



Australian Social Trends

USING STATISTICS TO PAINT A PICTURE OF AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY



MARCH 2010

EMBARGO:
11.30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) TUESDAY 16 MARCH 2010

Australian
Social Trends
March 2010

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Australian Statistician

ABS catalogue no. 4102.0

ISSN 1321-1781

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Contents

Introduction.....	vii
Health and socioeconomic disadvantage.....	1
Are young people learning or earning?.....	6
The labour market during recent economic downturns.....	11
Income support among people of working age.....	17
Repeat imprisonment.....	22

Introduction

Australian Social Trends draws on a wide range of data, sourced both from ABS and other agencies, to present a picture of Australian society. This publication aims to inform decision-making, research and discussion on social conditions in Australia. It covers social issues of current and ongoing concern, population groups of interest, and changes in these over time.

The selection of articles aims to address current and perennial social concerns and to provide answers to key social questions. Some topics are revisited as new data become available. The aim of this approach is for each report to remain responsive to contemporary concerns, while accumulating a more comprehensive picture of Australian social conditions over time. For this reason, articles often include cross references to other relevant articles in the current issue, and in previous issues. All articles published since 1994 are available on the ABS web site: www.abs.gov.au.

Australian Social Trends is structured according to the ABS Wellbeing Framework which identifies areas of social concern, population groups and transactions among people and entities within their social environments (see *Measuring Wellbeing: Frameworks for Australian Social Statistics, 2001* – ABS cat. no. 4160.0). The broad areas of social concern are:

- population
- family and community
- health
- education and training
- work
- economic resources
- housing
- crime and justice
- culture and leisure
- other areas - including environment, religion, and transport and communication.

Australian Social Trends is now issued on a quarterly basis. (From 1994 to 2008 it was an annual publication). In the course of a year, the articles will cover a wide range of the areas of social concern.

The articles focus strongly on people and social concerns. Each article aims to tell a story, providing a sense of the social and historical context in which a particular topic is embedded, moving from the general to the specific, and using statistics to bring light to the issue. Articles aim to balance 'what' analysis (relating the relevant statistical facts surrounding the issue, e.g. number, characteristics, change over time, sex, age and other differences), with 'why' analysis (providing context and explanation by highlighting relevant social changes and events and the chronologies of these). For example, an article on work may examine current labour force participation, how the labour market has changed over time, how different groups of people are affected by social and economic conditions, and how these factors may be linked to observed employment trends.

Health and socioeconomic disadvantage

Although the overall level of health and wellbeing of Australians is relatively high compared with other countries, there are significant disparities in the health outcomes of different populations within Australia. In particular, people who live in areas with poorer socioeconomic conditions tend to have worse health than people from other areas. Previous analysis has shown that disadvantaged Australians have higher levels of disease risk factors and lower use of preventative health services than those who experience socioeconomic advantage.¹

This article will use the Socio-Economic Index of Disadvantage for Areas (SEIFA) to examine the association between socioeconomic disadvantage and health. It should be noted that SEIFA scores are based on summary measures that represent an average of people and households in an area and should not be presumed to apply to all individuals within that area.

Data from the ABS 2007–08 National Health Survey (NHS) shows that there is a relationship between an increased level of disadvantage and poorer health outcomes for people living in those areas.

There are various material and psychosocial reasons why people living in disadvantaged areas experience poorer health. For example, low income can negatively impact housing standards or reduce access to medical services; low educational attainment can affect the ability to obtain information on health services and health risk prevention; and the lack of a sense of financial security or control over one's life may create chronic stress which can negatively impact on physical as well as mental wellbeing. However, the direction of causality is not necessarily one way. For example, people with chronic conditions may have a reduced ability to earn income, family members may reduce or cease employment to provide care, while people or families whose income is reduced may move to disadvantaged areas to access low-cost housing.²

Self-assessed health

Self-assessed health is considered a good proxy indicator of the overall health of a population. Research has shown that self-assessed health is a strong predictor of mortality and morbidity and provides an insight into how people perceive their own health.³ For more information on self-assessed health see [Self-assessed health in Australia: A snapshot, 2004–05](#) (ABS cat. no. 4828.0.55.001).

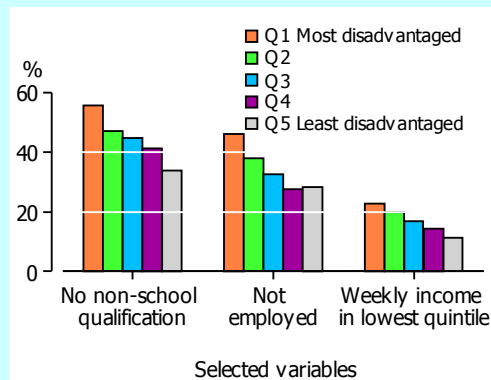
Data source and definitions

This article mainly uses data from the ABS 2007–08 National Health Survey. The analysis is restricted to all people aged 15 years and over unless otherwise stated.

The ABS has developed four indexes to rank the level of social and economic wellbeing of a region. The analysis in this article uses the *Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) of Disadvantage* based upon the 2006 Census of Population and Housing. The SEIFA index of relative disadvantage combines a number of variables (such as income, education and unemployment) of people, families and dwellings within an area, and ranks these areas on a scale of relative disadvantage. In this article the scale is divided into quintiles – with the first quintile representing the areas of greatest relative disadvantage and the fifth quintile representing the areas of least relative disadvantage.

This article primarily focuses on the health outcomes of people living in the most disadvantaged areas (Quintile 1). People living in these areas were more likely to have no non-school qualification (56%), be not working (46%) or have a weekly personal income in the lowest quintile (23%) than those living in the least disadvantaged areas (34%, 28% and 11% respectively). The distribution of age groups were relatively similar across the quintiles of disadvantage.

Proportion(a) with selected variables by relative disadvantage of area – 2007-08



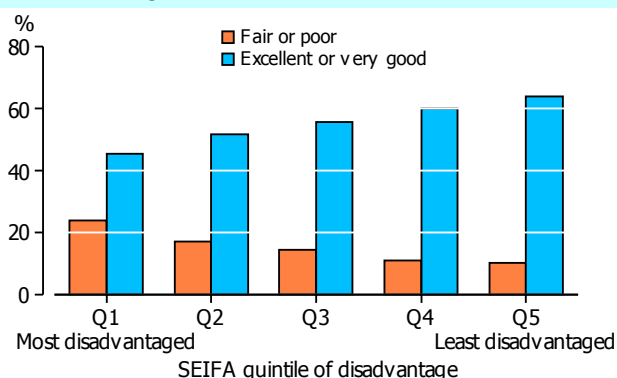
(a) Of total population, aged 15 years and over, living in each quintile.

Source: ABS 2007-08 National Health Survey

For more information on SEIFA see [Information Paper: An Introduction to Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas \(SEIFA\), 2006](#), (ABS cat. no. 2039.0).

In the past three ABS National Health Surveys (2001, 2004–05 and 2007–08) the majority of Australians (around 84%) rated their health as excellent, very good or good. However, there was a clear relationship between poorer self-assessed health and the relative disadvantage of the area in which people lived.

Proportion(a) who assessed their health as fair or poor, or, excellent or very good, by relative disadvantage of area – 2007-08



(a) Of total population, aged 15 years and over, living in each quintile.

Source: ABS 2007-08 National Health Survey

In 2007–08, almost a quarter (24%) of people living in the most disadvantaged areas rated their health as fair or poor compared with one-tenth of those living in the least disadvantaged areas. On the other end of the scale people living in the most disadvantaged areas were less likely to rate their health as excellent or very good (45%) compared with those living in the least disadvantaged areas (64%).

Selected long-term conditions

While the ABS 2007–08 NHS collected information on most long-term conditions, it had a particular focus on chronic diseases such as arthritis, cancer, diabetes, heart and circulatory conditions, and mental health.⁴ In 2007–08, there were clear gradients for most of these chronic diseases across the quintiles of disadvantage.

In 2007–08, people living in the most disadvantaged areas were more likely to have arthritis (23%) than those living in the least disadvantaged areas (15%). The proportion of people with arthritis levelled at around one-fifth in quintiles two and three and fell to around 15% in quintiles four and five.

The prevalence of other chronic diseases, such as ischaemic heart disease and diabetes, displayed a similar pattern across the levels of disadvantage. In 2007–08, people living in the most disadvantaged areas were around two and a half times as likely as those living in the least disadvantaged areas to have ischaemic heart disease (5.9% compared with 2.3%). The proportion of people with ischaemic heart disease tended to decline as the level of disadvantage also decreased. In 2007–08, this pattern was also reflected in the proportion of people who reported having diabetes.

The risk of cancer can be influenced by an individual's lifestyle and the conditions in

Indigenous Australians and self-assessed health

In 2004–05 Indigenous Australians, aged 15 years and over, made up 1.5% of the Australian population and over three-fifths (62%) lived in areas in the bottom two quintiles of socioeconomic disadvantage.

In the 2004–05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey, Indigenous Australians living in the most disadvantaged areas were 1.4 times more likely to report their health as fair or poor compared with non-Indigenous Australians living in the most disadvantaged areas. Alternatively, of those living in the most disadvantaged areas Indigenous Australians were around half (0.6) as likely to assess their health as excellent compared with non-Indigenous Australians.

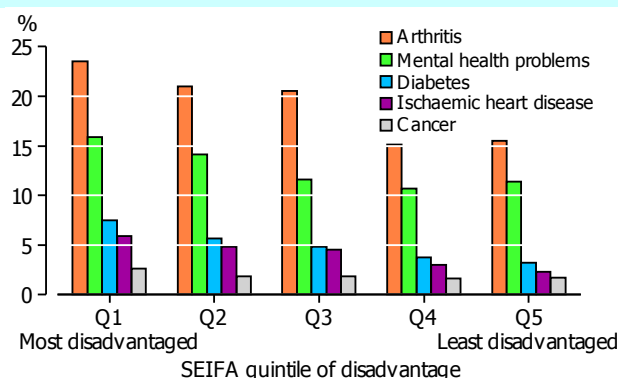
For more information on Indigenous Australians and their health see [The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 2008](#) (ABS cat. no. 4704.0).

which they live. For example, people in the most disadvantaged areas were more likely to be current smokers than those in the least disadvantaged areas (see the section below on 'Health risk factors'). Furthermore, people who live in areas of greater disadvantage may be less likely to be reached by preventative and promotion measures relating to cancer.⁵ In 2007–08, there was a greater proportion of people who had cancer in the most disadvantaged areas (2.6%) compared with the least disadvantaged areas (1.7%).⁶

...mental health

The direction of causality between mental health and socioeconomic disadvantage is unclear, but mental and behavioural problems can impair an individual's wellbeing. For example, poor mental health may affect an individual's ability to perform everyday activities such as working or maintaining a

Proportion(a) who had a selected long-term condition by relative disadvantage of area – 2007-08



(a) Of total population, aged 15 years and over, living in each quintile.

Source: ABS 2007-08 National Health Survey

social network. The NHS identified conditions such as emotional disorders, dependence on drugs or alcohol, feeling anxious or nervous and depression as examples of long-term mental and behavioural problems.

As with other selected long-term conditions, the proportion of people who reported having mental problems increased as levels of socioeconomic disadvantage increased. In 2007–08, 16% of people living in the most disadvantaged areas had a mental or behavioural problem compared with 11% of people living in the least disadvantaged areas. Proportions of people who reported having a mental or behavioural problem levelled at around one in ten across quintiles three, four and five.

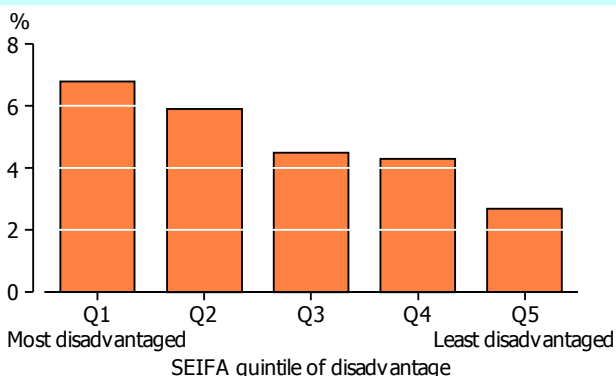
Disability

In 2007–08, there were higher proportions of people living with a disability in the most disadvantaged areas compared with people living in the least disadvantaged areas.⁷ As with other long-term conditions the direction of causality of this relationship is not straightforward.

The proportion of people with a profound or severe disability decreased with declining levels of disadvantage. More than twice the proportion of people living in the most disadvantaged areas (6.8%) had a profound or severe disability compared with those living in the least disadvantaged areas (2.7%).

A similar pattern was also reflected in the proportion of people who had an employment restriction due to a disability living in the most disadvantaged areas (18%) compared with those living in the least disadvantaged areas (7.7%), and in the proportion of people who had an education restriction due to a disability (4.2% compared with 2.1%).

Proportion(a) with a profound or severe disability by relative disadvantage of area – 2007-08



(a) Of total population, aged 15 years and over, living in each quintile.

Source: ABS 2007-08 National Health Survey

Health risk definitions

Current smokers are those who reported at the time of interview that they smoked cigarettes, cigars or pipes.

Obesity is defined according to Body Mass Index (BMI), using the formula weight in kilograms divided by height in metres squared. Adults are classed as obese if their BMI score is 30 or greater.

Risky or high risk drinking refers to relative risk levels as defined by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) in 2001. The main guideline to minimise risk in the long-term limits consumption to no more than an average of four standard drinks a day for a man and two standard drinks a day for a woman. In this article, **risky or high risk drinking** refers to drinking above these guidelines based on a seven-day average. Although these guidelines were revised in mid-2009, the analysis in this article is based on the 2001 guidelines as it is not possible to create meaningful measures relating to the 2009 guidelines from the 2007–08 NHS.

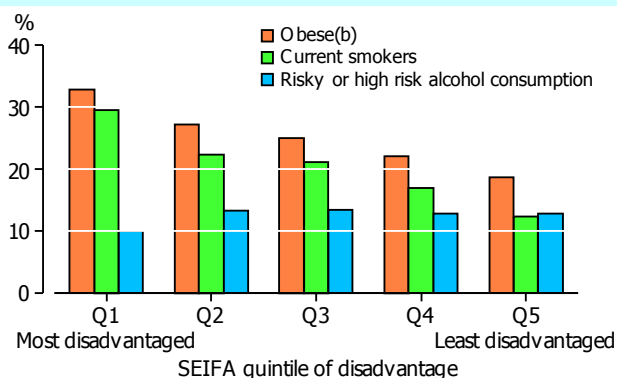
Health risk factors

Health risk factors can influence the health status of an individual and can signify an increased risk of developing a particular disease or condition. Lifestyle behaviours such as tobacco smoking, risky alcohol consumption and obesity are three of the more prominent health risks in Australian society. Smoking has been associated with cancers and lung disease; obesity has been associated with mature onset diabetes and heart disease; and risky drinking has been linked to liver disease and acute short term effects, for example, dangerous driving and violence. In 2007–08, the prevalence of these health risk factors varied according to the socioeconomic disadvantage of an area.

In 2007–08, people aged 15 years and over, and living in the most disadvantaged areas, were more likely to be current smokers (30%) compared with those living in the least disadvantaged areas (12%). This difference partly reflects the number of people who had never smoked; under half (45%) of those living in the most disadvantaged areas had never smoked compared with almost three-fifths (58%) of people living in the least disadvantaged areas. The proportion of people who were ex-smokers was relatively stable (at around 30%) across the five levels of disadvantage.

Being obese poses major health risks by increasing the risk of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers.⁸ In 2007–08, one-third of people living in the most disadvantaged areas (aged 18 years and over and who had their BMI score measured) were categorised as obese compared with under one-fifth (19%) who lived in the least disadvantaged areas. There was a clear gradient in the proportion of people who were classed as obese as the levels of disadvantage increased.

Proportion(a) with health risk factors by relative disadvantage of area – 2007-08



(a) Of total population, aged 15 years and over, living in each quintile.
 (b) Proportion of people who are obese of total population who had their BMI score measured, aged 18 years and over, living in each quintile.

Source: ABS 2007-08 National Health Survey

In contrast, the trend was reversed for the proportion of people who consumed alcohol at a level considered risky to their health – being slightly less common in the most disadvantaged areas (10%) compared with the least disadvantaged areas (13%).

Distribution of health services

People living in areas of greatest socioeconomic disadvantage may have difficulty accessing health services due to economic restraints and reduced mobility. However, there is also evidence to suggest that there is an uneven distribution of health services between areas of greatest and lowest relative disadvantage. The per capita rate of medical practitioners, specialists and dental practitioners all increased with declining levels of relative disadvantage.⁹

In 2006, around one in ten (11%) generalist medical practitioners worked in the most disadvantaged areas compared with almost one in four (24%) working in the least disadvantaged areas. There were less than half the rate of specialists working in the most disadvantaged areas (less than 30 per 100,000 people) compared with the least disadvantaged areas (over 60 per 100,000 people). A similar pattern was evident for the number of dental practitioners per 100,000 people, with almost half as many working in the most disadvantaged areas compared with the least disadvantaged areas.

Primary health care

In 2007-08, people living in the most disadvantaged areas were more likely than others to frequently consult their general practitioner (GP). Of those living in the most disadvantaged areas 15% consulted their GP at least once a month compared with 6.6% of those living in the least disadvantaged areas.

This is consistent with the evidence that people from more disadvantaged areas experience poorer health than others.

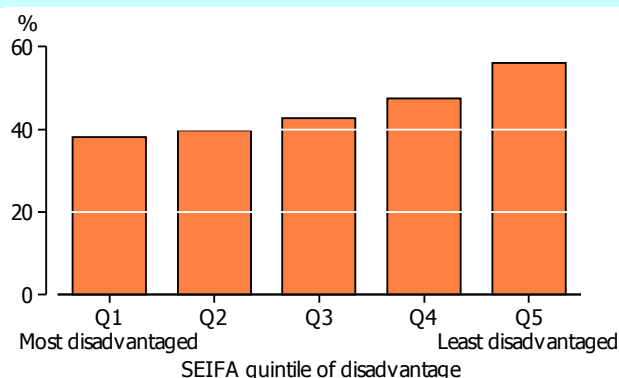
In contrast, in 2004-05 (the most recent NHS in which information on dental consultations was collected), people living in the most disadvantaged areas were less likely to have consulted a dentist in the 12 months prior to interview than those living in the least disadvantaged areas (38% compared with 56%). The proportion of people who had consulted a dentist tended to increase as the level of disadvantage decreased. This pattern was similar for visiting a dentist in the periods: three months, three to six months and six to 12 months, prior to interview. Dental visiting behaviour is closely associated with oral health; people who visit a dentist regularly have less invasive treatments than people who have a problem-orientated pattern of attendance.¹⁰ As dental services are not covered by public health arrangements, less frequent dentist visits are consistent with those living in the most disadvantaged areas being less likely to have the economic resources needed for dentist visits.

In 2007-08, this pattern was also reflected in the proportions of people who consulted other health professionals not covered under Medicare. In the 12 months prior to interview, 13% of people living in the most disadvantaged areas had consulted an acupuncturist, chiropractor, nutritionist or naturopath compared with 19% of those living in the least disadvantaged areas.

Health insurance

Private health insurance is one way of planning for health expenses. Private health insurance supplements the Medicare system and depending on the type of insurance purchased, provides cover against all or part of hospital theatre, accommodation costs in hospitals and costs associated with a range of services not

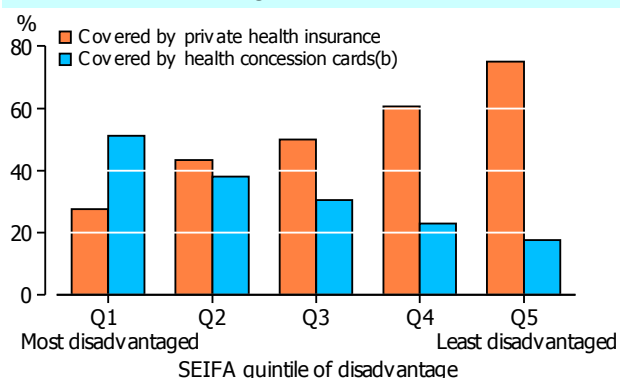
Proportion(a) who visited a dentist in the 12 months prior to interview – 2004-05



(a) Of total population, aged 15 years and over, living in each quintile.

Source: ABS 2004-05 National Health Survey

Proportion(a) covered with private health insurance and health concession cards(b) by relative disadvantage of area – 2007-08



(a) Of total population, aged 15 years and over, living in each quintile.

(b) Includes government health concession cards and veteran concession cards.

Source: ABS 2007-08 National Health Survey

covered under Medicare (including private dental services, optical, home nursing and ambulance). For more information see [Private Health Insurance: A snapshot, 2004-05](#) (ABS cat. no. 4815.0.55.001).

People living in the most disadvantaged areas reported much lower rates of private health insurance than those living in the least disadvantaged areas (28% compared with 75%). As the relative disadvantage of areas decreased there was a clear increase in the proportion of people who had private health insurance, rising from 43% to 50% to 61% across the three middle quintiles. This pattern is not surprising given the government policy to encourage people who can afford private health insurance to take it out. For example, the Medicare levy surcharge is applied to people who do not have private hospital cover and earn above a specified income (\$73,000 for individuals and \$146,00 for families), encouraging those with a higher income to take out private hospital cover.

While people living in areas of greater disadvantage were less likely to purchase private health insurance, they were more likely to be covered by other schemes such as government health concession cards or veteran concession cards, reflecting the greater proportion of people receiving pensions and other income support in more disadvantaged areas. Around half (51%) of people living in the most disadvantaged areas were covered by one of these cards compared with under one-fifth (18%) of people living in the least disadvantaged areas.

Looking ahead

The Council of Australian Governments' current *National Healthcare Agreement* (NHA) sets objectives to address the disparities in health outcomes of different populations, including between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The NHA stipulates that all governments agree that the healthcare system will strive to eliminate difference in the health outcomes of groups currently experiencing poorer health relative to the wider community. The NHA endeavours to improve health outcomes for all Australians and sustain a health system that promotes social inclusion and reduces disadvantage.¹¹

Endnotes

- 1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999, 'Health and socioeconomic disadvantage of area' in [Australian Social Trends 1999](#), cat. no. 4102.0, ABS, Canberra, <www.abs.gov.au>.
- 2 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, [Australia's Welfare 2009](#), cat. no. AUS 117, AIHW, Canberra, p. 153, <www.aihw.gov.au>.
- 3 Australian Bureau Statistics 2004-05, [Self-assessed health in Australia: A snapshot, 2004-05](#), cat. no. 4828.0.55.001, ABS, Canberra, <www.abs.gov.au>.
- 4 Long-term conditions are conditions that had lasted or are expected to last for six months or more.
- 5 World Health Organisation, 2002, [National Cancer Control Programmes: Policies and Managerial Guidelines](#), 2nd Edition, WHO, Geneva, part I, pp. 5-7, <www.who.int>.
- 6 The NHS excludes people in hospitals, nursing and convalescent homes and hospices; the exclusion of these groups is expected to have a greater effect on the data for cancer than for most other long-term conditions.
- 7 In this analysis a disability refers to a long-term condition that has or is expected to last six months or more and limits or restricts core activities.
- 8 World Health Organisation, 2006, [Obesity and Overweight](#), Fact sheet no. 311, WHO, <www.who.int>.
- 9 This excludes medical practitioners, dental practitioners and specialists working in hospitals; Information in the paragraph comes from: Australian Bureau Statistics, 2006, [Selected Health Occupations: Australia, 2006](#), cat. no. 4819.0, ABS, Canberra, <www.abs.gov.au>.
- 10 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2004-06, [Geographic variation in oral health and use of dental services in the Australian population 2004-06](#), research report no. 41, AIHW, Canberra, p. 2, <www.aihw.gov.au>.
- 11 Council of Australian Governments, 2007, [National Healthcare Agreement](#), COAG, Canberra, pp. 3-5, <www.coag.gov.au>.

Are young people learning or earning?

Levels of participation in education and the labour market are frequently cited indicators of the wellbeing of young people.¹ Research suggests that young people who are not fully engaged in education or work (or a combination of both) are at greater risk of unemployment, cycles of low pay and employment insecurity in the longer term.² Participation in education and training and engaging in work are also considered important aspects of developing individual capability and building a socially inclusive society.³

Increasing educational participation and improving transition to work outcomes for young Australians are the key objectives of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment.⁴ This agreement is aimed at providing measures to support engagement in education and training of young people aged 15–24 years.

Data source and definitions

Data in this article come from the ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work (SEW). It combines labour force concepts with education enrolment information to measure levels of engagement by young people aged 15–24 years.

Employed full-time: employed persons who usually worked 35 hours or more a week (in all jobs) and those who, although usually working less than 35 hours a week, worked 35 hours or more during the reference week.

Employed part-time: employed persons who usually worked less than 35 hours a week (in all jobs) and either did so during the reference week, or were not at work in the reference week.

Unemployed: persons who were not employed during the reference week, and had actively looked for (and were available to start) full-time or part-time work at any time in the four weeks up to the end of the reference week.

Not in the labour force: persons who were not in the categories 'employed' or 'unemployed'.

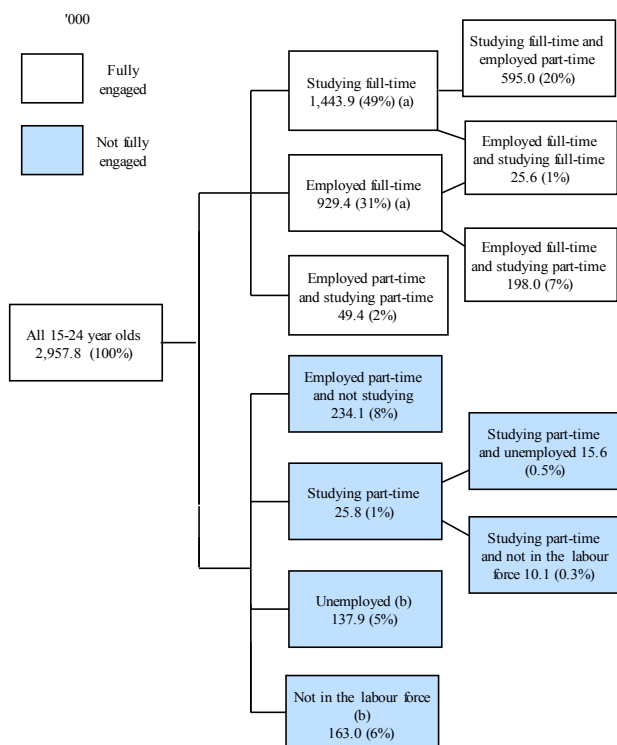
Enrolled: refers to persons registered for a course of study in the particular reference period at an educational institution. People enrolled at the time of the survey were asked whether they were studying their course full-time or part-time.

Fully engaged: people who, in the survey reference week, were in full-time work or in full-time education, or in part-time work combined with part-time education.

Not fully engaged: includes people who, in the survey reference week, were working part-time (but not studying), unemployed (regardless of whether studying part-time), studying part-time (and not working) and not in the labour force (except those who were full-time students).

School leavers: persons aged 15–19 years who attended school in 2008 but were not attending school prior to the survey date in May 2009.

Young people aged 15-24 years, engagement in education and the labour force – May 2009



(a) Includes 26,000 people (1%) who were in both full-time employment and full-time education, therefore components add to more than total.

(b) Excluding those who were studying.

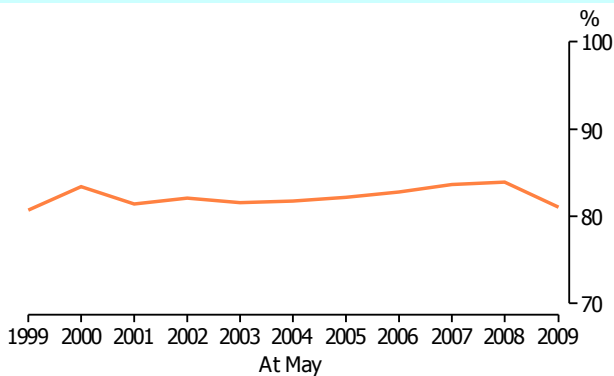
Source: ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work

Participation in education and work

In 2009, the majority (81%) of young people aged 15–24 years (from a total of around three million) were fully engaged in either education or work. Almost a half (49%) were studying full-time for a qualification, while almost a third (31%) were in full-time employment. A small proportion (around 2%) were engaged in both study and work on a part-time basis.

While most young people aged 15–24 years were fully engaged, some 561,000 (19%) were not. These were made up of 8% of young people who worked part-time (without being

Fully engaged in education or work, 15-24 year olds – 1999-2009



Source: ABS 1999, 2000 Transition from Education to Work; ABS 2002-2009 Surveys of Education and Work

enrolled in study), 5% who were unemployed, and another 6% who were not in the labour force. A very small proportion of young people (25,700 or around 1%) were enrolled in part-time study only.

...over the decade

Over the last decade, the proportion of young people who were fully engaged in education or work at the time of the May survey has been relatively steady, ranging from 81% in 1999 to a peak of 84% in 2008, then falling back to 81% in 2009. While the proportion of young people who were fully engaged was the same in both 1999 and 2009, the share of those who were in full-time education has increased from 45% to 48% between these time points, reflecting increases in both the completion of secondary school and the undertaking of further post-school education.

The recent economic downturn is the likely cause of the three percentage point decline in the proportion of fully engaged young people between 2008 and 2009. The most marked

change between these two years was the decline in the proportion in full-time work (from 35% to 31%). This was accompanied by increases in the proportions of:

- unemployed young men and women, most particularly among those aged 17-19 years;
- men aged 20-24 years doing part-time work; and
- women aged 20-24 years undertaking full-time study.

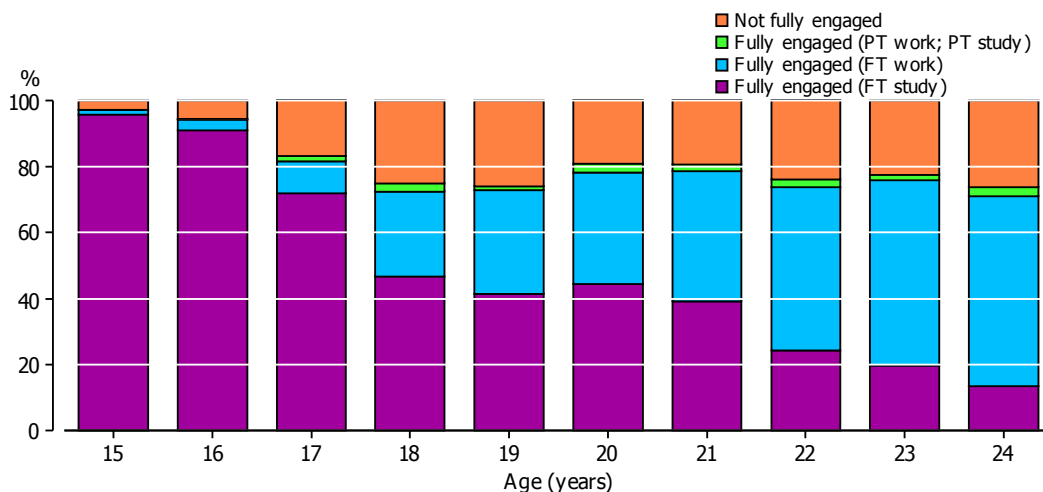
For a broader analysis of the labour-market impacts of the economic downturn, see Australian Social Trends March 2010, '[The labour market during recent economic downturns](#)' (ABS cat. no. 4102.0).

By age

Full engagement in either work or study was highest in the younger ages, where, not surprisingly the majority were still attending school. In 2009, all but 3% of 15 year olds and 6% of 16 year olds were fully engaged. From ages 17 to 19 years, where young people are increasingly likely to have recently left school, the proportion who were fully engaged dropped steeply: to 83% among 17 year olds and to 75% and 74% among 18 and 19 year olds respectively. By 20-21 years of age, the level of engagement picked up slightly (to 81%), but fell away again in the older ages, with the lowest level being 74% at 24 years.

The pattern of full engagement shows the gradual shift from the predominance of full-time education in younger ages to predominantly full-time work in older ages. In 2009, each age between 15 and 20 had higher proportions in full-time education than in full-time work. At 21 years, the proportions in full-time work and full-time education were

Engagement rates, 15-24 years – May 2009



Source: ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work

equal (39%), and by age 24, 58% of people were in full-time work and just 14% were in full-time education.

Young people not fully engaged

Reasons why young people may not be fully engaged in education or work may include the search for work following completion of studies, the decision to take time out for travel, to care for a child or relative, or because of personal illness or disability.²

Overall, 16% of 15–19 year olds (224,000 people) were not fully engaged in 2009. Just over half of them were not working or studying at all, being either unemployed or not in the labour force, while part-time workers made up most of the balance. Of the non-fully engaged people this age, males were more likely than females to be unemployed, while females were more likely to be not in the labour force than males.

Among 20–24 year olds, a greater proportion of women were not fully engaged than men (24% and 20% respectively) and as with the 15–19 year olds, women were more likely to be not in the labour force than men, and men were more likely to be unemployed. Differences in the type of non-full engagement between men and women at this age are in large part a reflection of women's greater likelihood of being a carer of young children. Mothers made up 39% of the not fully engaged women of this age. This contrasts with not fully engaged men this age, where fathers made up just 7%, and fully engaged women where only 4% had a child.

In addition to women caring for their children, there were some other groups of young people who had higher than average representation among the not fully engaged population. For example, Indigenous people were more than twice as likely as other young people to not be fully engaged. Similarly, young people living

Study and work overload

While working part-time jobs is desirable and necessary for many students, there are concerns that excessive working hours combined with the study workload may be detrimental to performance and wellbeing.

In October 2009, a parliamentary committee report, '*Adolescent Overload? Report of the inquiry into combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions*' was released which examined the growing number of students who were combining schooling with part-time work. The committee recommended a number of proposals, including: ensuring that further research is undertaken to gain a better understanding of the impact that part-time work has on the education attainment of young people and knowing what support may be required to assist young people who combine study and work.⁵

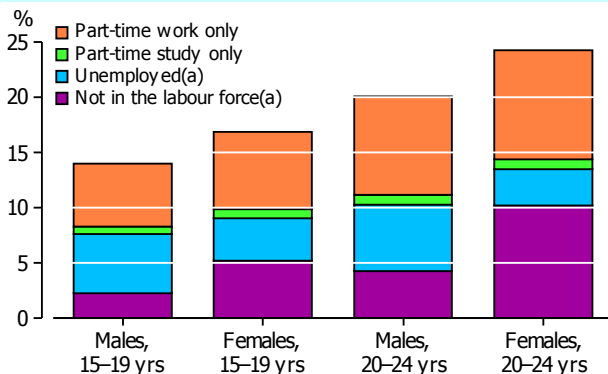
According to the ABS Survey of Education and Work, in May 2009, 41% (or 595,000) of Australia's 1.4 million full-time students aged 15–24 years worked a part-time job most weeks, and 2% (26,000 full-time students) worked a full-time job. A third of full-time secondary school students worked a part-time job, and 53% of full-time students doing higher education or TAFE worked, including 3% who worked full-time.

In November 2008, the median number of hours worked by full-time students each week was 16, and one in five usually worked 25 hours or more per week.

Source: ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work; ABS 2008 Forms of Employment Survey.

in areas belonging to the lowest quintile of relative socioeconomic disadvantage were around 50% more likely to be not fully engaged. Young people who left school without completing year 12 and who had not done any further study (or weren't currently doing so in May 2009) had a non-fully engaged rate around three times higher than that of young people overall and made up just under half (47%) of the non-fully engaged population.

Non-fully engaged people, category of engagement – May 2009



(a) Excludes people who were studying part-time.

Source: ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work

Non-full engaged rates by selected characteristics, 15-24 years – May 2009

	Non-full engaged rate	Proportion of non-engaged population
	%	%
Mothers	74.5	15.3
Live in areas comprising the lowest quintile of disadvantage	29.2	28.7
Did not complete yr 12(a)	55.0	47.1
Total 15-24 year olds	19.0	100.0

(a) And hasn't done/is not doing any non-school qualification.

Source: ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work

May 2009 outcomes of 2008 school leavers, by highest year completed

	Year 11 or below	Year 12	Total
	%	%	%
Fully engaged	47.4	73.2	65.9
Full-time work	28.2	17.2	20.3
Full-time study	16.8	53.8	43.4
Not fully engaged	52.6	26.8	34.1
Part-time work	15.1	15.4	15.3
Unemployed	18.5	8.4	11.3
NILF	18.1	2.3	6.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
	'000	'000	'000
Total	84.4	213.5	297.9

Source: ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work

Recent school leavers

In 2008, almost 300,000 young people finished school (72% of them completing year 12). Of these school leavers, 66% (196,000) were fully engaged in May 2009 (43% in full-time study and 20% in full-time work, with 2% working and studying part-time). School leavers who did not complete year 12 were over twice as likely to be unemployed as those who completed year 12 (19% and 8% respectively), and nearly nine times more likely to not be in the labour force (18% and 2% respectively).

...full-time students

Of the 130,000 school leavers who were enrolled in full-time study, almost two-thirds were studying for a bachelor degree, while the remaining third were studying for a certificate or diploma level qualification. The most popular fields of study for full-time students were management and commerce (19%), followed by society and culture (16%), creative arts (13%), engineering (11%) and health (10%).

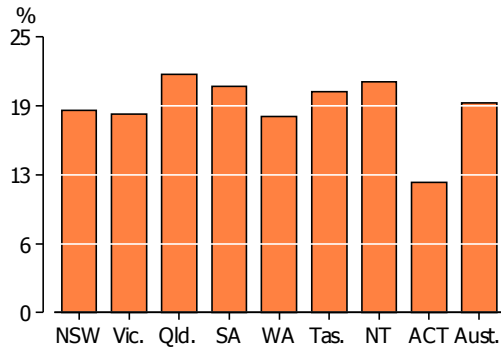
A relatively small number (23,000) of school leavers who reported gaining a place in an educational institution in 2009, had declined or deferred the opportunity. Seven out of ten of them were employed, although more often in part-time than full-time work.

...full-time workers

Of the 61,000 school leavers who were working full-time, more than a third (35%) were working as technicians and trade workers. The next most common occupational group was labourers (23%), followed by sales workers (18%) and clerical and administrative workers (12%).

Just over one-third of school-leavers (35%) who had full-time employment were doing apprenticeships or traineeships, the majority (73%) in technical and trade occupations. The

Not fully engaged, states and territories, 15-24 years – May 2009



Source: ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work

most popular field for apprentices was construction trade workers (29%), followed by automotive and engineering trades (20%) and electrotechnology and telecommunications (18%), with 5% doing hairdressing apprenticeships.

...non-fully engaged school leavers

Of the 34% of 2008 school leavers who weren't fully engaged, just under half were working part-time. Sales work and labouring were the most common kinds of work occupying 37% and 35% respectively of those with a part-time job.

One in three of the non-fully engaged school leavers were unemployed and one in five were not in the labour force. The 2008 school leavers who did not complete year 12 were twice as likely to be not fully engaged in May 2009 as those who did finish year 12.

State and territory snapshot

The proportion of young people who were not fully engaged varied across the country, but most notably was the relatively low level in the Australian Capital Territory with a non-fully engaged rate of 12% in 2009, compared with 19% nationally. Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales were just below the national level, each with 18%. Queensland had the highest rate of non-fully engaged young people in 2009 with just under 22%. However, over the previous five years, the highest non-full engagement rates were experienced in Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

Looking ahead

In April 2009, COAG agreed to a Compact with Young Australians to increase engagement in education and training. The Compact (which forms the foundation of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment), comprises a National Youth Participation Requirement, an entitlement to government subsidised education or training places for 15–24 year olds, and changes to Youth Allowance and Family Tax Benefit making

education and training preconditions for these payments. In order to qualify for Youth Allowance (other), people under the age of 25, without a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, must be in education or training.⁶

Endnotes

- 1 Foundation for Young Australians, 2009, [How Young People are Faring 2009](#), Foundation of Young Australians, Melbourne, p. 48, <www.fya.org.au>.
- 2 Pech, J., McNevin, A. and Nelms, L., 2009, [Young People with Poor Labour Force Attachment: A survey of concepts, data and previous research](#), Australian Fair Pay Commission, Canberra p. 7 <www.fwa.gov.au>.
- 3 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, [Overview of the Social Inclusion Agenda](#), DEEWR, Canberra, <www.socialinclusion.gov.au>.
- 4 Council of Australian Governments, 2009, [National Partnership Agreement On Youth Attainment and Transitions](#), COAG, Canberra, <www.coag.gov.au>.
- 5 Commonwealth of Australia, October 2009, [Adolescent Overload? Report of the inquiry into combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions](#), the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Education and Training, Canberra, p. 2, <www.aph.gov.au>.
- 6 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, [Compact with Young Australians, Learning or earning: New education and training requirement for 15-24 year olds](#), DEEWR, Canberra, <www.deewr.gov.au>.

The labour market during recent economic downturns

The recent economic downturn in Australia, triggered by the global financial crisis, is the fourth period of slowing or declining economic growth in the past 30 years. The first two, during the early part of the 1980s and the 1990s, respectively, were severe and protracted recessions, characterised by a marked decline in economic activity and rising unemployment. The most recent two, at the beginning and end of the decade just finished, were milder both in length and severity.

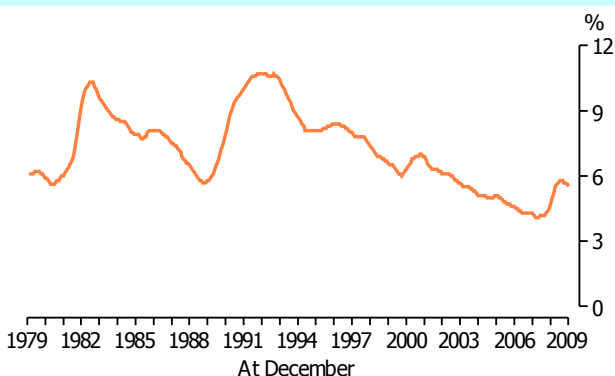
For many people, the most direct impact of an economic downturn is the effect it has on their opportunities in the labour market. The impact of economic downturns on the Australian labour market depends to a large degree on the extent of the contraction in economic growth and economic conditions experienced by our major trading partners. The effect of downturns has also changed in recent times due to shifts in the Australian labour market including, among other things, increased female labour force participation, and a marked increase in part-time employment.

The labour market 1980-2009

The impact of economic downturns on the labour market is usually measured by changes in the unemployment rate. During the recession of the early 1980s, the unemployment rate rose (from 5.6% to 10.3%) as the number of unemployed people rose by more than 300,000 to 724,000. It was a similar story in the early 1990s when the unemployment rate rose even higher (from 5.7% to 10.7%) with the number of unemployed people growing by 440,000 to more than 900,000.

The downturn of 2000–01 was comparatively mild, with unemployment rising just one

Unemployment rate(a) – 1980-2009



(a) Trend data.

Source: [Labour Force, Australia, Dec 2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 6202.0)

Data source and definitions

This article uses data from the [Labour Force, Australia, Dec 2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 6202.0).

Labour force status is a classification of the civilian population aged 15 years and over into full-time employed, part-time employed, unemployed or not in the labour force.

People **employed full time** are those who usually work 35 hours or more a week (in all jobs), and those who, although usually working less than 35 hours a week, worked 35 hours or more during the reference week.

People **employed part time** are those who usually work less than 35 hours a week (in all jobs), and either did so during the reference week, or were not at work during the reference week.

Unemployed refers to people who were not employed during the reference week and had actively looked for work in the four weeks leading up to the reference week and were available to start work during the reference week.

This article uses both the **unemployment rate** which is the number of unemployed people expressed as a proportion of the labour force (i.e. employed plus unemployed), and the **unemployment to population ratio** which is the number of unemployed people expressed as a proportion of the civilian population aged 15 years and over.

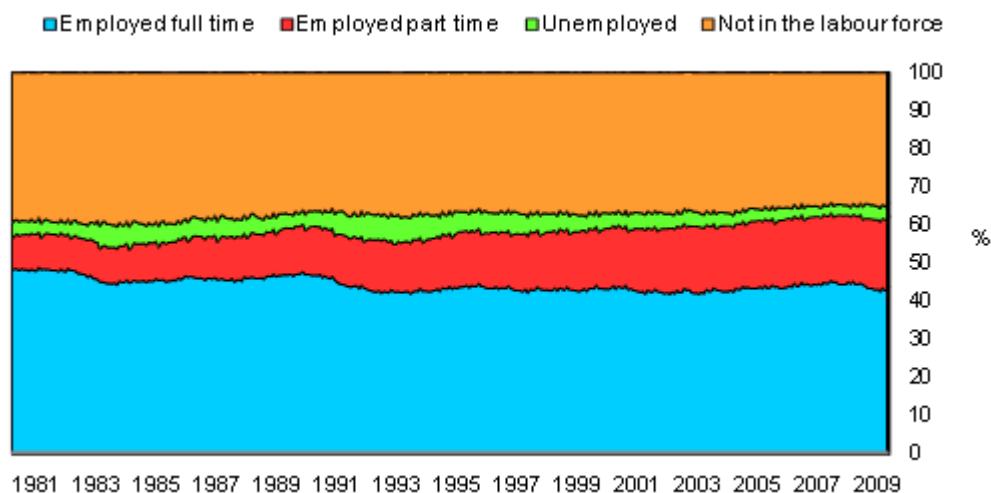
People **not in the labour force** are those who were classified as neither employed nor unemployed during the reference week.

Underemployed workers are employed people (who worked less than 35 hours in the reference week) who want and are available for more hours of work than they currently have. The **underemployment rate** is the number of underemployed workers expressed as a proportion of the labour force.

percentage point (to 7.0%). The impact of the most recent downturn was more pronounced with the unemployment rate rising from 4.1% to 5.8%, and the number of unemployed increasing by 200,000. There have been suggestions that unemployment could have risen more during the recent downturn but for employers' reluctance to put workers off due to the experience of labour shortages in recent years, and the prospect of future shortages as many baby-boomers reach retirement.¹

The emphasis on the unemployment rate is understandable given the profound economic and social costs associated with unemployment. However, the impact of economic downturns is not limited to rising unemployment. Labour force participation and the share of full-time and part-time work are also influenced by changes in economic conditions.

Changes in labour force status of people aged 15 years and over – 1980-2009



Source: [Labour Force, Australia Dec 2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 6202.0)

Changes in labour force status

Each of the economic downturns of the past three decades in Australia has been marked by a significant fall in the proportion of people aged 15 years and over in full-time employment and a corresponding rise in part-time employment, unemployment and people not in the labour force. In some cases, such as falls in the rate of male full-time employment, the changes represented permanent structural shifts in the labour market. Others were relatively fleeting, returning to more normal levels during periods of economic growth. The changes outlined in the following sections do not necessarily imply direct movement of people from full-time employment to other categories. They describe aggregate-level changes that incorporate movements between each of the categories, as well as changes in the cohort of people aged 15 years and over in the population.

Between June 1981 and June 1983, the proportion of people aged 15 years and over who were employed full time fell by around four percentage points (from 48.2% to 44.7%). Around four-fifths of the decline was accounted for by an increase in the proportion of people who were unemployed (up from 3.2% to 6.0%). There was also a rise in the proportion of people not in the labour force (by 0.7 percentage points to 39.9%), while the proportion of people employed part time remained steady (at 9.4%).

The downturn of the early 1990s was even more severe, with the proportion employed full time falling more than four percentage points to 43% in the two years to June 1992. As with the previous downturn, this period saw a significant rise in the proportion of people unemployed (from 4.1% to 6.7%), accounting for around two-thirds of the decline in full-time

employment. There was also an increase in the proportion of people not in the labour force (up 0.9 percentage points to 37.2%). Unlike the previous downturn, the early 1990s also saw an increase in the proportion of people employed part-time (up 0.8 percentage points to 13.6%).

While the rate of part-time employment has grown steadily throughout the past three decades, a shift to part-time employment was a defining feature of the downturn between July 2000 and July 2001 when around half of the decline in full-time employment (from 44.3% to 42.7%) was offset by an increase in the proportion of people employed part time (up 0.7 percentage points to 16.5%). Less than one-third of the fall in full-time employment was accounted for by increased unemployment. The downturn between July 2008 and July 2009 was similar in magnitude to that of 2000–01, with the proportion of people employed full time falling from 45% to 43%. However, unlike the previous downturn, it was increasing unemployment, as well as growing part-time employment, that accounted for the bulk of the decline.

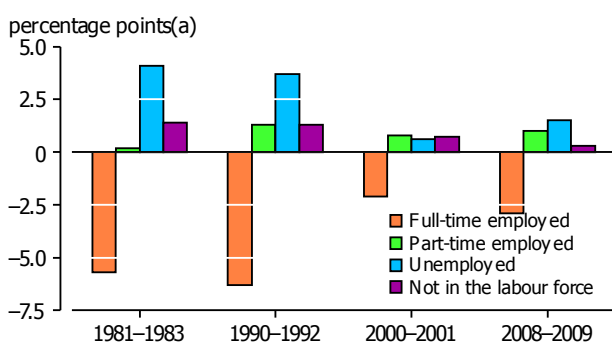
...by sex

As men have traditionally had higher rates of labour force participation than women, particularly in full-time work, the effect of economic downturns has been more pronounced for men. In the early 1980s, the proportion of men employed full time fell by six percentage points (from 70.3% to 64.7%), with almost all of this offset by an increase in unemployment (up 4.1 percentage points to 7.5%), and men not in the labour force (up 1.4 percentage points to 23.6%).

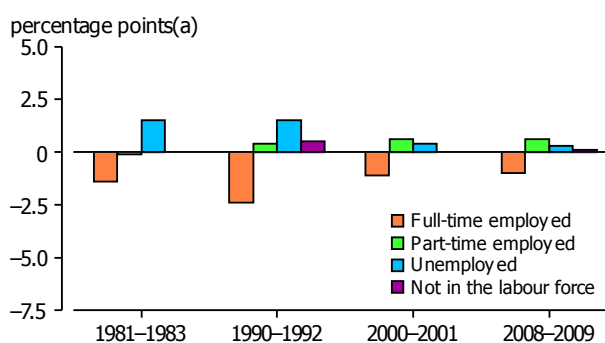
By contrast, the proportion of women working full time fell by 1.4 percentage points (albeit from a much lower base of 26.8%). All of this

Changes in labour force status during economic downturns by sex

MEN



WOMEN



(a) Percentage point change in the proportion.

Source: [Labour Force, Australia, Dec 2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 6202.0)

decline was offset by unemployment which increased over the period by 1.5 percentage points (to 4.6%).

By the start of the 1990s, the labour force participation rate among women had risen to around 52%, with much of this increase coming from part-time employment. Despite this shift, men still bore much of the impact of the early 1990s recession in terms of its effect on the labour market. The proportion of men employed full time fell around six percentage points (to 58.8%), compared with a fall of around two percentage points (to 26.7%) for women.² Around a fifth of the decline for men and a sixth for women was accounted for by an increase in part-time employment, reflecting the growing role of part-time work in the Australian economy.

The rise in part-time employment rather than unemployment was even more pronounced during the slowdown of 2000-01, for both men and women. This was also the case for women during the most recent downturn where more than half of the fall in full-time employment was offset by a rise in part-time employment, and unemployment accounted for just under a third of the fall in full-time employment.

For men, the most recent downturn was very different. More than half of the decline in male full-time employment was accounted for by a rise in unemployment, and only around one-third by an increase in part-time employment.

...by age

The impact that economic downturns have on people's labour market opportunities also tends to vary with age, affecting younger people in particular. However, this has been in the context of a general decline in full-time employment by young people associated with increased participation in education. During the recession of the early 1980s, the proportion of people aged 15-24 years employed full time fell by around seven percentage points. This compares with

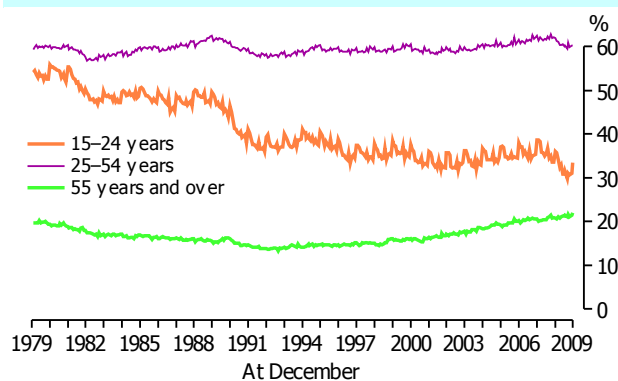
falls of around three percentage points for people aged 25-54 years and around two percentage points for those aged 55 years and over. A similar pattern was also evident during the recession of the early 1990s. In both cases, increasing unemployment accounted for the majority of the fall in full-time employment for those aged 15-54 years, while an increase in those not in the labour force offset the fall among those aged 55 years and over.

While the impact of the downturn of 2000-01 was also felt disproportionately by young people, the nature of this impact differed between young people and their older counterparts. An increase in the proportion of people unemployed explained most of the fall in full-time employment among those aged 15-24 years, while increasing part-time employment explained most of the fall for those aged 25 years and over.

Interestingly, while the proportion of people aged 15-24 years employed full time has fallen markedly during downturns, it has not tended to pick up again once growth returns, as it has for older age groups.

The effect of the most recent downturn has been quite different across the age groups. Despite the slowdown in 2008-09, the

Proportion of people employed full-time by age group — 1980-2009



Source: [Labour Force, Australia, Dec 2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 6202.0)

proportion of men and women aged 55 years and over employed in both full-time and part-time work increased, continuing a long-term trend. In contrast, the proportion of people aged 15–24 years who worked full time fell by five percentage points during the latest downturn. Around a third of this was offset by a rise in unemployment (driven by an increase among males), while more than half was accounted for by an increase in the proportion of people not in the labour force (this was particularly the case for women, with a rise in the proportion of young women in full-time study – see *Australian Social Trends March 2010*, 'Are young people learning or earning?').

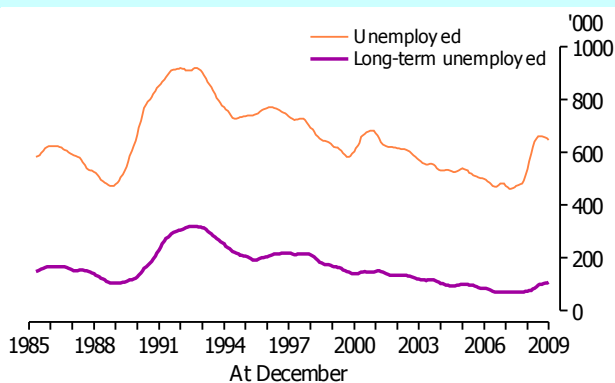
For those aged 25–54 years, there was a decline in the proportion of people employed full time, largely among men. Around half of this was accounted for by a rise in unemployment. This is in contrast to the previous downturn in 2000–01, when most of the decline was accounted for by an increase in part-time employment.

Long-term unemployment

One of the most concerning aspects of downturns is often an increase in the number of long-term unemployed (i.e. people unemployed for a period of 12 months or more). Aside from the potential financial hardship, being unemployed for an extended period can lead to a loss of relevant skills, confidence and motivation, making it harder to find work even when labour market conditions improve. During the recession of the early 1990s, the number of people who were long-term unemployed almost trebled, peaking at around 320,000 in 1993. Over this period, the proportion of unemployed who had been out of work for at least 12 months rose from one in five to one in three.

The downturn of 2000–01 was much shorter and milder than that of the early 1990s and had minimal impact on long-term unemployment

Unemployment and long-term unemployment(a) – 1986-2009



(a) Trend data.

Source: [Labour Force, Australia, Dec 2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 6202.0)

International comparison

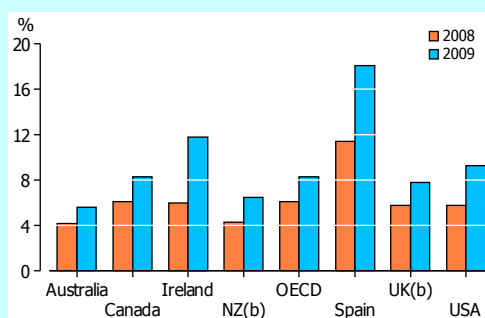


The impact of the global financial crisis of 2008–09 saw slowing economic growth and deteriorating labour market conditions in most countries around the world. Among the countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the average unemployment rate rose from 6.1% in 2008 to 8.3% in 2009.

Australia was one of the least affected countries in the OECD over this period, with the harmonised unemployment rate rising just 1.3 percentage points to 5.6%. This was less than the rises experienced in Canada (2.1), New Zealand (2.2), the United Kingdom (2.0) and the United States (3.5). The unemployment rate in Germany has been relatively unscathed by global conditions, rising just 0.2 percentage points, albeit from a high base (7.3%).

The impact of the crisis has been particularly severe in Ireland where the unemployment rate rose almost six percentage points to 11.8%, and Spain where the unemployment rate has risen almost seven percentage points to an average of 18.1% in 2009.

Unemployment rate(a), selected OECD countries



(a) Harmonised.

(b) Data are for third quarter rather than annual average.

Source: [OECD Harmonised Unemployment Rates](#)

other than to temporarily interrupt the downward trend. The most recent downturn has seen the number of long-term unemployed increase from 70,000 to around 100,000. It is too early to gauge the full impact of the downturn as movement in long-term unemployment tends to lag other changes in the labour market by many months. However, an increase in the average duration of unemployment (from 28 to 36 weeks over the year to December 2009) suggests that the unemployed are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain work.

Underemployment

Rising levels of part-time employment and increased flexibility in employment arrangements in recent times has seen a shift in the impact that downturns have on people's employment prospects. For many people, it is not so much that they cannot find any work during downturns, but that they cannot get enough work. Consequently, the unemployment

rate does not necessarily capture the full extent to which the labour supply is underutilised. This is reflected in growing interest in other measures of labour force underutilisation, such as the underemployment rate. This is a particularly important indicator for groups with a high prevalence of part-time employment, such as women and young people.

During the recession of the early 1980s, most of the increase in labour force underutilisation for both men and women came in the form of unemployment. There was little movement in the underemployment rate at this time (increases of less than two percentage points for both men and women), accounting for around a fifth of the overall increase in labour force underutilisation for men, and a third for women.

The recession of the early 1990s saw larger rises in the underemployment rate for both men and women. Among men, the underemployment rate rose by around three percentage points, compared with a rise in the unemployment rate of six percentage points. By the early 1990s, the underemployment rate among women was roughly on par with the unemployment rate (reflecting the high rate of part-time employment among women), and both rose by around three and a half percentage points during the recession.

The period of sustained economic growth following the recession of the early 1990s saw the unemployment rates for both men and women fall considerably. However, this was not matched by a fall in the respective underemployment rates which either rose or remained steady despite the strong growth in both economic output and employment. During the downturn of 2000–01, both underemployment and unemployment rates for men and women rose around one percentage point.

During the most recent downturn, underemployment and unemployment

contributed equally to the increase in the labour force underutilisation among men (both rising by around two percentage points). For women, however, underemployment accounted for roughly two-thirds of the overall increase in underutilisation.

Hours worked

Changes in demand for labour during economic downturns are also evident in measures of hours worked, particularly for men. During the year to June 1991, the aggregate hours worked in the Australian economy fell by around 4%. Aggregate hours worked by men fell by around 5%, while those worked by women fell by around 2%.

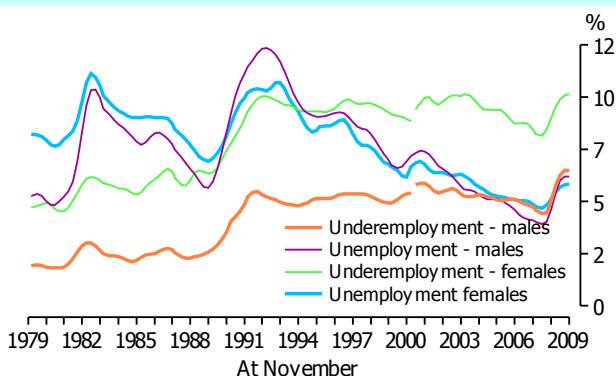
The two most recent downturns have been less severe, with aggregate hours worked by men falling by around 3% during both periods. By contrast, aggregate hours worked by women actually rose by around 1% during the downturn of 2000–01, and fell by just under 1% in the year to July 2009.

Anecdotal reports have suggested that many employers have responded to the most recent downturn by cutting employees' hours, rather than putting them off. This is partly reflected in an increase in the proportion of people employed part time. However, it is also evident in measures of the distribution of hours worked, with a decline in the number of men working long hours (e.g. more than 45 hours a week). This suggests that many have continued working full time, but work fewer hours than they did previously.

Industry

The economic downturns over recent decades have tended to affect the goods producing industries such as Manufacturing more so than the service industries, reflecting the structural adjustment in the Australian economy. During

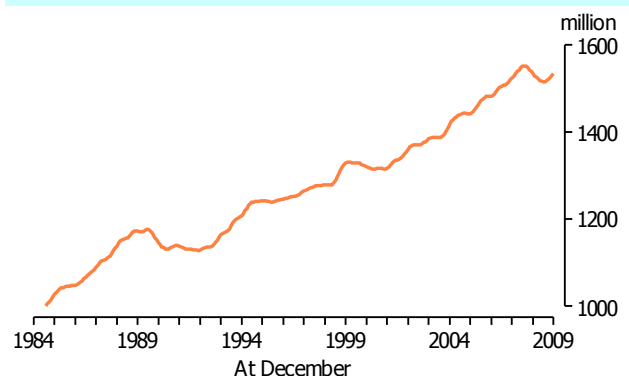
Underemployment(a) and unemployment rates(b) by sex – 1980-2009



(a) Break in male and female underemployment series at May 2001.
(b) Trend data.

Source: [Labour Force, Australia, Dec 2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 6202.0)

Aggregate hours worked(a), persons – 1985-2009



(a) Trend data.

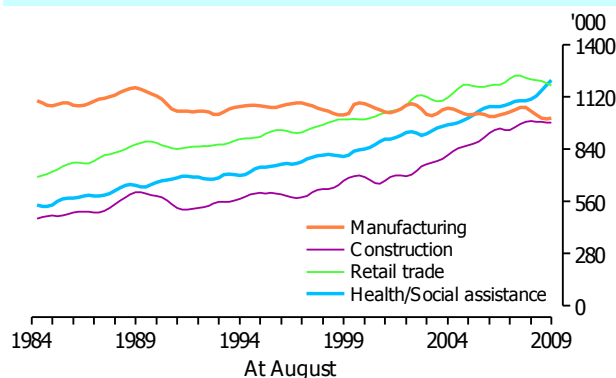
Source: [Labour Force, Australia, Dec 2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 6202.0)

the downturn of the early 1990s, the number of people employed in the Manufacturing industry fell by 93,900 (or around 8%), with almost all of this decline coming in full-time employment. While not as severe as that of the early 1990s, each of the two most recent downturns have also seen a decline in employment in Manufacturing. In the year to August 2001, employment in the Manufacturing industry fell by 51,500 (or around 5%), again with almost all coming from a fall in full-time employment. The most recent downturn also saw a fall in full-time employment in the Manufacturing industry (43,300), however, unlike in previous downturns, this was partially offset by a rise in part-time employment (14,200).

During the recession of the early 1990s, the number of people employed in the Construction industry fell by 61,500 (or around 11%), with a large fall in full-time employment partially offset by an increase in part-time employment. There was a similar pattern in 2000–01 when employment in the Construction industry fell by around 5%. The most recent downturn has also seen a marked fall in full-time employment in the Construction sector, although most of this has been offset by an increase in part-time employment. As a result, total employment in the industry has only fallen by around 2% overall. The relative strength of the Construction industry during the most recent downturn may reflect continued demand for new housing due to strong population growth, as well as the impact of government stimulus measures.

The different character of downturns in recent times is also evident in the impact they have had on employment in the Retail trade sector. The number of people employed in Retail trade fell by 29,500 (or around 3%) during the recession of the early 1990s. By contrast, the downturn of 2000–01 saw employment in the Retail trade industry increase by 33,600 (or around 3%), mainly in part-time employment. The most recent downturn has had an even

Total employment, selected industries – 1984-2009



Source: [Labour Force, Australia, Dec 2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 6202.0)

greater effect on the Retail trade sector than the recession of the early 1990s. In the year to August 2009, employment in the Retail trade sector fell by 51,700 (or around 4%), with more than two-thirds of this coming from a fall in full-time employment.

A number of industries, particularly in the services sector, have grown in spite of difficult economic conditions. For example, employment in the Health care and social assistance industry has increased during each of the three downturns since the early 1990s. During the most recent downturn, the number of people employed in this sector increased by 115,200 (or around 10%), perhaps reflecting increased demand for such services during downturns.

Endnotes

- 1 Thistleton, J., 2010 '[Skills crisis ACT 120,000 short](#)' in *The Canberra Times*, 25 January 2010. <www.canberratimes.com.au>.
- 2 While the percentage point decline in full-time employment was much larger for men than for women, the percentage decline in actual numbers was of a similar magnitude (7% for men and 6% for women).

Change in employment during economic downturns, selected industries

		<i>Manufacturing</i>	<i>Construction</i>	<i>Retail trade</i>	<i>Health care/ social assistance</i>
		'000	'000	'000	'000
May 1990 - May 1992	Full-time	-92.8	-72.0	-33.7	-5.6
	Part-time	-1.1	10.4	4.2	24.6
	Total	-93.9	-61.5	-29.5	19.0
Aug 2000 - Aug 2001	Full-time	-51.0	-45.1	6.4	8.5
	Part-time	-0.4	9.4	27.2	26.0
	Total	-51.4	-35.7	33.6	34.5
Aug 2008 - Aug 2009	Full-time	-43.3	-49.2	-36.5	37.3
	Part-time	14.2	34.2	-15.2	77.9
	Total	-29.1	-15.0	-51.7	115.2

Source: [Labour Force, Australia, Dec 2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 6202.0)

Income support among people of working age

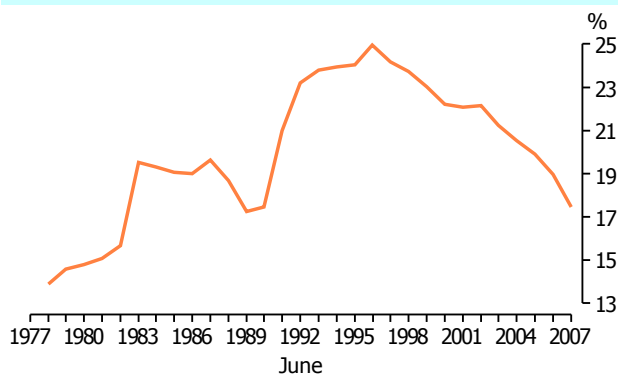
Over most of the 20th century an increasing proportion of the population received income support. In 1901, only 1% of Australians aged 15 years and over received an income support payment. By the early 1970s, 12% received income support and this increased rapidly during the 1970s to reach 23.5% in 1979. The proportion peaked in 1996 at 33% before declining to 27% in 2008.¹

Trends in rates of income support receipt among the working aged

One of the explanations for the long-term increase in the overall rate of income support receipt among people aged 15 years and over is that, because Australians are living longer, an increasing proportion of the population has become eligible to receive the Age Pension. Yet the proportion of working age people receiving income support also grew until the mid 1990s. The reasons for the increase in this proportion between June 1978 (about 14%) and June 1996 (around 25%)² include declines in full-time employment, an increase in the proportion of people without partners, and higher levels of education participation among young people (see *Australian Social Trends 2001*, [Income support among people of workforce-age](#)).

This article focuses on the subsequent decrease in the proportion of working age people receiving an income support payment between June 1996 (about 25%) and June 2007 (about 17%).² Factors contributing to this decrease include strong jobs growth, the closure or phasing out of some payments, and tightening of eligibility criteria to receive some other payments.

Proportion of working age people receiving income support(a) – 1978-2007



(a) Excluding DVA Income Support Supplement, Exceptional Circumstances Relief Payment, and Farm Family Restart.

Source: Parliament of Australia Parliamentary Library 2008, [Trends in the receipt of income support by workforce age people 1978 to 2007](#)

Data sources and definitions

Some of the data presented in this article have been sourced from publications and papers freely available on the websites of various Australian Government agencies. ABS Estimated Resident Population has been used to calculate rates of income support receipt. Other data are sourced from the ABS 2007–08 Survey of Income and Housing. Detailed information about this survey can be found in:

- [Household Income and Income Distribution, Australia, 2007–08](#) (ABS cat. no. 6523.0).
- [Information Paper: Survey of Income and Housing, User Guide, Australia, 2007–08](#) (ABS cat. no. 6553.0).

Income support from the Australian government is designed to provide a basic, acceptable standard of living for people unable to fully support themselves. The amount paid reflects prevailing community standards, and is largely determined by the application of income and asset thresholds and tapers (i.e. *means testing*). As a result of means testing, a claimant may receive a full-rate income support payment, a part-rate payment, or be assessed as ineligible to receive income support.

Not all payments from government are considered to be income support. Payments which are not means tested (e.g. economic stimulus payments, one off payments to seniors and carers), payments intended to help meet specific costs (e.g. Family Tax Benefit, Baby Bonus, Utilities Allowance), and payments which represent compensation for loss (e.g. DVA Disability Pension, War Widow(er)'s Pension and Orphan's Pension) are not regarded as income support.

In June 2007, *income support payments* comprised the following payments: Age Pension, Disability Support Pension, Newstart Allowance, Parenting Payment (Single), Youth Allowance (Full-time study), Service Pension, Parenting Payment (Partnered), Carer Payment, DVA Income Support Supplement, Youth Allowance (Other), Partner Allowance, Widow Allowance, Wife Pension, Abstudy, Exceptional Circumstances Relief Payment, Austudy, Sickness Allowance, Special Benefit, Mature Age Allowance, Widow B Pension, Bereavement Allowance, and Farm Family Restart.¹

In this article, people of *working age* are people aged 16–64 years. Children aged 15 years are often excluded from the working age range when calculating rates of income support receipt as very few 15 year olds are eligible to receive an income support payment. This article excludes 15 year olds from the working age population to maximise comparability between different data sources.

...strong jobs growth

A sustained increase in employment opportunities saw the proportion of working age people receiving an unemployment payment fall from

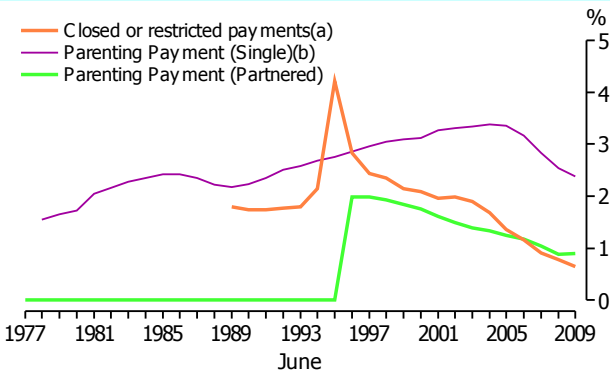
6.9% in June 1996 to 3.3% in June 2008 before rising to 4.2% in June 2009. These movements closely mirror changes in the unemployment rate (see *Australian Social Trends March 2010*, ["The labour market during recent economic downturns"](#)).

While it is a major contributor, the lower rate of receipt of an unemployment payment accounts for less than half of the 7.5 percentage point fall in the proportion of working age people receiving income support between June 1996 and June 2007. Given that the proportions of working age people receiving Disability Support Pension and Carer Payment actually increased over the same period, factors other than lower unemployment clearly also contribute to the fall in income support receipt among people of working age.

...several payments closed or being phased out

One of the other reasons for the decrease in the rate of income support receipt among working age people between June 1996 and June 2007 has been the closure and/or phasing out of a number of income support payments. Wife Pension was closed to new entrants in 1995. Access to Widow B Pension was limited in 1987, and then closed to new entrants in 1997. Partner Allowance and Mature Age Allowance were both closed to new claimants in 2003, and by 2008 there were no longer any recipients of Mature Age Allowance. Since 2005, new grants of Widow Allowance have been limited to women born on or before 1 July 1955.

Proportion of working age people receiving selected income support payments

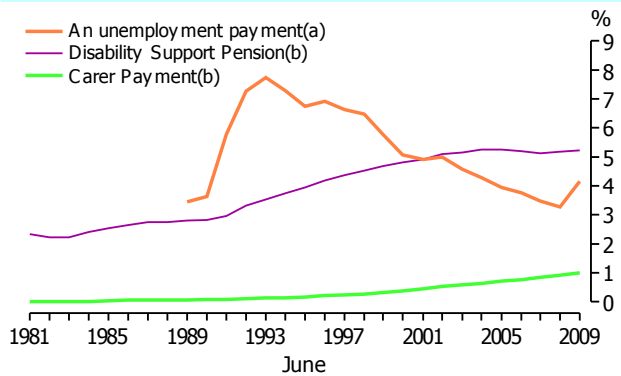


(a) Comprises Mature Age Allowances, Partner Allowance, Wife Pension, Widow B Pension and Widow Allowance. Some recipients are 65 or over, and some live overseas. These recipients are in the numerator but not the denominator of the proportion.

(b) Recipients living overseas are in the numerator but not the denominator of the proportion.

Source: Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs [Occasional Paper No. 1 Income support and related statistics: a 10-year compendium, 1989-1999](#); [Statistical Paper No. 1 Income support customers: a statistical overview 2002](#); [Statistical Paper No. 4 Income support customers: a statistical overview 2005](#); [Annual Report 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09](#); Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [Annual Report 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09](#); [Labour Market and Related Payments, January 2010](#); Parliament of Australia Parliamentary Library [Trends in the receipt of income support by workforce age people 1978 to 2007](#); [Population by Age and Sex, Australian States and Territories, June 2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 3201.0)

Proportion of working age people receiving selected income support payments



(a) Currently comprises Newstart Allowance and Youth Allowance (Other). Some recipients of Youth Allowance (Other) are under 16. These recipients are in the numerator but not the denominator of the proportion.

(b) Some recipients are 65 or over, and some live overseas. These recipients are in the numerator but not the denominator of the proportion.

Source: Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs [Occasional Paper No. 1 Income support and related statistics: a 10-year compendium, 1989-1999](#); [Occasional Paper No. 7 Income support customers: A statistical overview 2001](#); [Statistical Paper No. 1 Income support customers: a statistical overview 2002](#); [Statistical Paper No. 4 Income support customers: a statistical overview 2005](#); [Annual Report 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09](#); Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [Annual Report 2005-06, 2006-07, 2008-09](#); [Population by Age and Sex, Australian States and Territories, June 2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 3201.0)

The proportion of working age people receiving either Wife Pension, Widow B Pension, Partner Allowance, Mature Age Allowance or Widow Allowance decreased from 4.2% in June 1995 to 0.6% in June 2009. None of these closed or restricted income support payments have participation or activity requirements such as studying, training or searching for work. When introduced, the payments reflected attitudes and policies of the time about which groups of working age people could not reasonably be expected to find paid work to support themselves. However, attitudes and policies about the capacity for workforce participation by working age people without recent job experience have changed over recent decades.

...tightened eligibility for some payments

Another reason for the decrease in the rate of income support receipt among 16-64 year olds has been the gradual raising of the age at which women qualify for receipt of a pension for having reached retirement age. In June 1996, women needed to be aged 60.5 years to qualify for receipt of the Age Pension and 55.5 years to qualify for an equivalent retirement pension from the Department of Veteran's Affairs. By June 2007, these qualifying ages had risen to 63 years and 58 years respectively. This has resulted in progressively fewer working age people receiving the Age Pension. In June 1995 there were 211,685 women under 65 receiving the Age Pension (representing 1.8% of all

working age people). By June 2007 the number of women under 65 receiving the Age Pension had more than halved.²

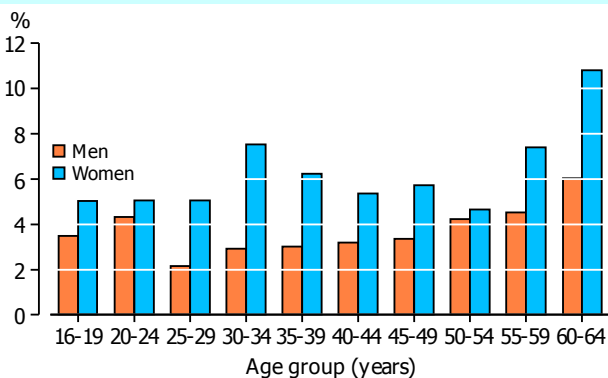
Until 10 May 2005, people qualified for the Disability Support Pension if they had an impairment that prevented them from working (or being re-skilled to work) for 30 hours a week at or above the minimum wage for at least the next two years. This changed from 30 hours a week to 15 hours a week for some working age people applying for this income support payment between 11 May 2005 and 30 June 2006, and for all new claimants from 1 July 2006. After rising from 1.7% in June 1972 to 5.3% in June 2004, the proportion of working age people receiving the Disability Support Pension changed little to June 2009 (5.2%).

Immediately prior to 1 July 2006, Parenting Payment was available (subject to means testing and residence rules) to the principal carer of a child aged under 16 years. Since 1 July 2006, new recipients needed to have a child under six (if partnered) or eight (if single). New recipients were required to look for at least 15 hours work per week when their youngest child turned six, and existing recipients were required to do so on 1 July 2007 or when their youngest turned seven (whichever was later).^{1,3} The proportion of working age people receiving Parenting Payment (Single) increased from under 1.6% in June 1978 to 3.4% in June 2005. Over the next four years it steadily fell to 2.4%. The rate of receipt of Parenting Payment (Partnered) has also declined; from 2.0% in June 1996 to 0.9% in June 2009.

Who receives income support?

The age/sex distribution of working age income support recipients is shaped by factors such as the incidence of disability (which rises with age) and parenting activity (which increases for women when they have children then decreases as their children age).

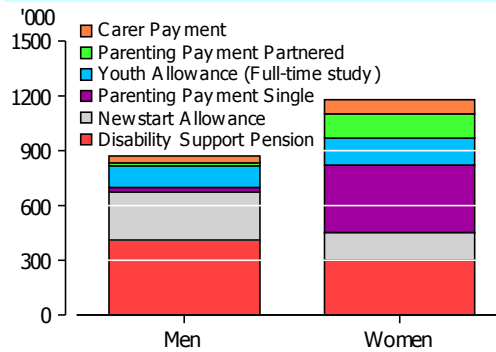
Age/sex distribution of working age income support recipients(a) – 2007-08



(a) Some income support recipients are excluded from this distribution because of the scope of the survey, and some are excluded because the survey did not determine that they were receiving an income support payment.

Source: ABS 2007-08 Survey of Income and Housing

Recipients of selected income support payments – June 2007



Source: Harmer, J 2008 *Australia's future tax system: Pension Review Background Paper*

In 2007–08, women represented nearly two-thirds (63%) of all working age income support recipients living in private dwellings. Yet men are more likely than women to receive certain types of payments. In June 2007, men comprised 63% of Newstart Allowees and 58% of Disability Support Pensioners. Rates of receipt of the Disability Support Pension rise with age for both men and women,¹ which partly explains the relatively high proportion of working age income support recipients who are aged 55–64 years.

In June 2007, some payments to people of working age (i.e. Wife Pension, Widow B Pension, Widow Allowance and the Age Pension) were received by women only, while some others (e.g. Carer Payment, Partner Allowance and Bereavement Allowance) were mainly received by women. These payments also partly explain the relatively high proportion of working age income support recipients who are 55–64 year old women.

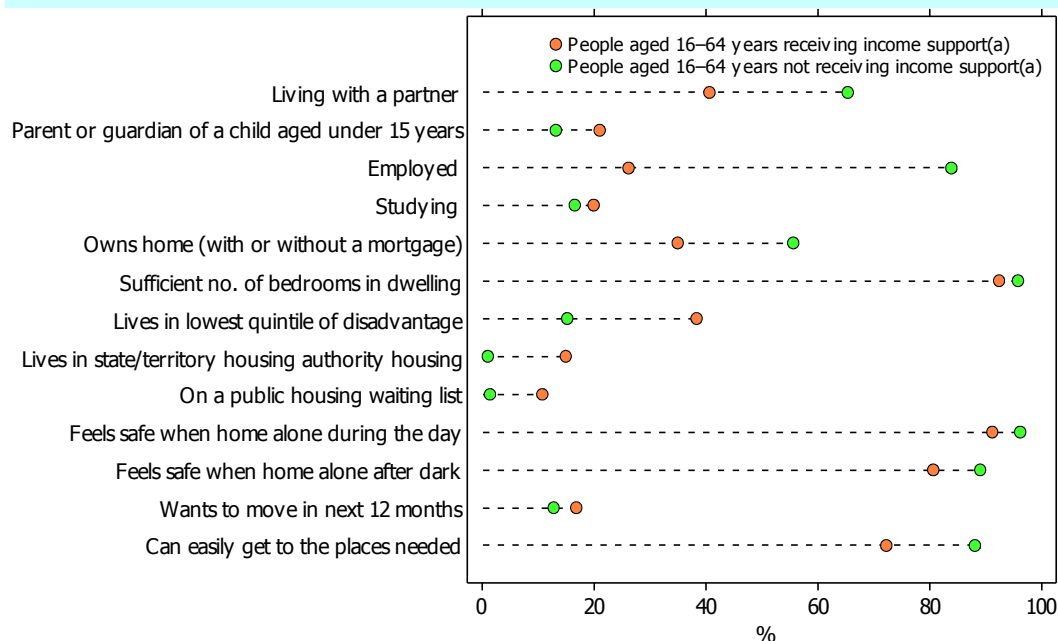
Among younger age groups, there were other reasons why there were more female than male income support recipients. High proportions of people receiving Parenting Payment (Single) (93%) and Parenting Payment (Partnered) (91%) were women, as were more than half (54%) of all students receiving either Youth Allowance (Full-time study), Austudy or Abstudy.

Characteristics and living standards

On some socioeconomic measures collected in the ABS 2007–08 Survey of Income and Housing, working age people receiving income support appear broadly similar to working age people not receiving income support. On other measures, the income support recipients do not fare nearly as well.

Largely because their rate of participation in paid employment was relatively low (26% compared with 84% of other 16–64 year olds), income support recipients had lower income-related consumption possibilities. In 2007–08, their mean weekly disposable personal

Selected socioeconomic characteristics and selected indicators of living standards – 2007-08



(a) Some income support recipients are excluded from these proportions because of the scope of the survey, and some are included in the 'not receiving income support' population because the survey did not determine that they were receiving an income support payment.

Source: ABS 2007-08 Survey of Income and Housing

income (\$371) was less than half (47%) that of 16-64 year olds who did not receive income support (\$787). Taking into account the income of other household members and the economy of scale benefits derived from sharing household expenses, the average weekly household equivalised disposable income of working age income support recipients (\$525) was 59% that of other 16-64 year olds (\$895).

Working age income support recipients were also less likely than other working age people to be living with a partner (41% compared with 65%) yet were more likely to be the parent or guardian of one or more children aged under 15 (21% compared with 13%). Around 13% of working age income support recipients lived alone (compared with 9% of other 16-64 year olds), 19% lived in a one-parent family household (compared with 3% of other 16-64 year olds) and 52% lived in a couple family household (compared with 77% of other 16-64 year olds).

Other measures show little difference between recipients and non-recipients of income support. For example, 20% of working age income support recipients were studying (compared with 17% of other 16-64 year olds), 92% had a sufficient number of bedrooms in their dwelling (96% of other 16-64 year olds), 91% felt safe when home alone during the day (96% of other 16-64 year olds) and 17% wanted to move in the year ahead (13% of other 16-64 year olds).

Looking ahead

Government policy to maximise workforce participation combined with recent indications of improving labour market conditions might be expected to keep rates of income support receipt relatively low among people of working age. Further tightening of eligibility criteria to receive income support could be expected to have a similar effect.

One example of further eligibility tightening took effect on 1 July 2009, when there were changes to what Centrelink defined as assessable income for determining eligibility to receive most means tested income support payments. Assessable income could no longer be reduced by investment losses or salary sacrificed superannuation contributions.⁴

Another example of further eligibility tightening is that the Age Pension qualifying age is continuing to increase. Rates of income support receipt observed among 63 and 64 year olds in 2007-08 may lower in forthcoming years as the Age Pension qualifying age for women incrementally increases from 63 to 65 years between 2007 and 2013. Between 2017 and 2023, the Age Pension qualifying age is scheduled to gradually increase to 67 years for both men and women.⁵ This may extend the upper age limit of what is regarded as 'working' age.

The Australian Government is currently considering a wide-ranging review of the tax and transfer system, aiming to improve

incentives to work, reduce complexity and maintain cohesion.¹ The review made recommendations to meet looming demographic, social, economic and environmental challenges.⁶ Changes to aspects of some working age income support payments are one possible outcome of the government's response to the review.

Endnotes

- 1 Harmer, J., 2008, *Australia's future tax system: Pension Review Background Paper*, Canberra, <www.fahcsia.gov.au>.
- 2 Parliament of Australia Parliamentary Library 2008, *Background Note: Trends in the receipt of income support by workforce age people 1978 to 2007*, APL, Canberra, <www.aph.gov.au>.
- 3 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2009, *Annual Report 2008–09*, DEEWR, Canberra, <www.deewr.gov.au>.
- 4 Centrelink, 2009, *Changes to the definition of income could affect your payment*, Centrelink, Canberra, <www.centrelink.gov.au>.
- 5 Centrelink 2009, *Increase in Age Pension Age*, Centrelink, Canberra, <www.centrelink.gov.au>.
- 6 Australian Treasury 2009, *Australia's future tax system*, Treasury, Canberra, <www.gov.au>.

Repeat imprisonment

Imprisonment aims to prevent crime and enhance community safety by removing offenders from the public arena and acting as a deterrent to potential offenders, as well as meeting society's need for reparation or retribution for crimes committed.¹ However, while a period of imprisonment may deter some people from re-offending, in others it may foster further criminal behaviour.²

Measuring repeat imprisonment is one way of gauging recidivism (repeated or habitual participation in crime). Studying the characteristics of people who have been imprisoned more than once, and understanding trends in criminal career development can provide valuable evidence for designing crime prevention strategies.

At 30 June 2009, there were 29,300 prisoners in Australia. This is equivalent to an imprisonment rate of 175 prisoners per 100,000 adults in Australia. Since 1989, the imprisonment rate has increased by around two-thirds.

How common is reimprisonment?

Over half (56%) of the people in prison in 2009 had been imprisoned before. However, this does not necessarily indicate the rate of reimprisonment, as it does not account for the people who are released from prison, but not reimprisoned. It is also influenced by the number of first time prisoners entering the system, and the length of sentences.

A more valid measure of reimprisonment can be made by following over time a group of people who have been released from prison, and taking the proportion of that group who re-enter the

Data source and definitions

This article is based on a forthcoming research paper *An Analysis of Repeat Imprisonment Trends in Australia using Prisoner Census Data from 1994 to 2007*. The analysis is based on a longitudinal dataset built from the annual National Prisoner Census collected by the ABS. The analytical model used is explained on page 3 of this article.

The Prisoner Census provides a snapshot of the adult prisoner population at 30 June each year, and is collected from administrative data sources maintained by corrective services agencies in each state and territory. Within each state or territory, every prisoner is assigned a unique prisoner identification number. This number allows the presence or absence of individual prisoners to be followed over time at each Prisoner Census, and enabled the construction of a 14 year (1994–2007) longitudinal dataset. This dataset is used to identify prisoners with multiple imprisonment episodes.

Prisoner refers to a person held in custody. The imprisoned population includes remandees, some of whom may be found not guilty by the court. In all states and territories people remanded or sentenced to adult custody are aged 18 years and over, except Queensland where 'adult' refers to people aged 17 years and over.

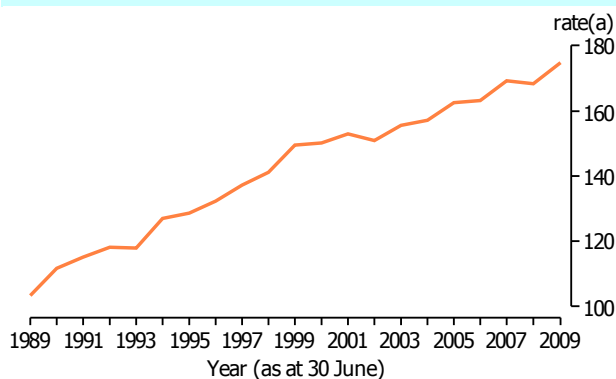
Release refers to a proxy measure derived from the absence of a prisoner's record in a subsequent Prisoner Census. Information on the release of prisoners is not collected by the census, so people's 'disappearance' from the Prisoner Census is used as a proxy of their release from prison, and their 'reappearance' as a proxy of their reimprisonment. The interval between the year of release and the subsequent reimprisonment is approximated by the number of years between the release year and the first census year of the reimprisonment.

The Prisoner Census does not capture all prison episodes, that is it does not capture the entire inflow and outflow of prisoners during the year. Short prison episodes can be missed if they do not span 30 June, which may result in both an underestimate of the number of prisoners serving multiple spells of imprisonment and an underestimate of the number of prison spells for prisoners identified as serving multiple terms. It is also not possible to link prison episodes that occurred in different states and territories.

prison system at a later date. Over the four years from 1994 to 1997, 28,600 prisoners were released from Australian prisons (the 1994–1997 release cohort). The analysis in this article is based on this group of people.

Within 10 years of their release, two in five people in the 1994–1997 release cohort had been reimprisoned. The rate of reimprisonment increased relatively rapidly in the early years following release, then levelled out over time.

Imprisonment rate



(a) Prisoners per 100,000 people aged 18 years and over. From 1989 to 1993 rate is for people aged 17 years and over.

Source: Australian Prisoners: results of the National Prison Census, 30 June, issues 1989–1993, Australian Institute of Criminology; [Prisoners in Australia, 2004](#) and [2009](#) (ABS cat. no. 4517.0)

Prisoners released in 1994-1997, selected characteristics of offenders

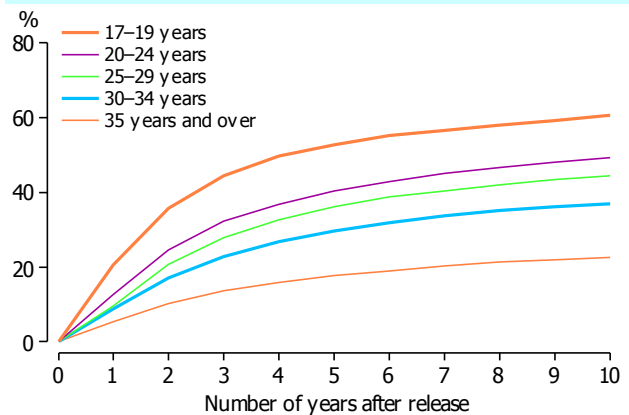
Reimprisonment rate within 10 years of release	
Selected characteristic	%
Men	39.7
Women	31.3
Age at release	
17-19 years	60.7
20-24 years	49.3
25-29 years	44.4
30-34 years	37.0
35 years +	22.6
Indigenous	57.9
Non-Indigenous	35.0
Has prior imprisonment	49.9
No prior imprisonment	25.1
Australia	39.2

Source: ABS data available on request

Who gets reimprisoned?

As the characteristics associated with reimprisonment are often aligned with other characteristics, a regression model was used to isolate the most important factors (see the box on page 3). Results of the modelling showed that reimprisonment was strongly associated with already being a recidivist prisoner, as opposed to being in prison for the first time. Also strongly associated with reimprisonment were the characteristics of being young, of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, or, to a lesser extent, being male.

Prisoners released in 1994-1997, cumulative reimprisonment rate, by age at release and time to first reimprisonment



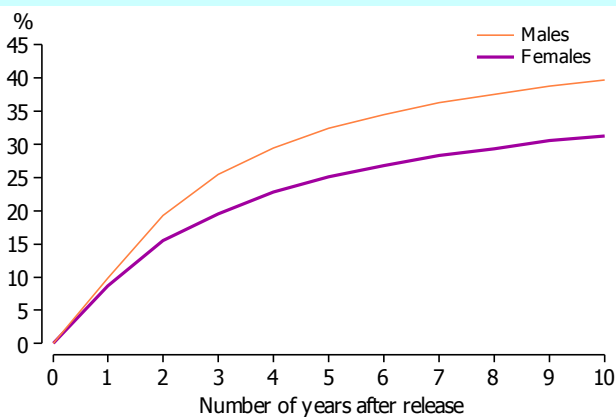
Source: ABS data available on request

During the 10 years after being released, men were more likely than women to return to prison. Although this gap was quite small at the beginning it increased with the passage of time. By the tenth year, 40% of released men had been reimprisoned at least once, compared with 31% of released women.

Younger prisoners were more likely than older prisoners to be reimprisoned following release. Within 10 years of being released, the reimprisonment rate for the teenager group (those aged 17-19 years when released) was 61%, compared with 23% for those aged 35 years and over.

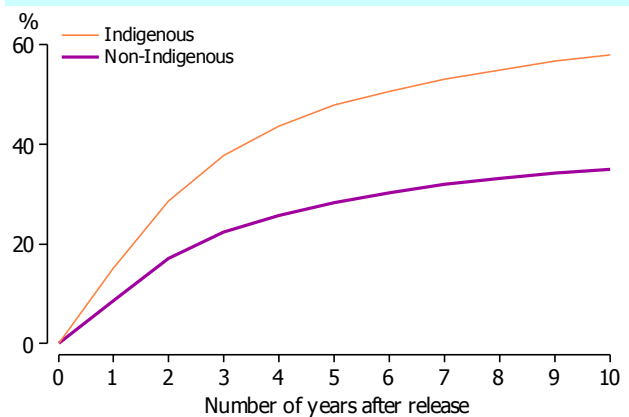
The reimprisonment rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within 10 years of release was around 1.7 times that of non-Indigenous people.

Prisoners released in 1994-1997, cumulative reimprisonment rate, by time to first reimprisonment



Source: ABS data available on request

Prisoners released in 1994-1997, cumulative reimprisonment rate, by Indigenous status and time to first reimprisonment



Source: ABS data available on request

Prisoners released in 1994-1997, states and territories

Reimprisonment rate within 10 years of release

State or Territory	%
NSW/ACT	39.3
Vic.	37.8
Qld	42.1
SA	35.5
WA	38.3
Tas.	32.8
NT	48.2
Australia	39.2

Source: ABS data available on request

...states and territories

Within 10 years of their release, 48% of prisoners in the Northern Territory had been reimprisoned, compared with the national average of 39%. However, this high reimprisonment rate reflects the demographic characteristics of its prisoner population (such as Indigenous status and age) which are associated with high rates of reimprisonment. After adjusting for these and other factors using logistic regression, Northern Territory prisoners showed an average level of reimprisonment propensity (that is, it was not significantly different from the average across all jurisdictions).

Criminal career development

Developing an understanding of the frequency of offending, and the types of crimes committed by chronic offenders, may assist in crime prevention.

In the Prisoner Census, information is collected on only the most serious offence of sentenced prisoners, and the most serious charge for unsentenced prisoners. Analysis of criminal career development is based on the most serious offence/charge, referred to as the 'offence'.

People in the 1994-1997 release cohort were most likely to have been in prison for assault and acts intended to cause injury, and burglary. Illicit drug offences and theft were also common offence types for which prisoners were originally imprisoned.

Analysis of the repeat imprisonment dataset

The 1994-1997 release cohort is the group of prisoners who were released at least once between 1 July 1994 and 30 June 1997.

In the release cohort and the total prisoner population, around nine in ten prisoners were male, and about one-fifth were Indigenous. Among first-time prisoners, the median age when imprisoned was 28 years. A small proportion (less than 10%) of prisoners in the release cohort were aged 17-19 years when released from prison, while around one-third were aged 35 years and over. Around 40% of the prisoners were in New South Wales prisons.

Logistic regression is a type of multivariate analysis. This technique is used to show the effect that each individual factor has on the likelihood of a person being reimprisoned, when all other factors are held constant. For example, characteristics like state or territory of imprisonment and age may be associated with each other so that the association between jurisdiction and reimprisonment is a reflection of the age profiles of different states and territories, rather than a result of that jurisdiction itself. The multivariate analysis disentangles the effects of the following characteristics: sex; age at release; Indigenous status; prior imprisonment; state and territory of imprisonment; previous offence; and the length of the previous prison episode. This statistical technique is applied to the 1994-1997 group 10 years after release.

Prisoners released in 1994-1997, distribution of previous offence type(a)

Previous offence(a)	Proportion %
Homicide	3.1
Assault(b)	15.9
Sexual assault	8.8
Robbery	9.3
Burglary	14.9
Theft	11.1
Deception	5.7
Illicit drug offences	10.7
Weapons offences	0.3
Property damage	1.7
Public order offences	0.6
Road traffic offences	8.6
Offences against justice	8.2
Miscellaneous	1.0
Total prisoners	100.0
	no.
Total prisoners	28,600

(a) Previous offence refers to the offence related to the episode of imprisonment from which the prisoner was released during 1994-1997.

(b) Includes acts intended to cause injury.

Source: ABS data available on request

...how frequently were people reimprisoned?

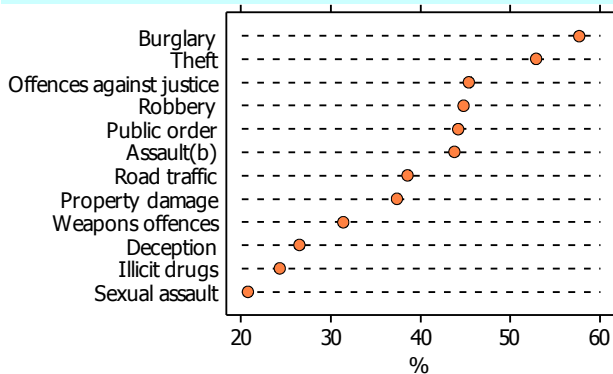
Almost one-fifth (19%) of the 1994–1997 release cohort had been reimprisoned only once by June 30, 2007. One in ten were reimprisoned twice, 6% were reimprisoned three times, and a further 6% were reimprisoned four or more times.

...reimprisonment by offence type

The following analysis looks at patterns of specialisation in offence types and movements from one type of offence to another.

The reimprisonment rate varied according to the offence type for which the prisoner was originally imprisoned. Members of the 1994–1997 release cohort who had been in prison for burglary or theft had the highest reimprisonment rates (58% and 53% respectively). At the other end of the spectrum, people whose previous offence was illicit drugs or sexual assault and related offences had the lowest reimprisonment rates (24% and 21% respectively).

Prisoners released in 1994–1997, reimprisonment rates by 30 June 2007, by previous offence type(a)



(a) Previous offence refers to the offence related to the episode of imprisonment from which the prisoner was released during 1994–1997.

(b) Includes acts intended to cause injury.

Source: ABS data available on request

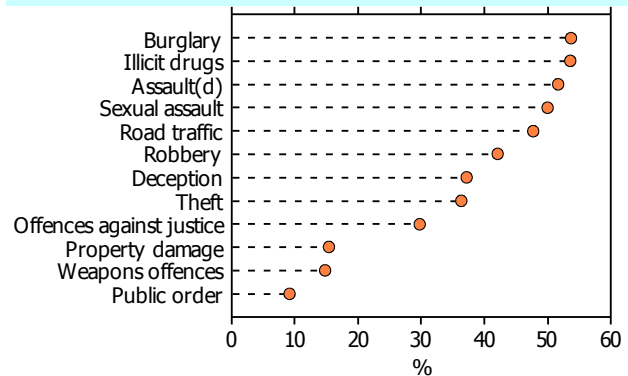
...specialisation

Offence specialisation was measured by taking the proportion of repeat prisoners whose reimprisonment was for the same offence as that for which they were originally imprisoned. Burglary had the highest rate of specialisation. Just over half (54%) of those previously imprisoned for burglary were reimprisoned for this same offence by June 30, 2007.

Other offence types with a high degree of specialisation (around 50%) included acts intended to cause injury, road traffic offences, illicit drugs and sexual assault and related offences.

Repeat prisoners tended to specialise in the offence types of burglary, illicit drug offences, acts intended to cause injury, road traffic offences, and sexual assault and related offences.

Specialisation(a) by previous offence type(b), prisoners released in 1994–1997 who were reimprisoned by 30 June 2007(c)



(a) The ratio of reimprisonment for the same offence to total reimprisonment.

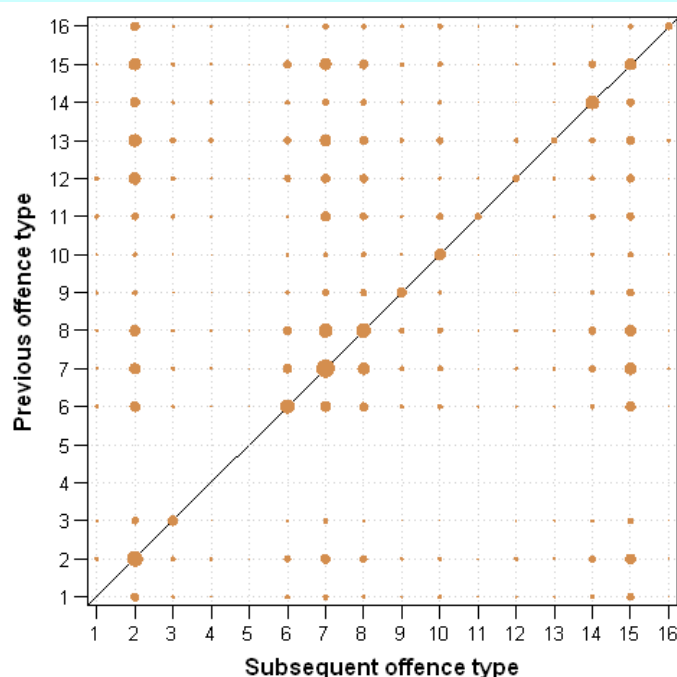
(b) Previous offence refers to the offence related to the episode of imprisonment from which the prisoner was released during 1994–1997.

(c) Data for weapons offences and public order offences are not published due to small numbers involved in the calculation.

(d) Includes acts intended to cause injury.

Source: ABS data available on request

Prisoners released in 1994-1997, probability of being reimprisoned for a certain offence type by 30 June 2007, by previous offence type



- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 Homicides | 9 Deception |
| 2 Acts intended to cause injury | 10 Illicit drug |
| 3 Sexual assault and related offences | 11 Weapon offences |
| 4 Dangerous or negligent acts | 12 Property damage |
| 5 Abduction | 13 Public order |
| 6 Robbery | 14 Traffic offences |
| 7 Burglary | 15 Offences against justice |
| 8 Theft | 16 Miscellaneous |

Source: ABS data available on request

...offence type changes by repeat offenders

The probability of reimprisonment chart shows previous offence types along the vertical axis and subsequent offence types along the horizontal axis. The size of the circles are proportional to the probability that a person previously imprisoned for an offence was, at some later date, reimprisoned for the same or a different type of offence. In other words, the pattern along the diagonal indicates the probability of repeat imprisonment for the same offence, while vertical patterns in the matrix indicate progression into particular offence types.

There was a relatively high probability that people previously imprisoned for acts intended to cause injury, robbery, burglary or theft would later be reimprisoned for those same offences. In addition, these offences also attracted a high proportion of prisoners who were previously imprisoned for other offences.

Many offenders also tend to be reimprisoned for offences against justice at some stage. This can be reasonably assumed as attributable to breaches of justice orders. For example, prisoners may be paroled, seriously breach the parole conditions, and then are returned to prison.

Unless offenders started their criminal careers with sexual assault and related offences, deception, or illicit drug offences, they did not tend to commit this sort of crime later.

Endnotes

- 1 Roche, D., 1999, 'Mandatory Sentencing' in *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice Paper No. 138*, Australian Institute of Criminology, <www.aic.gov.au>.
- 2 Rawnsley, T., 2003, 'Working Paper No. 2003/02: Dynamics in Repeat Imprisonment: Utilising Prison Census data', cat. no. 1351.0, ABS, Canberra, <www.abs.gov.au>.

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