

ask the children



nsw commission for
children & young people

Young people speak about their experiences of work

The Commission for Children and Young People asked almost 11,000 children in New South Wales about their working experiences to find out the extent of kids' work, the sorts of activities they do as work, the conditions of their work, their experiences at work, their likes and dislikes about working, and the impact of their work on other areas of their lives. Their experiences challenge common assumptions about children and will help the community give kids positive working experiences.

Who participated in the research?

10,999 kids in Years 7 to 10 in New South Wales participated in our survey. They came from 22 different schools; 68.3% attended government schools, 23.3% attended Catholic schools, and 8.3% attended other non-government and Independent schools.

The kids were aged between 12 and 16 years; 55.7% were boys and 44.3% were girls; 69.7% came from metropolitan and 30.4% came from rural and regional areas; 3.0% were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and 13.7% were born overseas; and 28.6% spoke a language other than English at home.

The kids answered questions about:

- 1) the type of work they do and the tasks involved;
- 2) their work conditions;
- 3) their satisfaction with work and quality of life;
- 4) injuries sustained while working;
- 5) experiences of harassment at work; and
- 6) what they like and dislike about working.

Because we wanted to know about all the jobs that kids do, whether paid or unpaid, we asked the kids to include anything that they considered to be jobs or work, except for routine household chores and schoolwork. For example, work could include traditional paid employment, work done for family or neighbours, looking after siblings while parents were at work and volunteer work.

Which children work?

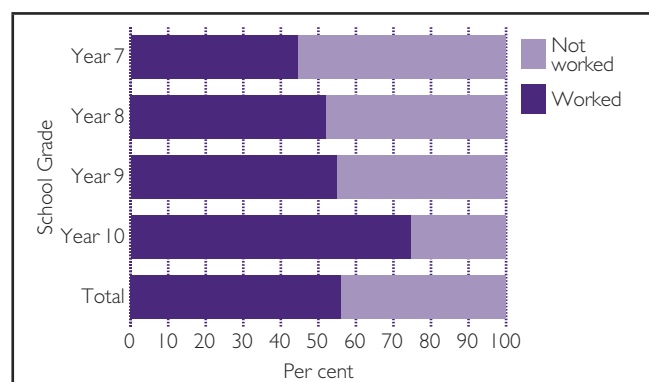
More than half of the kids (56.1%) surveyed had done some form of work during the 12-month period prior to our research.

We found out that:

- Slightly more girls than boys work (58.3% compared with 54.7%). This difference reflects the greater number of girls who undertake care work, like looking after children or older relatives.
- Kids are more likely to work as they get older. Three-quarters (75.9%) of 16-year-olds work compared with 42.7% of 12-year-olds.

Children who work by school grade

Figure 2.2: Children who work by school grade



- Kids who live in rural and regional areas are more likely to work than those who live in the Sydney metropolitan area (66.5% compared with 50.4%). This difference reflects the large number of children in rural and regional areas who undertake farm work.
- More children born in Australia work than those born overseas (57.7% compared with 48.2%).
- Children living in extended family arrangements are less likely to work than those who do not (49.9% compared with 57.2%). No differences were found between kids living in two-parent and single-parent families.
- Kids living in the least disadvantaged areas are more likely to work than those living in the most disadvantaged areas (64.0% compared with 42.4%).

What work do kids do?

We found that kids' work is diverse. Their most common jobs are babysitting (21.2%), food and drink sales (10.1%), leaflet and newspaper delivery (6.8%), and general farmhand work (6.0%). Taken together these jobs make up almost half of the work that kids do (44.1%).

We found that:

- Boys dominate work that requires physical activity such as labour work and leaflet and newspaper delivery. Girls dominate work associated with care and service to others such as service, sales, and clerical work, teaching, performance work and sports coaching.
- There are certain types of jobs children of all ages do, but as they get older they work in a wider range of jobs.
- The types of jobs available to children are similar across regional and metropolitan areas. The only exceptions are that farm work is only done in rural and regional areas and leaflet and newspaper delivery is more common in metropolitan areas.
- Many of the tasks that kids perform in their jobs are usually associated with adult jobs and require them to exercise a range of competencies, accept responsibility for other people and property, perform to certain standards and produce expected outputs.

'Babysitting neighbours – feed them, bath them, play with them and put them to bed' (Child, 14 years)

'Babysitting – change the baby, give the bottle and make her sleep' (Child, 12 years)

- Some jobs require knowledge of a particular content area and mastery of specific skills. This sometimes involves quite technical knowledge, for example in agricultural and horticultural work, computing, entertainment, teaching and tutoring and some trade-related work.

'Work in computer shop, building and repairing computers' (Child, 16 years)

'Rearranging and re-wiring of offices' (Child, 15 years)

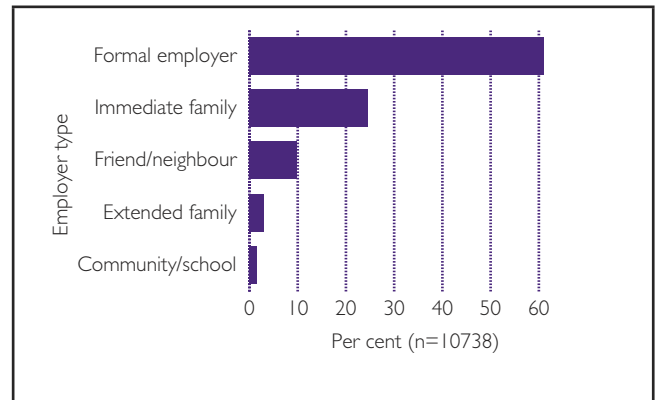
'Renovate two rooms by taking down the ceiling and replacing it, tiling, painting and decorating' (Child, 12 years)

What are kids' work conditions?

Kids work in two dominant contexts: for formal employers (61.0%) or for immediate family (24.5%). A small number work informally for friends or neighbours (9.9%), extended family (3.1%) and other community groups or schools (1.3%).

As children grow older, greater proportions work in the formal labour market. The older the child, the more likely they will work for a formal employer. This suggests there is a 'pathway' in children's work. Children start with informal work at home, move on to do similar work for other informal employers, finally taking up a variety of jobs for formal employers with similar pay and conditions to adults.

Figure 4.3: Employer type, by age*



Note: *Data refer to all jobs

We asked kids about their conditions of work, including whether they were paid or rewarded in some other way for their work, how much they were paid, how regular their work was, and how many hours they worked.

Pay and reward:

We found that over three-quarters of kids receive money for their work (76.9%). A further 12.3% are compensated with some form of non-monetary reward such as food and clothes and 10.8% are not compensated at all.

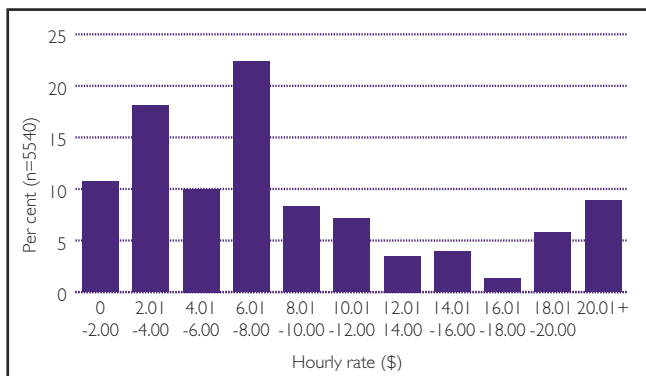
Children who work for their immediate family or for schools and other community groups are the least likely to be paid. In contrast, work undertaken for formal employers and extended family is most likely to be paid.

Rate of pay:

Hourly rates of pay are comparable to those for 15-19 year olds in Australia. Just over 22% of kids who are paid receive between \$6.00 and \$8.00 per hour. However some kids are paid low rates, with 29.0% earning \$4.00 or less per hour. At the other end of the pay spectrum 16.0% earn around \$16.00 an hour or more.

Approximate hourly pay*

Figure 4.6: Approximate hourly pay*



Note: *Data refer to all paid jobs

Jobs most like domestic work, such as babysitting, cleaning and food service, receive lower pay rates. Those that require specific skills, in a specialised market or are trade related, are most highly paid.

Regular, casual and one-off work

Casual work is the most common form of work (49.5%) followed by regular work (38.2%) and one-off work (12.2%). This means 61.7% of kids' work is very flexible and insecure.

Kids of all ages, of both sexes, and from country and city areas, are as likely to perform one-off, casual and regular work. However, kids in the most disadvantaged areas are more likely to do one-off jobs, suggesting fewer opportunities for kids in these areas.

Jobs done for formal employers or that involve routine commitments to community based employers are most likely to be regular jobs. These include sports-related work, food preparation, delivery work, teaching and tutoring, sales work and other service work. Trade related work, labour and non-labour, are more likely to be one-off than either regular or casual.

Hours worked:

Most kids in the study undertake work that can fit around their other activities; 55.9% work five hours or less per week and 26.2% work between six and 10 hours per week. However, nearly one in 10 work more than 15 hours.

We found that older kids are more likely to work longer hours, reflecting their greater involvement in the formal labour market.

Jobs that are task focused or organised around specific activities or events are more likely to involve shorter hours, including agricultural and horticultural work, delivery work, cleaning work, teaching and tutoring, sports-related work and babysitting and other care work. Jobs involving shift work or that are based around the ongoing operation of an enterprise involve longer hours, such as sales, food preparation and other food service. One-off jobs are also more likely to involve longer hours.

Combining early or late hours of work (before 7am and after 7pm) with long working hours may be particularly problematic for children and could increase the possibility that children may find it difficult to manage other demands and maintain relationships.

'I have to get up early and work late, it gets hot and I get tired. I don't like it' (Child, 14 years)

'I dislike having to get up early' (Child, 13 years)

'Getting out of bed early, not able to do some of my leisure activities' (Child, 14 years)

Are kids satisfied with their work?

We found that kids are generally very satisfied with the work they do and their work conditions. They value the opportunity to develop new skills, exercise more responsibility and self-reliance, earn money and make a contribution. These are opportunities that they may otherwise be excluded from because they are children.

Four factors were found to influence children's satisfaction with work: recognition, support, control and autonomy, and income. Kids were most satisfied with the recognition and support they receive and least satisfied with their income and their degree of control and autonomy.

Does work affect kids' quality of life?

We found a moderate or no effect on the quality of life of kids currently working. They are able to balance their work commitments with personal, family, educational and social demands.

The amount that kids currently work does not compromise the time they spend on homework and household tasks. In fact, there is evidence that children who work spend more time on these tasks than those who do not.

Working appears to have neither a positive or negative impact on how kids feel about their life generally.

The relationship between working and time pressure is interesting. Some kids who work feel rushed all the time, while some don't feel rushed at all. By comparison, smaller numbers of children who don't work feel rushed all the time and none of the time. Factors such as time spent on homework and household tasks, age and gender, influence whether kids feel rushed, more than whether they work.

Are kids safe at work?

We asked kids whether they had sustained any injuries at work in the 12 months prior to completing the survey and, if they had, how serious the injuries were.

We found that 40.1% had sustained some type of injury at work. Of those, 7.4% sustained a serious work-related injury, which was defined as an injury that resulted in hospitalisation, required medical treatment, or an injury that resulted in time off school or work for three days or more.

Agricultural and horticultural work, labouring, food preparation and delivery work have increased likelihood of injury. Agricultural work and labouring are the most likely to cause serious injury.

'A bull knocked me over and I fell off my motor bike while moving cattle. [I] was concussed and got a large gash on my leg' (Child, 14 years)

'A pallet of bricks fell off the forklift onto me and I was pinned under it. I broke my right arm and leg and broke a couple of ribs' (Child, 14 years)

'[I] sliced off the top of my finger with an angle grinder' (Child, 14 years)

The most frequent type of injuries reported were burns (22.6%), followed by open wounds (22.1%), sprains and strains (16.0%) and superficial injuries (13.6%). Together these accounted for almost three-quarters (74.3%) of the injuries.

Injuries are most commonly caused by objects coming into contact with the body, exposure to heat, and slips, trips and falls. Non-powered hand tools, appliances and hand equipment were involved in one in three injuries.

The kids most likely to report having been injured at work were those who performed agricultural and horticultural work, labour work, food preparation and delivery work.

Do children experience harassment at work?

When we asked kids whether they had experienced harassment at work, 47.8% said that they had experienced verbal harassment and 22.8% said they had experienced some form of physical harassment.

We found that the likelihood of experiencing verbal or physical harassment increases with the number of hours worked, the regularity of work and the formality of work conditions. Given this, it is not surprising that we also found that older kids are more likely to experience harassment (they are more likely to work in formal settings and for longer hours). The harassment may be due to a greater emphasis on efficiency and mistake-free work. Formal work environments have hierarchical structures that increase the opportunities for harassment, or there is more opportunity to establish relationships where harassment can occur.

Verbal harassment included being shouted at, sworn at and made fun of.

'Customers swearing hurts me' (Child, 15 years)

'Manager at [name of shop] always makes sexual remarks about me' (Child, 16 years)

'Using their seniority over me and using bluffs and being intimidating on occasions when provoked' (Child, 15 years)

Boys were slightly more likely to be verbally harassed. This may be because male dominated workplaces promote a particular form of masculinity that encourages harassment.

The kids most likely to report verbal harassment are in high pressure environments such as food preparation, other food service and sports-related work. Kids in sales work, agricultural and horticultural work and labour also reported an increased likelihood of verbal harassment.

Physical harassment included having tricks played on them, being threatened and intimidated, physically hurt or pushed, having personal possessions damaged and being touched in an uncomfortable way.

'I got abused. The person I worked with threatened to hit me' (Child, 15 years)

'Ignoring me, pushing me around, not letting me go on lunch/toilet breaks' (Child, 16 years)

'A boy once put this other boy's hand on my bum' (Child, 13 years)

What do kids like and dislike about work?

Kids were asked what they like and dislike about working. We found that the overwhelming majority were able to list both positive and negative aspects of working.

Kids mentioned four main aspects of work that they liked. These were getting paid, gaining experience, feeling a sense of responsibility and achievement, and the social aspects of working.

Overwhelmingly, kids like being paid. They enjoy the feeling of financial independence that comes with working.

'Being able to buy the things I need and want. And also stuff like presents for family and friends, and not having to ask your parents to pay for it' (Child, 15 years)

'Being able to make my own money and spend it. I feel independent' (Child, 14 years)

'I can buy the things I want without feeling I haven't earned the right to spend the money from my parents. It makes me feel like I'm growing up' (Child, 13 years)

For some kids, money is the only positive aspect of work. In the words of one participant:

'[I like] absolutely nothing [about work]. I wouldn't work if I didn't get paid. No one would' (Child, 16 years)

Many kids said that work provides them with an opportunity to gain experience for the future and to learn new things.

'I can gain experience from what I do and understand what work is like' (Child, 15 years)

'Working is great, you get great experience and some idea of what you want to become in the future' (Child, 13 years)

'...I have learnt quite a lot so when it's time to get a proper job I will be ready' (Child, 15 years)

Other kids enjoy the sense of responsibility and achievement that they gain through working.

'Gives me a sense of responsibility and makes me feel more grown up' (Child, 14 years)

'...It makes you feel like you are contributing to something you feel is important' (Child, 13 years)

'...It makes me feel good afterwards as I've done something useful with my time' (Child, 15 years)

The social aspects of work were also frequently mentioned as a positive aspect of work. Kids said that they enjoy being around people, interacting with different sorts of people and making new friends.

'I can meet new people and not just have friends in school but also out of school and it builds my social life. It's fun' (Child, 15 years)

'[I like] meeting new people, friends and communicating with different people' (Child, 16 years)

Other positive aspects of work that were less frequently mentioned were that work helps to build confidence, work is fun, and that work involves doing things for others and helping people.

There are aspects of work that kids dislike. These centre on the tiring aspects of work, unfair treatment by employers, and interference with other areas of their lives.

Many children mentioned that they dislike feeling tired after work. Specifically, they spoke about working long hours, standing on their feet all day, the physically demanding aspects of some of their jobs and having to get up too early.

'At the end of the day sometimes I feel tired and sore' (Child, 13 years)

'[I dislike] heavy lifting, repetitive procedures, only 15 minute breaks' (Child, 15 years)

Kids also dislike being treated unfairly by their employers. Many felt that they are exploited and unfairly treated because of their age, feeling they are often bossed around and yelled at, and not paid sufficiently for the work that they do.

'I don't like being physically and mentally injured. I don't like being patronised and demeaned, and I want to be treated as an equal' (Child, 14 years)

'[I dislike] people being mean because of my age. [They] think they can push me around' (Child, 16 years)

'[I dislike] the poor pay for my age as there are older people than myself who do the exact same job but get paid more' (Child, 16 years)

Interference with other areas of their lives was also frequently mentioned as something that kids dislike about working, although we did not find a difference to their quality of life when compared with non-working kids. They felt that having to work meant time away from family and friends, and missing out on social events and other activities.

'I can't go to as much parties as I'd like'
(Child, 13 years)

'[I dislike] missing out on leisure activities, especially when the surf is good' (Child, 15 years)

Other less frequently mentioned aspects of work that kids dislike include having to deal with rude and abusive customers and that the tasks they have to perform are boring and repetitive.

Where to from here?

This research identified a wide range of important issues for kids who work. The Commission will be establishing a task-force, chaired by the Commissioner, to assess these issues and to make recommendations that involve government and non-government organisations, parents, children and the community.

Want more information?

This publication is a summary of the Commission's research report *Children at Work*, written by Toby Fattore.

The full report is available on our website at www.kids.nsw.gov.au/publications/childrens_work.html

The Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800

The Office of Industrial Relations website at www.industrialrelations.nsw.gov.au/rights/young/index.html is a good resource for young people who want to find out about their rights and responsibilities as a worker.

Children and young people can also find out about their rights as a worker on the Lawstuff website at www.lawstuff.org.au

The Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales website at www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/adb.nsf/pages/index provides information about equal opportunity, anti-discrimination and harassment.

The WorkCover New South Wales website at www.workcover.nsw.gov.au has information about workplace injuries, workers compensation and occupational health and safety.

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) has set up a national free advice hotline for people who are bullied, harassed or treated unfairly at work. The number is **1300 362 223**.

Other useful work-related resources can be found on the ACTU Worksite for Schools website at www.worksite.actu.asn.au/

The Commission would like to thank the students and staff of all the participating schools for generously providing their time, insights and experiences.

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