparison – which avoids the pitfalls of using different categories – is to look around in other advanced capitalist countries for forms of employment that, irrespective of their label, resemble casual employment in Australia in their lack of rights, benefits and entitlements. The best indicator here is a lack of entitlement to paid annual leave. Here the anomalous position of Australia stands out even more clearly. In most OECD countries there is comprehensive statutory regulation that gives *all* employees a minimum entitlement to paid annual leave (though the length can vary), and as a result the figure for employees without such an entitlement will be close to zero. Such a statutory requirement is characteristic of most European Union (EU) countries. Until recently the United Kingdom was one exception, and the figures suggested that it resulted in a significant group of employees without an entitlement to paid annual leave (around 3.5 percent of full-time employees and around 34 percent of full-time employees – see Green, 1997: 248). However, the 1993 EU Working-time Directive includes a provision for a minimum of three weeks paid annual leave for all employees covered by the Directive (and a ban on ‘cashing out’ such leave, except where the employment is terminated – see Article 7) (EIRR, 1994). In order to conform with this Directive, the UK introduced legislation in 1998, which extends paid annual leave (initially three weeks and then four weeks) to all employees (EIRR, 1998). Outside the EU the picture is similar. For example, New Zealand has a parallel industrial history to Australia, including the development of an award system and the development of award provisions for casual

employment (and indeed a parallel history of labour market deregulation in the 1990s). New Zealand has 'casual employees', but these are covered by statutory regulation that extends paid annual leave and paid sick leave to all employees (Anderson *et al.*, 1994: 498-499). As such, they differ in a fundamental respect from the casual employees in Australia. The one country where it is possible to find a reasonable analogy to casual employment in Australia is the United States. According to recent Bureau of Labour figures, 12 percent of full-time employees and 64 percent of part-time employees in the US did not receive paid vacations in 1994-95 (Foster, 1998: 59). This is the product of a quite different regulatory history, in which the US appears as the one major advanced capitalist society that failed to erect a solid platform of minimum labour standards for employees. As such the wages and conditions of employees in the US are structured in a continuous spectrum, at the bottom end of which there can be a startling absence of any rights and benefits. Nevertheless, though the product of a different history, the outcome in this respect can be seen as similar to the outcome in Australia. In the light of the familiar difficulties associated with the bottom end of the US labour market (Mishal and Schmitt eds., 1995), this similarity cannot be seen as any source of comfort.

Casual employment in Australia has attracted increasing research attention in recent years both through studies of aggregate statistics (e.g. Simpson, 1994; Campbell, 1996a, 1996b; Wooden, 1996a: 21-27; Burgess, 1997; Simpson *et al.*, 1997; Wooden, 1998, Smith and Ewer, 1999) and through studies at the enterprise or industry level (e.g. Mylett, 1994; ACIRRT, 1996; Whitehouse *et al.*, 1997; Walsh and Deery, 1997; Allan, 1998; Weller *et al.*, 1999, De Ruyter, 2000). In spite of this flurry of attention, many questions remain. The causes of casualisation are one important area of debate. Most explanations rightly focus on what can crudely be called the 'demand side' of the labour market. Thus they concentrate on changing employer perceptions and demands and on the increased opportunities for employer use of casual labour as a result of labour surplus, weakened trade unions and changing regimes of labour regulation. This draws attention to the peculiarities of the Australian system of protective regulation, which freely permits employers to hire workers as casual employees with few entitlements other than a basic entitlement to an hourly wage (Campbell, 1996a; Smith and Ewer, 1999).

It also draws attention to the manifold advantages of casual employees to employers in areas such as cheaper labour costs, greater ease of dismissal, the opportunity to match labour time to fluctuations in demand, greater administrative convenience, and greater opportunity for enhanced control of employees (e.g. Campbell, 1996b: 89-93). However, the precise advantages of casual labour for employers in different sectors, the specific pressures and opportunities that face employers in different sectors, and the precise contribution of the regulatory structure remain controversial.

One additional question concerns the social groups most heavily involved in casual employment. This is an important issue in its own right, e.g. in enriching the description of casual employment. But the question of social groups is also important because it is imbricated in broader debates on the explanation of casualisation and the evaluation of its outcomes. In some analyses, it is pointed out that casual employment draws heavily on distinct social groups such as full-time students and persons (women) with family responsibilities. It is suggested that such groups can be seen as 'predisposed' to casual employment, i.e. that they have distinctive employment needs and preferences, which can best be met by taking up casual employment. The employment participation of such groups has been rapidly increasing in recent years, and it is therefore tempting to venture a supposition that this in turn may be a fundamental cause of the process of casualisation.

Hints of this line of argument can be detected in several articles. Simpson (1994: 38) refers to the alleged attraction of casual employment for "those who wish to work a small number of hours in order to pursue leisure activities and those who only want, or need, a limited income". He runs through a list of groups that might be seen as seeking casual employment, e.g. social security beneficiaries wanting a supplement to their income, full-time students, employees wanting to gradually ease out of the workforce, and those whose health, age or disability would make full-time work difficult (Simpson, 1994: 37-38). A recent EPAC report suggests that "casual jobs allow people to balance work and family commitments or work and study" (1996: 22; see also Barnes *et al.*, 1999: 73). A recent Ministerial Information Paper speaks of the value of the flexibility of casual work for people caring for children or relatives as

well as of the attraction of the casual loading for groups such as full-time students (Reith, 2000: 9; see Wooden, 1993: 177). This in turn segues neatly into a suggestion that the sources of casualisation can – at least partly – be traced back to the increased prominence in the workforce of groups such as married women, full-time students and retirees, who have such distinct working-time preferences (Simpson *et al.*, 1997: 201; Barnes *et al.*, 1999: 73). In this perspective, casualisation may not be as much of a problem as it first appears, and the need for a policy response may not be as pressing.

This paper takes up the question of the social groups participating in casual employment. In particular, it is concerned to examine the extant empirical data on the social groups involved in casual employment, the extent of their involvement, and the changes in this involvement over time. Can casualisation be traced back to an increase in the employment participation of social groups that are allegedly predisposed to casual employment?

The paper draws on unpublished ABS data from 1984, 1993 and 1998, which disaggregate casual (and permanent) employment by sex, age and full-time student status. These data have several deficiencies. The base year is not 1982, as in Figure 1 and Table 1, but rather 1984. It is only possible to measure the participation of full-time students from 1993 (and part-time students are missed out altogether). Moreover, the categories remain rather rough. It is not possible to identify women with family responsibilities in these data; instead the much broader category of prime-age women has to be used as a rough proxy. It is not possible to disaggregate the broad category of 'part-time hours'. Nevertheless the data are the best available, and they do provide useful insights into the issues posed above. The next section of the paper summarises the 1984 data on the participation of select social groups in casual employment. The second section points to salient features of changing labour markets since 1984, including changing employment rates. The third section then presents unpublished ABS data for the changes in the participation of select social groups in casual employment from 1984 to 1998. The fourth section develops the discussion by separating out full-time and part-time casual employment. The final section draws out some of the implications of the analysis.

**Table 2: Full-time and part-time casual employees, 1984**

	Full-time Casual Employees	Part-time Casual Employees	Total Casual Employees	
	('000)	('000)	('000)	Casual Density (%) a)
<b>Males 15-19</b>	15.2	54.4	69.6	24.4
<b>Females 15-19</b>	11.5	87.1	98.6	35.9
<b>Males 20-24</b>	31.6	23.1	54.7	11.9
<b>Females 20-24</b>	15.5	53.3	68.8	16.7
<b>Students 15-24</b>	0.9#	136.5#	137.4#	91.0#
<b>Non-students 15-24</b>	72.9#	81.4#	154.3#	12.1#
<b>Males 25-54</b>	112.1	30.7	142.8	6.6
<b>Females 25-54</b>	53.8	302.2	356.0	27.1
<b>Males 55+</b>	11.3	16.2	27.4	8.5
<b>Females 55+</b>	*3.2	27.2	30.4	25.9
<b>All Males</b>	170.2	124.3	294.5	9.1
<b>All Females</b>	84.0	469.8	553.8	26.1
<b>All Persons</b>	254.1	594.1	848.2	15.8

a) 'casual density' = casual employees as a percentage of all employees in that group.

# author's estimate (see note 3).

\* relative standard error greater than 25 per cent.

Source: ABS - *Labour Force Survey* (unpublished data).

### Casual Employment in 1984

It is useful to start by looking at data on the social groups – or perhaps more exactly social categories – involved in casual employment in the base year, 1984 (Table 2). The most striking feature is the sharp gender difference. Women constituted almost two thirds of all casual employees in 1984, with women in the prime-age group from 25 to 54 years old contributing a full 42 percent. Casual density among female employees was 26.1 percent, whereas among male employees it was only 9.1 percent. The gender differential was sharpest for the prime-age group and also for mature-age workers 55 years and over, but it was more muted for the younger age groups. Female employees in all age groups showed high levels of casual density. The highest level was recorded for

female employees aged from 15 to 19 years (35.9 percent), but women in the prime-age group (27.1 percent), mature-age women (26.1 percent) and women from 20 to 24 years old (16.7 percent) also displayed levels of casual density that were higher than the mean for all employees. Amongst male employees, only the group aged 15 to 19 years showed a relatively high level of casual density (24.4 percent), while all other groups of male employees displayed levels of casual density that were well below the mean for all employees.

The 1984 data also point to the importance of young workers, in particular young teenage workers, as a component group of casual employees. High levels of casual density were evident for both male and female employees in the 15 to 19 year age group, but lower levels were characteristic of young workers in the 20 to 24 year age group. Although the 1984 data do not separate out full-time students from non-students, it is possible to make rough estimates.<sup>2</sup> These suggest that just under half of the young workers engaged in casual employment were full-time students.

Table 2 incorporates a distinction between part-time and full-time casual employment. This brings out a further feature of gender differences. Women were more likely than men in each age group to be in casual employment, but in each case the casual employment in question was overwhelmingly *part-time* casual employment. Conversely, with the exception of male casual employees in the teenage group, males were relatively unlikely to be in casual employment. However, in so far as they were involved in casual employment, males tended to be in *full-time* casual employment.

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2 Extrapolating back for the missing data in Table 3 (see below) produces an estimate for the number of full-time students who were employed in 1984 of 156,000. Adding an assumption that these were in casual and permanent employment at the same ratio as in 1993, produces an estimate for the number of full-time students in casual employment in 1984 of 137,400. Adding a further assumption that these were in part-time and full-time casual employment at the same ratio as 1993 produces an estimate for full-time students in part-time casual employment of 136,500 and for full-time students in full-time casual employment of 900. Figures for non-students are then calculated as the residual from the entire population of young workers.

In short, casual employment in 1984 drew heavily on just a few social groups. Included was a substantial group of full-time students, who were overwhelmingly concentrated in part-time casual employment. Certainly for this group (part-time) casual employment was the traditional channel of participation in employment. By far the largest group of casual employees was made up of prime-age women, who were also predominantly in part-time casual employment. In this case, however, it would be misleading to suggest that casual employment was the traditional channel of participation in employment, since only around a quarter of this group of female employees were in any form of casual employment. Permanent employment, either full-time or part-time, was more important for this group. Casual employees also came from a range of other groups, although in most of these cases the proportion in casual employment was generally low and permanent employment clearly remained the dominant form of employment. In short, in 1984 casual employees were disproportionately made up of full-time students and prime-age women, who together accounted for the majority (around 58.2 percent) of all casual employees.

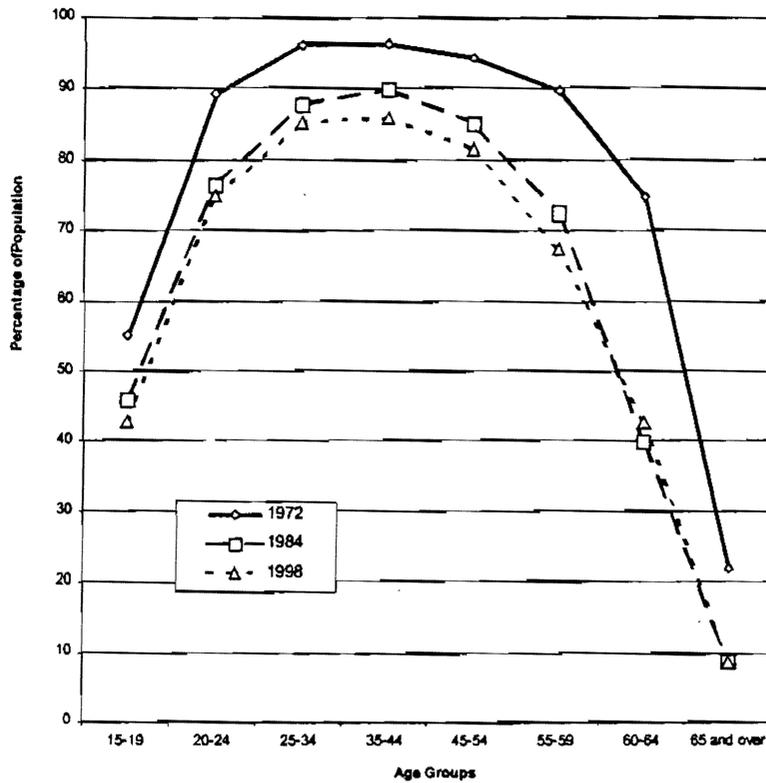
### **Changing Labour Markets, 1984-1998**

The period since 1984 has witnessed a complex series of changes in labour markets (EPAC, 1996). Here, it is only possible to mention a few aspects. At an aggregate level, the composition of the Australian workforce has changed, as employment rates for some groups have declined and employment rates for others have increased. Though the major decline in male employment rates occurred in the 1970s and early 1980s, continued decline is evident in the period from 1984 to the present, in particular amongst the prime-age groups (Figure 2).

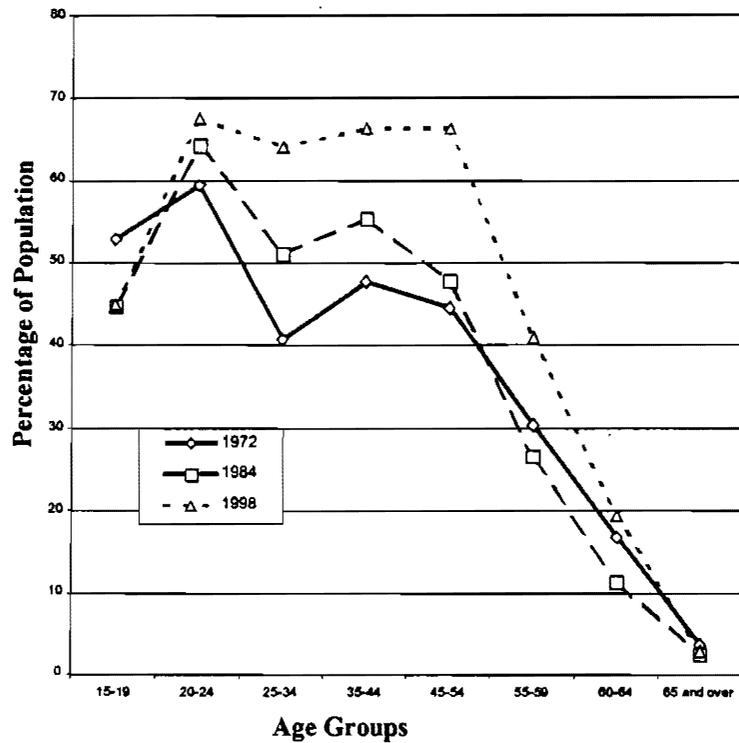
By contrast, employment rates for most age groups of women have steadily increased, including in the most recent period from 1984 to 1998 (Figure 3). Figure 3 indicates that much of the increase is in the prime-age groups, where the employment rates are starting to converge with those for prime-age males. The relative drop in participation amongst the 25 to 34 age group, signifying withdrawal in the years of child-bearing and early child care, has become less marked and appears as only a slight kink in the

1998 data. The shape of the figure is now much closer to the 'plateau' shape characteristic both of males in most advanced capitalist societies and of females in several societies such as Canada, the United States, and the Scandinavian countries (Rimmer, 1994: 65-74; Rubery and Fagan, 1994: 148-152).

Figure 2: Male Employment Rates, 1972, 1984 and 1998



Source: ABS - The Labour Force, Australia, Historical Summary 1966 to 1984, Cat. No. 6204.0; ABS - Labour Force, Australia, 1978-95, Cat. No. 6204.0; ABS - Labour Force, Australia, August 1998, Cat. No. 6203.0.

**Figure 3: Female Employment Rates, 1972, 1984 and 1998**

Source: ABS - The Labour Force, Australia, Historical Summary 1966 to 1984, Cat. No. 6204.0; ABS - Labour Force, Australia, 1978-95, Cat. No. 6204.0; ABS - Labour Force, Australia, August 1998, Cat. No. 6203.0.

Figures 2 and 3 only hint at the major transformation in youth labour markets (Wooden, 1996b; Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 1998, 1999). As part of this transformation, more young people have continued in full-time study, and a growing proportion of these full-time students have combined their studies with employment. Both trends contribute to an increase in the number of full-time students in paid employment (Table 3).

Table 3: Full-time Students who are Employed, 1984-1999

	15-19: Attending a Secondary School Full-time		15-19: Attending a Tertiary Institution Full-time		20-24: Attending a Tertiary Institution Full- time	
	Employed		Employed		Employed	
	('000)	(%)	('000)	(%)	('000)	(%)
1984	96.8	17.3	na	na	na	na
1985	109.3	18.7	na	na	na	na
1986	120.3	19.8	na	na	na	na
1987	142.0	21.5	40.5	31.0	46.4	35.1
1988	149.4	22.8	44.6	32.2	45.1	35.5
1989						
1990	162.7	24.8	67.8	42.5	69.2	40.9
1991	157.7	23.1	70.4	38.5	74.5	38.2
1992	168.2	24.8	68.3	38.0	80.4	36.7
1993	157.0	23.5	66.0	36.0	85.4	36.9
1994	180.0	27.0	64.2	36.5	91.7	40.3
1995	193.4	29.1	80.6	45.2	100.8	41.8
1996	209.7	31.0	89.3	47.3	101.9	43.8
1997	188.5	26.9	94.9	47.9	111.1	43.0
1998	206.3	28.8	101.5	48.4	120.5	45.9
1999	214.5	29.7	113.1	50.0	133.5	49.1

na - not available.

Source: ABS - *The Labour Force Australia*, Cat. No. 6203.0, August issues.

In short, it is indeed true that the period since 1984 has witnessed a significant expansion in the number and proportion of prime-age women who are employed and in the number and proportion of full-time students who are employed. At the same time, it is also important to take note of the changes affecting other groups. Several forces have acted to redefine vulnerable groups in the labour market. Retrenchments have been most prevalent in recessionary periods such as 1982-83 and 1991-92, but the popularity of downsizing (including outsourcing) in large public sector and private sector firms has helped to extend the reach of redundancies even into periods of relative prosperity such as the present (ACIRRT, 1999). Downsizing appears to have disproportionately affected blue-

collar males, both from mature-age and prime-age groups, and many older workers have found it difficult to secure another comparable job. This may add a push to the pull factors drawing such older workers out of the labour market, but it can also leave a substantial number of workers stranded at the edges of employment (O'Loughlin and Watson, 1997; VandenHeuvel, 1999). Also important is the continuing upheaval within youth labour markets, marked by a sharp decline of full-time permanent job opportunities for younger workers. This affects in particular the group of young workers who are not full-time students. Though this group, especially amongst teenagers, is declining in importance, it is still large enough to provide substantial numbers who are similarly stuck at the edges of the labour market (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 1998, 1999).

### The Composition of Casualisation, 1984-1998

Table 4 presents basic data on the social composition of casualisation between 1984 and 1998. Several social groups are distinguished and the table offers three measures of change for each group – change in absolute numbers, contribution to the net growth in casual employees, and change in casual density. These data refer to all casual employees, irrespective of their part-time and full-time status (this latter dimension is discussed in the next section).

Table 4 indicates that the number of casual employees (in their main job) increased by almost 1.1 million persons between 1984 and 1998. All groups contributed to the overall increase by increasing their numbers in casual employment. However, the extent of the contribution varied.

The two groups singled out earlier as potential drivers of casualisation are full-time students and women in prime-age groups. As noted earlier, the number of *employed full-time students* increased substantially since the mid-1980s (see Table 3). According to my estimates, the number of employed full-time students who are casual employees has grown between 1984 and 1998 by around 230,000. This contributed around 21 percent of the total growth in casual employment over this period. It is important to note that this increase does not involve any major change in

casual density. Employed full-time students were always likely in Australia to be overwhelmingly concentrated in casual rather than permanent employment, and this continues to be the case today. The increase in their numbers within casual employment is largely a simple concomitant of the increase in their numbers within the workforce as a whole.

**Table 4: Casual Employees and Casual Density by Age, Sex and Full-time Student Status, 1984, 1993 and 1998**

	Casual Employees ('000)				Casual Density (%) A)		
	1984	1993	1998	Contribution To Net Growth in all Casual Employees, 1984-98 (%)	1984	1993	1998
Males 15-19	69.6	122.7	152.2	7.5	24.4	49.9	55.2
Females 15-19	98.6	158.5	207.2	9.9	35.9	67.4	74.2
Males 20-24	54.7	102.1	143.9	8.1	11.9	21.7	30.2
Females 20-24	68.8	120.6	147.7	7.2	16.7	27.0	34.2
Students 15-24	137.4 #	271.6	367.8	21.0#	91.0#	91.0	87.8
Non-students 15-24	154.3#	232.4	283.2	11.7#	12.1#	21.1	27.1
Males 25-54	142.8	305.6	503.4	32.8	6.6	12.1	17.7
Females 25-54	356.0	533.5	630.8	25.0	27.1	26.9	26.7
Males 55+	27.4	47.5	94.6	6.1	8.5	16.7	25.8
Females 55+	30.4	44.5	66.3	3.3	25.9	31.2	31.3
All Males	294.5	578.0	894.1	54.6	9.1	16.4	22.6
All Females	553.8	857.1	1052.0	45.4	26.1	30.6	32.0
All Persons	848.2	1435.0	1946.1	100.0	15.8	22.7	26.1

a) 'casual density' = casual employees as a percentage of all employees in that group.

# author's estimate (see note 3).

Source: ABS - Labour Force Survey (unpublished data); ABS - Weekly Earnings of Employees (Distribution), Australia, August 1993, Cat. No. 6310.0 (unpublished data); ABS - Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership Australia, August 1998, Cat. No. 6310.0 (unpublished data).

*Prime-age women* have also increased their weight within the workforce. Table 4 indicates that there has been an increase of around 275,000 persons in the number of prime-age women who are casual employees,

representing 25 percent of the total growth in casual employment. Again, we can note that the increase in their numbers within casual employment appears to be a concomitant of the increase in their numbers within the workforce as a whole. Casual density for this group has been remarkably stable since 1984 (at around 27 percent). Indeed this stability is somewhat surprising, since most other social groups show sharp increases in casual density over this period. As a result of this stability, the casual density for prime-age female employees now hovers close to the mean for all employees, and prime-age women no longer stand out as a group that is heavily concentrated in casual employment.<sup>3</sup>

Increases amongst full-time students and prime-age women do contribute to casualisation, accounting for around 46 percent of the net increase in casual employees since 1984. As this figure indicates, these increases constitute an important element in any account of casualisation. However, they are far from providing the whole story. It is also necessary to examine the contribution to casualisation amongst other social groups.

In particular, Table 4 draws attention to the contribution of the sharp increase in the number of *prime-age males* and *mature-age males* who are casual employees. The former accounted for almost one third (32.8 percent) of the total net increase in casual employment, and the latter accounted for a further 6.1 percent. Overall employment in both age groups has grown – though only slowly, particularly amongst mature-age male workers – since 1984. In the light of the low levels of casual density amongst both groups in 1984 (see Table 2), we could have

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3 Whether this also holds for women with family responsibilities is unclear. Only patchy information on this group is available, primarily related to their levels of casual density. A 1991 Victorian survey of the work patterns of women divided employed women into five categories according to family or household relationships: single mother with dependent children; wife with dependent children; wife without dependent children; other family member; and not living with family. Two groups - single mothers with dependent children and wives with dependent children - recorded levels of casual density that were higher than for all female employees (ABS Cat. No. 6204.2, October 1991). Estimates from August 1997 suggest that female employees with children aged under 12 years numbered 798,100, of whom 37 percent (295,200) were in casual employment (ABS Cat. No. 6342.0, August 1997). This is significantly higher than the level of casual density for prime-age female employees (see Table 4).

expected this overall increase in employment to have provided just a small boost to the numbers of casual employees. The fact that the increase is so large is primarily due to an increase in casual density in these two groups, from 6.6 percent to 17.7 percent amongst prime-age male employees and from 8.5 percent to 25.8 percent amongst mature-age male employees. Whereas both groups were only slightly affected by casual employment in 1984, they now appear to have been drawn more comprehensively into the ambit of casual employment.

The increase in casual employment amongst *young workers who are non-students* is another important aspect of casualisation. This increase contributed 11.7 percent of the net growth in casual employment. Again this is a group that shows little evidence of any rapid growth in overall employment. Instead the increase in casual employment is primarily associated with an increase in casual density (from 12.1 percent in 1984 to 27.1 percent in 1998). This is another social group that appears to have been drawn more comprehensively into the ambit of casual employment.

Both older males and young workers who are non-students were identified above as groups that have been rendered more vulnerable as a result of labour market changes since the mid-1980s. These data suggest that increased vulnerability is expressed not only in higher rates of unemployment but also in higher rates of participation in casual employment.

The data in Table 4 indicate that casualisation affects most groups, but it has been most rapid amongst groups that had hitherto been little affected by casual employment. The net of casual employment is spreading and drawing in a wider range of social groups. With the exception of full-time students, casual employment is still far short of constituting the dominant form of employment. However, it has become a major form of employment for all the social groups distinguished here. One consequence of the extended reach of casualisation is an apparent leveling of the differences in casual density amongst social groups. Casual employment is no longer as socially concentrated as it was in 1984. In particular, it is possible to observe an apparent shrinking of the gender differential in participation in casual employment. Casual density amongst male employees increased from only 9.1 percent in 1984 to 22.6

percent in 1998. Casual density amongst female employees also increased but more slowly, from 26.1 percent to 32.0 percent.

### **Full-time and Part-time Casual Employees**

The argument up to this point refers to all casual employees, irrespective of their part-time and full-time status. Consideration of the part-time and full-time division adds several important nuances. Table 5 presents basic data on the composition of the changes in full-time and part-time casual employment. The same social groups as in Table 4 are distinguished, and the table uses two measures of change for each group – change in absolute numbers and the contribution to the net growth in all casual employees.

Table 5 indicates that around two thirds of the net increase in casual employment is in *part-time casual employment*. The most important component in the increase in part-time casual employment is the increase in full-time students who are casual employees. Another important component is the increase in prime-age women who are casual employees. A smaller contribution comes from an increase in part-time casual employment amongst mature-age female workers. In each case, these were groups whose participation in casual employment in 1984 was predominantly participation in part-time casual employment. Perhaps more surprising is the significant contribution from groups normally associated with a preference for full-time hours. Table 5 indicates that the vast bulk of the increase in casual employment amongst young workers who are non-students has been in part-time casual employment. This in turn has contributed a substantial boost to the increase in part-time casual employment. Similarly, though most of the increase in casual employment amongst prime-age males is in full-time casual employment, a significant part is in part-time casual employment. A further contribution stems from mature-age males. In short, even in the case of part-time casual employment, it is possible to observe signs of a spreading net, increasingly taking in young workers who are non-students and a proportion of prime-age and mature-age males.

**Table 5: Full-time and Part-time Casual Employees by Age, Sex and Full-time Student Status, 1984, 1993 and 1998 a)**

	Full-time Casual Employees ('000)			Contribution To Net Growth in all Casual Employees, 1984-98 (%)
	1984	1993	1998	
Males 15-19	15.2	16.3	19.4	0.4
Females 15-19	11.5	9.1	8.8	-0.2
Males 20-24	31.6	38.9	52.4	1.9
Females 20-24	15.5	25.7	22.7	0.7
Students 15-24	0.9#	*1.8	*1.0	0.0#
Non-Students 15-24	72.9#	88.3	102.3	2.7#
Males 25-54	112.1	204.0	332.6	20.1
Females 25-54	53.8	84.4	121.8	6.2
Males 55+	11.3	20.9	48.7	3.4
Females 55+	*3.2	*5.3	11.0	0.7
All Males	170.2	280.2	453.2	25.8
All Females	84.0	124.5	164.3	7.3
All Persons	254.1	404.7	617.5	33.1
	Part-time Casual Employees ('000)			
Males 15-19	54.4	106.5	132.8	7.1
Females 15-19	87.1	149.4	198.4	10.1
Males 20-24	23.1	63.2	91.5	6.2
Females 20-24	53.3	94.9	125.0	6.5
Students 15-24	136.5#	269.8	366.8	21.0#
Non-Students 15-24	81.4#	144.1	180.9	9.1#
Males 25-54	30.7	101.6	170.8	12.8
Females 25-54	302.2	449.1	509.0	18.8
Males 55+	16.2	26.6	45.8	2.7
Females 55+	27.2	39.2	55.3	2.6
All Males	124.3	297.8	440.9	28.8
All Females	469.8	732.6	887.7	38.1
All Persons	594.1	1030.4	1328.6	66.9

a) data for 1984 are for full-time and part-time status in all jobs; data for 1993 and 1998 are for full-time and part-time status in the main job.

# author's estimate (see note 7).

\* relative standard error greater than 25 per cent.

Source: ABS - *Labour Force Survey* (unpublished data); ABS - *Weekly Earnings of Employees (Distribution), Australia*, August 1993, Cat. No. 6310.0 (unpublished data); ABS - *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership Australia*, August 1998, Cat. No. 6310.0 (unpublished data).

One third of the net increase in casual employment is in *full-time casual employment*. This is the subsidiary part (and it might appear even more subsidiary if accurate data excluding owner-managers of incorporated enterprises were available). On the other hand, its significance would be greater if we looked at hours worked rather than just jobs. This increase in full-time casual employment is perhaps the most surprising and significant feature of casualisation. At the same time as full-time permanent employment has contracted, full-time casual employment has expanded. As a result, the growth in full-time casual employment is accompanied by a sharp increase in casual density amongst full-time employees, from 6.2 percent in 1984 to 11.8 percent in 1998 (see Table 1). The most important component of the increase in full-time casual employment is the increase in casual employment amongst prime-age males, but a significant contribution also comes from mature-age males. In short, for two of the groups more comprehensively drawn into the net of casual employment, increased participation primarily takes the form of an increase in full-time casual employment. However, we can also note – to further complicate the picture of changes amongst prime-age females – that a significant contribution to the increase in full-time casual employment comes from this group.

Consideration of the full-time and part-time division throws up several interesting issues. As could be expected – given the different distribution of males and females over full-time and part-time employment – gender differences come more to the fore in Table 5. In this sense, it is necessary to qualify the earlier assessment concerning the apparent shrinking of the gender differential in participation in casual employment. Males are becoming more involved in casual employment, but differences in the distribution of men and women over full-time and part-time casual employment continue to be important. At the same time, however, it is noteworthy that gender differences in hours of casual employment do not appear quite as stark as in 1984. There are signs of seepage of more men into part-time casual employment. This is not surprising in so far as it involves full-time students, but more novel is the evidence of increased participation from young males who are non-students, and also from a section of prime-age and mature-age males. Conversely, there are also signs of seepage of more women into full-time casual employment, in particular prime-age women. This complements the already significant

levels of participation of prime-age women in full-time permanent employment.

### **Implications of the Analysis**

This paper presents ABS data concerning the composition of casualisation. It suggests that just under half (46 percent) of the net increase in casual employment in Australia since 1984 is associated with an increase in the number of full-time students and prime-age women who are casual employees. In this respect, the argument that appeals to broad changes in the employment participation of select social groups can be seen to have some merit. Casualisation does indeed seem to be fuelled by a growth in employment participation amongst full-time students and prime-age women. In the case of full-time students, the increased employment participation flows predominantly into the traditional channel of casual employment. In the case of prime-age women, however, only a minor part of the increased participation flows through the channel of casual employment.

At the same time, it is clear that increased participation amongst these two groups cannot be used to account for the entire process of casualisation. The paper also points to the significant contribution arising from changes amongst groups such as young workers who are non-students, prime-age males, and mature-age males. In these cases the contribution to casualisation does not stem from increased participation in employment but primarily from changes in casual density. Moreover, these changes appear to be associated with the opening up of new channels of participation in casual employment, in particular through full-time casual employment. In short, the data point here to a weakening of the extent to which casual employment draws on just a few social groups such as full-time students and prime-age women. It points to the hidden story of casualisation – that casual employment is a spreading net that is drawing in an increased range of social groups.

The paper is limited to statistical data on social categories. Such data do not allow any inferences about a 'predisposition' to casual employment on the part of social groups. This is equally true for the varied speculations on

predisposition found in recent articles. Even for the period of the early 1980s these speculations are implausible. As closer inspection reveals (e.g. Simpson, 1994, 38), the preferences carelessly ascribed to groups such as full-time students and women with family responsibilities are in fact simply preferences for reduced (part-time) hours of paid employment. But preferences for *part-time* employment cannot be used to explain the growth of *casual* employment. Even if full-time casual employment were put aside and the discussion confined to part-time casual employment, this argument would contribute little to explaining why in Australia – in marked contrast to other advanced capitalist societies – around two thirds of part-time waged work is structured in terms of casual status and only one third is structured in terms of permanent status. In short, it fails to account for the central fact that many workers are employed as part-time *casual* rather than part-time *permanent* employees. The argument appears particularly objectionable in the case of employed women with family responsibilities, only a minority of which – even in 1984 – has been engaged in casual employment.

Such arguments have even less purchase in the present, when levels of casual density have risen most markedly amongst groups such as prime-age males, mature-age males and young people who are non-students. These are social groups traditionally engaged in full-time permanent employment. The fact of their increasing involvement in casual employment – predominantly *full-time* casual employment – clearly cannot be explained by speculations about a predisposition to seek reduced hours of paid work. The explanation is more likely to be found in an account of *employer* predispositions to use casual employees (facilitated by the increased vulnerability of segments of these groups in the changed labour market conditions of the 1980s and 1990s).

The statistical data used here are only indicative. A full analysis and evaluation of casualisation needs to reach out further. It needs to tackle the central issue of employer calculations and choices (which can of course entail a targeting of employment policies according to assumptions about social groups – see Allan, 1998). It also needs to reach further in the analysis of effects on individual employees. The specific disadvantages of casual employment – themselves already diverse according to the nature of the job – will vary according to the

social position of the individual worker. For example the impact of doing casual work in a bar at night may vary according to whether the worker is a full-time engineering student, a single mother reliant primarily on benefits, or a prime-age male moonlighting from a regular full-time job. A sensitive exploration of employment conditions and employee preferences and attitudes would help in teasing out these specific effects. It is particularly important to explore the way in which social groups are situated in terms of the distinction between 'true casuals' and 'long-term casuals'. We can presume that many full-time students are likely to fall within the ranks of the 'true casuals', joined perhaps by some non-students from younger age groups and a sprinkling of participants from other social groups. On the other hand, most prime-age males and prime-age females are likely to fall within the ranks of the 'long-term casuals'. However, harder information is clearly necessary to develop the description and policy prescriptions.

Though the data are only indicative, they undermine current claims that casualisation is confined to just a few social groups and is therefore not a major problem. On the contrary, the data reinforce concerns that arise out of an awareness of the stark evidence on incidence and trends. They support the widespread suspicions that casualisation is indeed a major problem in Australian labour markets.

### **Appendix: Measuring Casual Employment and Casualisation**

This paper uses the conventional ABS estimates, which provide the most readily accessible measure of the significance of casual employment in Australia. Even with the usual ABS definition of casual employee, it is of course possible to develop alternative measures. Some measures would point to *higher estimates* of the significance of casual employment. Thus, a more detailed presentation of the cross-sectional data would also have to take into account multiple job-holders, who increased rapidly to 5.2 per cent of the employed labour force in August 1997 (ABS Cat. No. 6216.0, August 1997). Many of the second or third jobs are likely to be casual. Similarly, the figures measure employees in one reference week. But casual employment can entail high turnover, with the result that the

number of persons involved in casual employment over a period of say a year can be much higher than a count of casual employees at any one point in time suggests. Both points are accommodated in a recent study, which suggests that casual jobs constituted 38 percent of all wage and salary paying jobs undertaken in the year to September 1996 (ABS Cat. No. 6286.0, 1994-1996). It is also possible to argue that some workers who are classified as self-employed in the ABS data are 'fake self-employed' or 'disguised wage labourers', who are in a similar situation to casual employees, including with respect to their lack of employment benefits. This would seem to be the case for some workers in labour-hire companies, where the fact that they are self-employed rather than casual does not reflect any major difference in the practice of their employment but can be seen as primarily an artefact of the way the labour-hire company has structured its employment relations with these workers.

On the other hand, several factors could point to *lower estimates*. Thus, it is necessary to take into account the hours of employment. As Table 1 indicates, casual employment is heavily loaded towards part-time employment. As a result, allowing for the number of hours in each job would generate a much lower estimate of the significance of casual employment. For example, the above-cited ABS study suggests that casual employment accounted for only 16 per cent of all hours worked in wage and salary paying jobs in the year to September 1996 (ABS Cat. No. 6286.0, 1994-1996). It is also necessary to take into account the fact that the ABS category of employee includes owner-managers of incorporated enterprises. Around half of these owner-managers of incorporated enterprises are misleadingly counted as casual employees because they pay themselves a flat salary without any paid sick leave or paid annual leave. This inflates the estimates for both part-time and (especially) full-time casual employees. Recent evidence (ABS Cat. No. 6359.0, August 1998) indicates that excluding owner-managers of incorporated enterprises from the calculations would reduce the estimated number of casual employees in August 1998 from 1,946,100 to 1,666,100 persons and would reduce the estimated casual density from 26.9 to 24.8 percent, i.e. by 2.1 percentage points. Some researchers highlight the lower estimates of casual density associated with the AWIRS (Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey) 95 research (e.g. Wooden and Hawke, 1998, 86-87; Wooden, 1998, 6-7; VandenHeuvel and Wooden, 1999, 10-11). This emphasis is

misplaced. The substantially lower estimate for casual density in the AWIRS 95 main survey is almost fully accounted for by the fact that the sample is drawn from workplaces with 20 or more employees (see Morehead *et al.*, 1997, 58-59), where casual density is markedly lower than in smaller workplaces. The even lower estimate in the AWIRS 95 employee survey population arises as a result of the added effects of lower response rates amongst casual employees and of a slightly altered definition of casual employee in the survey schedule.

Different estimates can also be associated with different definitions of a 'casual employee'. For example, a recent ABS survey separates out owner-managers and then introduces a new category of 'self-identified casuals', who were persons who had no entitlement to paid sick leave or paid annual leave and who identified themselves as casual employees. From the point of view of comparison with the conventional ABS estimates, the effect of introducing the category of 'self-identified casuals' is to reduce the estimate cited above from 1,666,100 to 1,439,700 persons, with most of the difference being allocated to a new category of 'other employed persons' (ABS Cat. No. 6359.0, August 1998). This survey is interesting in showing that – once we put aside the problem of owner-managers of incorporated enterprises – the vast majority of those who would usually be classified by the ABS as casual employees do indeed recognise themselves as casual employees. However, in my opinion it would be wrong to use this as the basis for a new classification schema. Self-identification is not a solid basis for any schema (and in any case it is noteworthy that self-identification is only used here for the casual category and not for the other categories). More broadly, some researchers (e.g. Wooden, 1998: 3-4, 7-8) hint that it may be more useful to narrow the definition just to that group of casual employees whose work is genuinely short-term and irregular, corresponding to a strict economic definition of casual employment. This would involve singling out and focusing on a small group of 'true casuals'. However, the pertinent aspect from the point of view of policy-oriented research is not length of tenure but rather the broader issue of lack of entitlements. One of the strengths of the ABS definition is its orientation to this issue. It thereby draws attention to the existence not only of a group of 'true casuals' but also of the substantial and very important group of 'long-term casuals' who have

accumulated lengthy tenure but are nevertheless deprived of all standard entitlements.

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