



Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Work-Life Balance in New Zealand

A Qualitative Study

[October 2003]



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I. Introduction

1.1 Research objectives

The key objective of the research was to identify and explore current understanding of and attitudes towards the issue of work–life balance amongst key stakeholders.

This involved:

- identifying what meanings are conveyed by the term work–life balance
- identifying the language used in talking about work–life balance
- identifying the key themes (positive and negative) that emerge in discussion on the issue
- adding to the background understanding of the current nature of work – life balance for employees in different sectors and the current workplace processes available to ensure work–life balance.

1.2 Question-line

The focus group question-line was based on the research objectives and was developed in consultation with the Employment Relations Service (ERS).

A focus group question line is not like a quantitative questionnaire where questions are ordered and fixed. In focus groups question-lines are used as a guide to encourage participants to discuss and explore ideas and thoughts they have on the topic being researched. A strength of focus group inquiry is that lines of questioning are flexible and allow for additional questions to be asked both during a focus group or at subsequent groups.

A copy of the focus group question-line is included in Appendix one.

1.3 The research design

The research utilised qualitative methods: This report is based upon eight focus groups, three mini groups and five depth interviews conducted from 22 September to 2 October 2003.

The groups selected for the study were chosen to:

- enable a particular focus on key audiences where there is more limited knowledge of perceptions and attitudes, and

- explore perceptions amongst groups who may have a distinctive relationship to the issue of work life balance.

The groups undertaken are outlined in the following table.

Group specifications			
Demographics	No. Participants	Location	Facilitators
Pacific peoples Aged 25-60 years, All female	Five	Auckland – UMR Office	Felolina Tumataiki
Pacific peoples Aged 18 –60 years, All male	Five	Auckland – UMR Office	Felolina Tumataiki
Blue collar employees Aged 25-60 years, Mix of New Zealand European and Pacific peoples, One union member, Mix of family types, Some working parents, All female	Six	Auckland – UMR Office	Andrea Kan
Blue collar employees Aged 25-54 years, Mix of New Zealand European, Pacific peoples and Maori, Mix of family types, Some working parents, All male	Six	Auckland – UMR Office	Andrea Kan
Self employed Aged 25-54, Mixed gender, Employ less than 2 staff	Six	Auckland – UMR Office	Andrea Kan
Maori Aged 25-60, Mixed income, Mixed gender	Five	Auckland – UMR Office	Marc Elliott
Small employers Mixed gender, One with union, Less than 10 employees	Seven	Auckland – UMR Office	Marc Elliott
Medium employers Up to 50 employees, Two with union	Seven	Auckland – UMR Office	Andrea Kan
Small employers Mixed gender, Two with union, Less than 5 employees	Seven	Christchurch – The George Hotel	Marc Elliott
White collar employees Aged 18-54, One union member, Mix of family types, All male	Eight	Christchurch – The George Hotel	Marc Elliott
Rural mothers at home Mix of one and two parent families, Aged 25-54	Nine	Christchurch – The George Hotel	Marc Elliott

The duration for each focus group was approximately two hours.

The five depth interviews were conducted amongst larger businesses with 50 plus employees. Each interview was approximately one hour in length.

Facilitators

One facilitator moderated each focus group. Three facilitators were used for this study to provided flexibility in matching the most appropriate facilitator to the participants being researched.

1.4 Recruitment

Participants were recruited by telephone using UMR's trained interviewers. Participants were recruited by a mixture of cold calling and from UMR's focus groups database. UMR ensures a number of group participants are always recruited on a cold calling basis so that participants are kept fresh and not programmed on how to respond in focus groups.

For those recruited from UMR's focus group database, participants are not allowed to have attended a group in the last six months.

1.5 Research analysis

Transcriptions of the focus group discussions were searched to identify key themes.

It should be noted that this is a qualitative research study. While qualitative research can be used to identify a range of issues and assess the intensity with which views are held, quantitative research is necessary to establish with certainty the extent to which views expressed are held throughout wider populations.

UMR is the author of this report and requires that all parties permitted to use the report and the research contained within the report give full and correct acknowledgement of authorship.

II. Executive Summary

■ Views of work-life balance

- While most participants could relate to the issue of work-life balance it was clearly not an issue that people reflected on, unless prompted.

Managing the different aspects of their lives was considered complex and assessment of work-life balance was seen to require stepping back and viewing your life objectively. Most noted that it was easy to get caught up in the day-to-day details of living and for life to become out of balance without realising it.

- Most felt that people would not seriously look to address work-life imbalance issues in their life until some crisis or event spurred them into action.
- Even though participants from different socio-economic backgrounds could relate to the issue of work-life balance, the reasons work and life became out of balance were fundamentally different. For many from higher socio-economic backgrounds work-life imbalance was a price they were willing to pay to achieve certain life goals – the fact that work and life was out of balance was considered a matter of choice.

For many from a lower-socio economic background work-life imbalance was often seen to be forced upon them. Imbalance towards the working part of their life was often considered necessary to generate an income that just covered immediate outgoings. Many in this position felt trapped and unable to see how their circumstances would improve or how they could get ahead in life.

■ Current work-life balance

- Most participants claimed that their work and life was out of balance. It was an issue that both employers and employees could personally relate to, although there was evidence of some disconnection between perceptions of work-life balance of the employee by employers.

Most employers felt that the work-life balance of employees was better than their own, while employees own rating of their work-life balance was more inline with that stated by employers for themselves.

- While paid work was clearly a key contributor to any imbalance between work and life, there were also many factors outside the workplace that were also seen to impact on work-life balance.
- There were numerous stories recounted of the impact work-life imbalance had on an individual's personal life. Participants tended to focus more intensely on the impacts outside the workplace, although for most there were a number of important issues relating to the impact on the workplace such as deterioration of work relationships, increased mistakes, lower quality work and decreased job satisfaction.
- Although not working in paid employment, rural mothers at home felt that work-life balance was definitely an issue relevant to their situation. A major issue was the lack of differentiation between work and the rest of their life. With their workplace being the home, there was little refuge from work demands.

Exacerbating their feeling of work-life imbalance was the perception that their input as stay at home mothers was not valued by New Zealand society.

■ Addressing work-life balance

- Most employees felt some reticence raising work-life balance issues with their employer. The issue was considered a grey area as it spanned both home and work life, and was also seen to be stifled by New Zealanders natural reserve and pride with regard to discussing personal issues.
- Participants recounted a number of ways they managed or coped with work-life balance issues. There was an emphasis on coping mechanisms outside the workplace, which points to a perception that managing work-life balance is the responsibility of the individual.

■ Work-life balance initiatives

- There was a strong belief amongst employers and employees that the implementation of work-life balance initiatives would have a positive and noticeable impact on the workplace. Overall, employers indicated reasonably strong support for initiatives that helped employees manage work and life commitments.

A key to support amongst employers was that employers could relate to the issue personally and could therefore understand the impact endemic work-life imbalance could have on the workplace.

- Employers viewed the key benefits of implementation of work-life balance initiatives were retention of quality staff and being able to attract quality staff, both issues of concern in the current buoyant labour market.

Other perceived benefits were higher productivity, happier workplaces, more motivated staff, a closer relationship between staff and management, and a trickle down effect that would lead to happier communities.

- Key barriers seen to hinder employers implementing work-life balance initiatives were:
 - the perceived cost of implementing some initiatives, which was seen as an issue particularly important to smaller businesses
 - having the time and resources to manage and implement the initiatives
 - a lack of expertise and knowledge both in terms of the best initiatives to implement for their type of business and how to actually set-up particular initiatives.
- Unprompted suggestions for work-life balance initiatives raised by employees included:
 - More money, courses and counselling, social clubs, more time to take stock, child care facilities, additional staff to cover busy periods, more fulfilling work, and an employer that was understanding and supportive during times of stress.
- Unprompted suggestions for work-life balance initiatives (additional to what were already offered by their organisation) raised by employers included:
 - Teaching employees life skills and third party support for smaller businesses.
- Both employers and employees suggested flexible hours, disclosing company goals, and enhanced health care facilities as possible work-life balance initiatives.
- Prompted suggestions for work-life balance initiatives that employees were most interested in included:
 - Stress management programmes, communication on company objectives, working part-time, counselling and workload planning.
- From the prompted list of work-life balance initiatives a majority of employers claimed to already have the following in place, workload planning, working part-time, tailored contracts, and clear communication on company objectives. Of initiatives not yet in place, employers noted that they were most likely to consider offering stress management programmes and job sharing.

■ Key roles

- Responsibility for work-life balance was seen to primarily lie with the individual. The key role of the employer was seen to be in providing a good working environment.

- While most employers did not want to see the Government legislate on work-life balance issues, there were a number of suggestions as to the role the Government could play.
 - Raise awareness and educate both employees and employers on the benefits of maintaining a healthy balance between life and work.
 - Provide best practice and cost-benefit information on the various initiatives that could be put in place to address work-life balance issues.
 - Be a positive role model as a major New Zealand employer.
 - Provide subsidies to implement work-life balance initiatives.
 - Provide independent work-life balance services that small businesses could access such as counselling and advice on how to set-up services.
 - Provide tax breaks to alleviate the cost of implementing any services.

III. Definition of Work-life Balance

3.1 Work-life balance definition

Work-life balance was clearly an issue that resonated with participants, although the issue was not necessarily consciously evaluated. Participants often talked about the lack of time and pressures of modern life but this was more likely to be voiced as a consequence of modern life rather than a work-life balance that could be addressed.

Once raised, most participants could relate to the need to balance both work and other aspects of their life.

I think you have to become a whole person, like you need to concentrate on spiritual, social, mental, work, just whatever. You need a balance. If you just devote all your time to work, then you're going to be neglecting the social aspects, the spiritual aspects, whatever different aspects of your life. Just be a whole person, be fulfilled in all different areas of your life. You need to find that balance. You do need to work I believe as well. There's lots of different aspects in your life and you can't overdo it with one. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

There were three key components that participants felt needed to be in balance to achieve a healthy lifestyle, namely, paid work, unpaid work and personal time.

I think wellbeing springs to mind for me in terms of finding a balance between all three. There's always that. Between how much money you've got, how much time you've got and the third one is finding the ratio between the three so you can work all the time and not have enough time to enjoy your time, or you can have too much time and not enough money and opportunities to still keep you rested so I think it's finding the balance of the ratio of work to leisure and the overall sense of wellbeing. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

What generally characterised work was a sense of responsibility towards the tasks involved. In the case of paid work there was also an element of financial gain and the acknowledgement that providing an income was generally a necessity.

Personal time was made up of many parts, all of which had an important role in maintaining work-life balance. As personal time had less affiliated responsibilities it was often the part of the work-life balance equation that was most easily sacrificed.

The other thing is that at some stage with that work balance thing – it may not just be work, work, it could be not necessarily voluntary work but other activities outside which aren't family orientated – you suddenly realise that the family's growing up and you're not there. To me your family life or your home life is time with your family. Anything that isn't time with your family is work to me. That includes when you're coaching a sport, even though it's a hobby. Whether you go out and sit in a paddock somewhere painting a picture. [That's seen as work?]

It's not to you. [Or playing golf. (Interjection.)] Yes, it's not to you but it's not family time. That's what you've got to look at. It's not necessarily work life and private life, but work life and family life. (Auckland, blue collar, male)

All aspects of work-life balance were seen to have an element of personal goals and rewards involved. Paid work, unpaid work and personal time were all seen to contribute to some personal need, which varied from the perceived personal challenge involved to the sense of satisfaction in completing a task.

Unpaid work was generally considered to be home duties and activities that were task oriented and not purely leisure.

Personal time was seen to comprise of several elements, which all participants felt needed to be present in a person's life to achieve a proper balance.

Me-time: This was time participants felt needed to be spent purely on activities for themselves. Often the activities were solitary and people spoke of the activities such as pampering themselves that had an element of guilty pleasure about them.

Time to reflect/ reenergise: Participants spoke of the need for time to reflect and reenergize themselves.

Spiritual needs: A number noted that spiritual needs (not necessarily religion based) also needed to be fed to ensure a healthy balance.

Family time: For participants with families it was considered extremely important that quality time was spent with their children. It was considered necessary that time spent with their children was quality time rather than just time looking after their basic needs.

For some participants (particularly of Pacific and Maori background) it was also seen as important to spend time with extended family members.

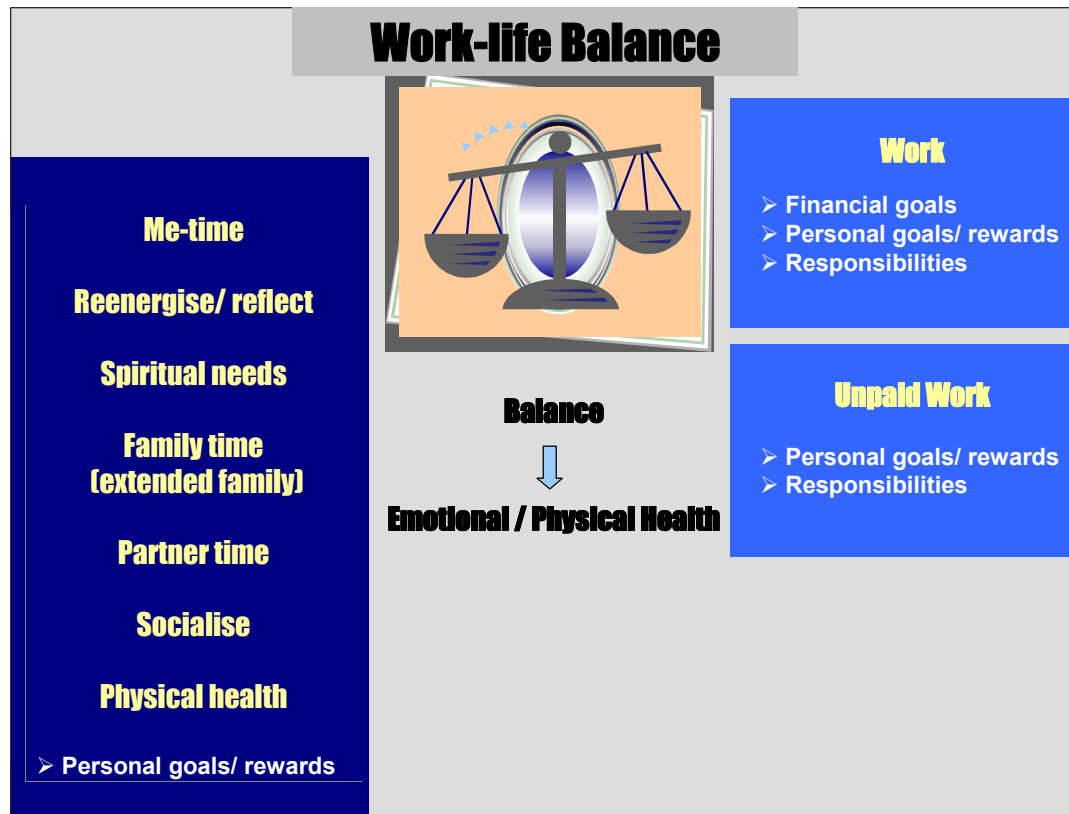
Partner time: Those in relationships acknowledged the need to nurture and spend time with their partners. This was seen as critical to maintain a healthy relationship.

Social time: Many noted that it was important to maintain social networks to keep a healthy balance.

Physical health: Many felt it necessary to have an exercise programme in place to maintain their physical health. Many also found exercise a time to refresh and reenergize themselves.

The different aspects of work-life balance are summarised in Diagram 1 following.

Diagram 1.



3.2 The work-life balance timeline

Viewing an individual's personal journey through life, it was clear that key changes and milestones over time were seen to influence work-life balance. A number noted that life could become a treadmill, moving from one goal to another with a person losing sight of the need to keep a good balance between work and the rest of their life.

The key issue was seen to be over the level of income considered necessary to meet their needs.

[Things that would encourage you to address work-life balance issues?] *From my point of view, the only thing that can increase the work balance to the life balance, or decrease it, would be extra pay because I cannot afford to work less.* (Auckland, blue collar, male)

[What would encourage you to create the time?] *More pay.* [That's right, that's the underlying factor working, money. (Interjection.)] *If you're going to boil it down, no matter what you say, we work to have a better life. If what we're being paid isn't enough to gain that better life we have to work more hours.* (Auckland, blue collar, male)

Focus on keeping a good balance between work and life was often only seen to come with life experience or most often, after a crisis or event that prompted a time of reassessment and change.

I'm more towards my private life. Some of the reasons behind that is a few years ago I had a job like you've got and I just stressed myself out so much and now I refuse to do that for somebody else. It's my life, we only get one shot at it. I am where I think it should be. If I wasn't happy with the situation then I would just move on and change it. (Auckland, blue collar, female)

These events were seen to crystallise in a person's mind what is important and usually resulted in the person taking some action to ensure a better work-life balance.

[What would encourage people to think more seriously about a work-life balance?] People don't usually do this until they have a good revelation or they go through some tragedy or some experience which makes them think they've got to change their life. It shouldn't have to be a big catastrophe or a tragedy which is a wake-up call. They should already be living it. Usually it has to wait until then. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

If your marriage was on the line or my daughter went off the rails and it was because we weren't spending enough time with her or you had some health problems – [You'd be forced to then. (Interjection.)] (Auckland, Maori, male)

Some common events that brought about moments of reassessment were:

- the death of someone close such as a family member or colleague
- ill health due in some part to overwork or stress
- the breakdown or deterioration in their relationship with their partners
- problems with their children which could be attributed to a lack of time spent with their parents or lack of care.

Key milestones

Generally work-life balance was seen to be better at the start of a person's working life, when they had fewer responsibilities. Most noted that younger people just starting out only had to focus on building their skills and generally still had time to have some fun.

As a person aged their responsibilities and needs were seen to grow, with most aiming to buy their first home (with associated financial responsibility), perhaps start a family and build up material possessions. These financial and personal responsibilities were seen to require increased focus on paid work and also the added pressure of needing to meet these commitments.

It's like do you live to work or do you work to live, and that's the balance there. It's up to you at the end of the day. You can have as much as you want but you're going to have to put this much in to get it. It's a catch 22 and it's a balance and a compromise. Its worse if children are thrown into the mix as well and the pressures of all that. (Auckland, blue collar, male)

This was a stage in life where many from a low socio-economic background (in the groups particularly those from blue collar, Pacific and Maori backgrounds) were seen to stall. Blamed on low paying jobs, a number noted that they could not progress any further and were struggling just to survive and maintain what they had. Participants in these situations felt that they had few choices and had little chance of changing their circumstances.

[You may have a long-term goal?] I think with all good intentions it starts out that way. [You get swallowed in the game if you're not careful. (Interjection.)] You really can. People are very materialistic and that's what a lot of people judge their life by so they work to buy things and suddenly the need to buy things becomes more important than the life they're living and to buy those things they've got to work and that's when it starts to overtake. I wrote down that it's a balance of division of time between your work life and your private life. The biggest danger nowadays is not the fact that you're working to buy things. A lot of people are working to survive. (Auckland, blue collar, male)

To survive nowadays you're working 10 hours a day to meet the bills. There's a time when we used to have only the husband work and the wife at home. Long gone. You've got to have two partners working. There's no more one income earners and when they do have one income it's a struggle and I don't know how anyone can live. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

For more affluent individuals (mainly participants in the white collar, higher socio and employers groups) goals and milestones continued to be set and passed as people sought to upgrade their homes, progress in their careers and amass more material possessions. Participants in this situation acknowledged that they had choices but that it was easy to get caught up in goal setting and lose sight of the need to keep a proper balance between work and life.

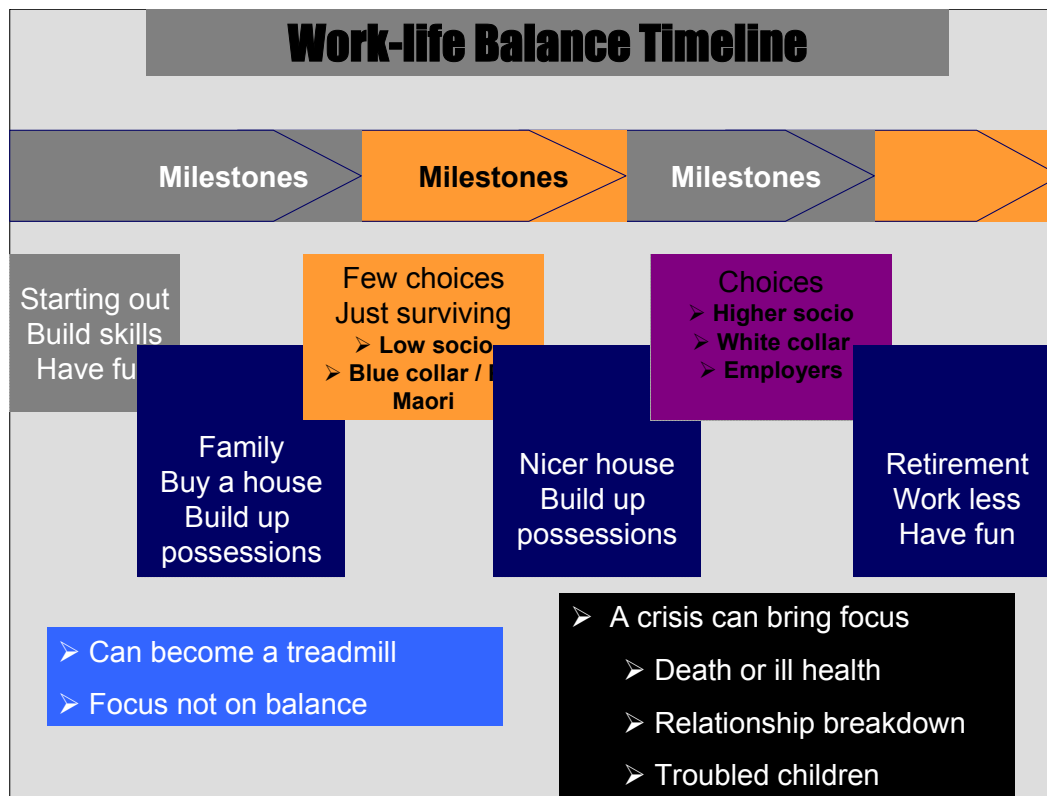
[Do you think other people in the wider community have the same views?] Most people don't set their goals. My wife and I have set goals. Things are going to happen when we're 50. That's six years away for us now. After that I don't want to work any more. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

[Causes of imbalance?] I think its everyday expectations. There's a material need that wasn't there before with a lot of us. Isn't there some research that says that on average people now want about 25% more than what they've always got. We're always striving, doesn't matter where we are, we always want more. It's very competitive. I think the city's got something to do with it. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, female)

The ultimate aim was to be able to work less or retire with enough funds to maintain a comfortable lifestyle. Many stated the aim to make-up for the fun missed by working hard earlier in life.

The work-life balance timeline is summarised in Diagram 2 following.

Diagram 2.



3.3 Group differences

Blue collar employees/ Pacific people/ Maori participants

These groups showed greater tendency to believe that they were powerless to control issues such as work-life balance. Most noted that they were working to survive rather than for luxuries or to save for retirement.

Many felt a lack of control over their circumstances and that they only had limited choices available to them.

A key factor was their perceived difficulty in being able to earn an income that allowed a decent quality of life.

White collar/ Employers/ Self employed

These groups were much more goal driven. Most had key milestones they were aiming for (even if they were not clearly thought out or articulated).

There was an element of choice associated with work-life balance, with many forgoing a good balance in the short-term to achieve specific goals.

IV. Current Work-Life Balance

4.1 Actual work-life balance

Most participants felt that their work and life was out of balance. It was an issue that both employees and employers could relate to, as most considered it relevant to their own situation.

At the moment I don't have a balance any more as work tends to be a seven day job and there's hardly any time left for family, leisure activities and even just meeting friends casually like I used to do. We used to ring up, "come over and have something to eat with us", I can't do that any more. (Auckland, employers, small business, female)

Quizzed on what an ideal work-life balance would be, most felt that equal weight on work and other aspects of their life would be the ideal. It was acknowledged however, that the ideal balance would differ from person to person with some people that gained a lot of personal fulfilment from their work viewing a much larger weighting towards work as ideal.

In the groups participants took part in an exercise where they had to note their current work-life balance in rough percentage terms on a moving scale. On the same scale employers were also asked to note what they thought their average employee's work-life balance was.

What was clear from this exercise was that there was a disconnect between perceptions of the work-life balance employers felt their employees faced and what employees viewed as the reality. While employees felt their work-life balance was weighted at 60 to 70 percent in favour of work, most employers felt that their employees work-life balance was more around the 50% mark.

My staff are 50/50 around about that. There's no stress. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, female)

[Employees?] On average they would be 60% private life. I've got a lot of young people working for me and they like to get out and do their own thing. They're not as committed to the job. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

Asked whether employers acknowledged that work-life balance was an issue, employees were divided in opinion.

Some employers were seen to acknowledge that work-life balance issues can impact on productivity and so actively encouraged balanced work habits.

[What do employers think about work-life balance? Is it something they think about?] Naturally they do because in the long term I suppose they want you to be as happy and as healthy as you can be because if you're not, you're not much

use. If you're stressed and tired the whole time you're not as productive. You're likely to take sick days when you're not sick. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

Other employees had a cynical view of employers and felt they only paid lip service to being good employers and only addressed issues when it was unavoidable.

With our firm they're more of an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. If something happens they're there for you like one of the guys has just been diagnosed with a terminal illness and he's on sick leave so they're topping up his income to what his salary would be, but as far as work is concerned, all they're concerned about is getting the job done. They don't care how you do it as long as it gets done. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

For these things to actually come into effect as an employer they won't do them unless they're forced to do them by the government. They'll say yes this is all good. You'll get the companies that are more enlightened will go through and do it but 98% of companies won't do anything because it's going to cost them dollars and they'll only do it if it's legislated by government. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

[Employers' view of work-life balance] All talk no action. They don't walk the talk. They stand there and tell everybody how marvellous but they don't walk the talk. The first priority is profit. I don't care what anybody says. Profit to the shareholders. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

4.2 Work-life balance issues

4.2.1 Outside work

There was discussion on what causes work and life to become out of balance. Impacts both outside and inside the workplace were raised by participants. While workplace issues were clearly significant, impacts outside work also played an important part in creating work-life imbalance.

The influences outside the workplace are discussed following.

Home duties

Many felt that uncompleted tasks around the home were a constant pressure. As many of these tasks were on-going, most noted that there was always some task left unfinished. As these duties were also unpaid work, they were more easily left if other pressing commitments arose.

Some (mainly amongst female participants and those in the Pacific people groups) noted that having an unsupportive partner could exacerbate the pressure to complete these home duties. Some male partners were seen to expect all home duties to be undertaken by the female partner, regardless of whether both were in paid employment.

[Imbalances?] Longer hours at work. Just purely doing day to day work. It's the hours you're putting in. You come home and you're still cleaning, you're still

working. You're cooking and cleaning. The washing has to be done. The day to day at home has still got to be done. Vacuuming, cleaning, cooking. As a woman and there's very few men that will help. The new modern men are helping but the older ones, no way. You've got long hours at work and then you've got working hours at home. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

Because I'm hardly home I think that's a threat to him. He wants me to be there now and again as his servant but I can't do that. I have to find time for the kids as well. Try and do things properly, try and clean the house, try and go out there and earn money. He wants me to do his every need. It doesn't work like that with me. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

Stereotypical roles

Both male and females felt that pressure to conform to certain stereotypical roles contributed to work-life imbalance.

Some male participants felt that the traditional role of the male as the main breadwinner placed them under pressure to provide a certain living standard for their families. There was also a perceived pressure to be the strong decision maker and resolve disputes at home.

The hard part is the male thing. The hard part is you are the father, you are the one forcing issues and when you've been at work and you've got stress there, then you come home and the kids want you to sort out a problem, and your wife has got something to sort out as well, you're expected to sort it out. That can take a toll. (Auckland, blue collar, male)

[Breadwinner role?] Increasingly I'm finding people of my age group, men, are starting to question that whole role and if they should take the whole burden of that. Why can't men redefine themselves? Women have. Who's the Governor-General? Who's the Prime Minister? Who's the Minister of Immigration? Women have really redefined themselves with feminism over the last 20 years. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

Female participants noted some pressure to be super 'mum's' regardless of whether they were also working full-time.

Children

While acknowledged as providing immense joy and personal satisfaction, children were also seen to place some pressures on parents that impacted on work-life balance.

Children were generally acknowledged as the top priority for parents and many of the goals people had were referenced to the need to provide the best start in life for their children. Some from a Pacific people background put themselves under pressure so they could leave some sort of legacy for their children.

What I strongly believe, I don't think it's a culture – I don't even think its Pakeha culture for them to plan ahead. For me as a Christian it's biblical. It says in there you've got to leave an inheritance and also a legacy behind for your children and that is my drive, even for this business. I think leaving an inheritance and a legacy behind for my children that will set them up for life. Not only for my

children, for my grandchildren as well. I don't think it's a culture. It's up to you really. You decide what your culture is today. For me it's kingdom culture not Samoan culture. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

Participants from a lower socio-economic background were often driven to ensure their children had the chance of a better life and received a quality education. Some noted that they maintained two jobs to ensure their children did not miss out on anything.

Standard of living too. All of my family are wanting to get luxuries as much as possible and that's why I'm striving for higher because the higher I get the more money I get at the end of the day, the more my family's going to benefit and my daughter's going to be able to do those luxury things that I can't do because I'm working. That's the way I see my responsibility in the family. (Auckland, Maori, male)

Apart from the need to provide for their children, making provision for school holidays was seen as another significant pressure for parents. Most parents had to arrange for additional childcare during this time.

School holidays aren't a pleasant time at all. They're constantly wanting money to go somewhere. If they're not old enough to stay at home alone you've then got to pay somewhere for them to go and that's another added stress. Or if they are at home it's like they're ringing up every hour or if they don't ring its like "shit they didn't ring, I'd better ring them up". (Auckland, blue collar, female)

Extended family

Beyond the immediate nuclear family, there were often calls both in terms of time and money from extended family members that placed pressure on individuals. Many had elderly or sick relatives that required support with tasks such as shopping or household duties.

[Caring for family members?] I've got elderly parents. My Dad's 89, he's just had a heart attack. My Mum's 88 and suffers from slight dementia. They've both been very, very sick. I'm backwards and forwards like a yo-yo. Do a meals on wheels tea for them. I fit it in. You just do it. (Christchurch, employers, female)

Many Pacific people also noted that there were numerous calls from extended family members for money and support. It was acknowledged as a common phenomenon amongst Polynesian families for even distant relatives to ask for support.

My father's been dead now nearly 10 years and they still expect me to contribute – that's my Samoan side and I just said "no, I will give what I can afford but the stress of having to participate in the Samoan lava-lava all the time, it just drags you" and it's people you don't know. It would be different if it was cousins and that, you don't mind, but this is second, third, fourth or someone in the church. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

There was one stage where his grandmother was staying with us so I was trying to cope with family and work, looking after her as well and I got burnt out too. [Was that for a short period of time?] No it was ongoing so it's only the last year that she went and stayed somewhere else and that eased the burden a bit but with extended family you have people turning up left, right and centre so your house turns into a halfway hotel. (Auckland, Maori, female)

Life skills

There was a view that some younger people did not have the life skills to adequately manage their finances. Poor budgeting and wasting money on gaming and associated activities were seen as issues that could increase the financial burden and pressure on individuals. This was an issue mainly raised by Pacific people participants.

[Is it our culture or everybody?] I think it's the culture that we come from. [I don't believe that. Pakehas do it too. (Interjection.)] We have to be educated how to use the money. We come from the islands and money's not always available. Even if they're on the dole, for them to spend it wisely. They just spend it all and wait for the next pay round. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

The only reason I get cross with the Polynesian people is when they spend their money in the church and they're giving it to the falaleles and not paying their bills. That's where you ask why the police take me around, because of that. To give to the church – and I get mad at the pastors and priests who stand up and tell you how much each person donates because that's wrong. People get so embarrassed, they want to beat the Jones and the Lalofis so they're putting thousands of dollars in to keep up and yet their kids are starving. You go to the casino – I've kicked people out of the casinos. I've seen people that I know who shouldn't be there and their kids are down. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

Unpaid work

A number of participants in the groups (both male and female) noted that they undertook unpaid work for their partners. This was often in the form of paperwork for businesses run by their partners.

[So you feel under pressure from the work you do for your wife?] Well, with that there are things I just can't control, things like compliance. Bang, PAYE, GST, FBT, paperwork. That stuff doesn't go away. If it's not being done on the Sunday tomorrow there's a penalty. Bad luck, you do it before you go to bed. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

But having said that, talking about those pressures, sometimes there are ways around it. I have a couple of rental properties. They're not freehold, the bank owns them. I just have the stress and I bring that on myself of keeping all the tenants and all the rest of it. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

Voluntary work

While voluntary work was often viewed as enjoyable with many benefits arising from undertaking this type of work, many acknowledged that the demands of voluntary work could spiral out of control.

[Unpaid work?] I belong to an education lobby group and I've just been on a case where we took the government to court for under-resourcing of special needs children. To me that's a joy and it's something that's been really interesting but even that becomes consuming. That's another thing as well. [Is it voluntary?] Yes. Some passions become – they lose their passion and they become another

thing that you've got to spend a lot of time doing. [Do people come to you and ask for help?] A lot of parents of special needs children for advocacy work because they're not getting their kids into schools. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, female)

Once a person was identified as someone willing to undertake voluntary work they were seen to be targeted as a person to contact when help was required.

There're so many voluntary things out there with the Brownies and helping at school or on committees. They're all extra nights and days out. [Do you get asked all the time, or do you feel you should be offering?] I think you just are around and then you get involved. You see that there's a need there and for some reason you open your mouth and you're doing it. Your hand goes up and you're thinking "don't do that". It can get out of hand. (Auckland, blue collar, female)

For those from a religious background church activities could be quite extensive and most found it difficult to reject requests for help from these avenues.

I share the church work with refugee people just that I've met in the church organisation. Sometimes for me it's difficult to get things in because I come home sometimes tired and I have dogs to walk and gardens to do and that and spend some time with my wife also. So I find it hard. But I think it's actually very important for me that I get out of my own fairly complacent world in the sense of being okay and feeling life is alright for me. I need to be with other people so that I know that things could be different. [Key reason why you get involved in volunteer work] Religious I suppose. That's the motivation. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

New Zealand society

New Zealand society was also seen to play a part in exacerbating the imbalance between work and life. Society was seen to foster a materialistic outlook, which drove people to seek monetary rewards above other goals.

Linked to this view were perceptions that society held workaholics in high esteem and encouraged competitiveness – factors which were seen to promote an imbalance in favour of work.

One of the key factors I noticed is that ideologically the workaholics are held in high esteem. The work ethic is so prevalent that the harder you work the more honoured you become. There is an ideological pressure to work and work and work because that is viewed as success and the most successful people who have the most materially are usually the hardest workers and we're all supposed to aspire to that because their boss is the mentor but my feeling on that is at some of the time they are such hard workers that they really are quite imbalanced people. I'm not sure now if that's such a great role model when we get older. I tend to think that other things are equally important. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

Financial issues

Financial issues were seen to have a strong impact on work-life balance. Some participants had certain goals that necessitated working extra hours or two jobs so as to earn additional funds to meet these goals.

The trouble is a lot of time nowadays is people start doing extra work to get the extra they want in their own life and then suddenly they turn around and realise that they're still working and they haven't got ... it just happens without realising it. (Auckland, blue collar, male)

As mentioned previously financial goals were considered a matter of survival for a number of participants who felt they were working as hard as they could to provide an income that just covered their immediate costs.

[What things are happening now that make it hard to juggle the balance?] The hardest thing is that I'm earning salary-wise more than I was 20 years ago and I'm worse off money-wise because the cost of living has gone up so much. I'm not a unionist but in the days when there were unions they got out there and they said "no you've got to pay us more" and it was controlled. Nowadays there's no union, no nothing and the company I work for, we haven't had a pay rise – [How does that affect your work-life balance?] Because you've got to work more. You've got to work longer hours to get the equivalent money to break even and that's all you're doing is just breaking even. I can get paid \$1400 a fortnight on a Wednesday and have \$25 left in the bank on the Thursday. (Auckland, blue collar, male)

4.2.2 At work

Issues impacting on work-life balance in the workplace are outlined following.

Powerlessness

A number of participants (mainly in blue collar jobs) felt a level of powerlessness over their work and conditions.

[Lack of control over own work?] I'm a control freak. I like to control things but if it's out of your control that's what stresses you. [Is that an imbalance?] Definitely because you can't control it. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

Many felt trapped as they claimed to have few job opportunities with options diminishing as unskilled jobs became rare. Job security and conditions were often considered poor, which added to their financial pressures.

You can always leave if they ask too much. This is what everyone says to me. If things are that tough, leave. It's how you see it. Now there could be three reasons you don't leave. 1) You don't want to look for another job because there's going to be all that extra interviewing. Or 2) you like it, you can put up with it, or the third one is that no-one else will hire you. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

Revenue

Pressure to achieve certain revenue levels were a factor seen to be contributing to the work-life imbalance of self employed and small employers. Due to their size, these businesses only had limited resources to weather slow periods and many acknowledged that when business came up they were loathe turning down the opportunity even if it put them and their staff under additional pressure.

Also when you're self-employed you've also got in the back of your mind that there's going to be some lean times. There's the old saying, you make hay while the sun shines. I guess over a period of time it will all balance out but unless you take the opportunity at those busy times, you're going to suffer if you haven't done it when the lean times come along. (Auckland, self-employed, male)

Personal pressure

Participants acknowledged that personal goals often drove them to place more emphasis on their work rather than other aspects of their life. Working hard was often seen as the way to achieve promotion and associated pay increases.

A number that gained significant satisfaction from their careers accepted that the challenge of excelling at their profession often drove them to overwork. These participants also noted that as work became more important it was difficult to switch off from work and even on their leisure time thoughts of work often intruded.

Sometimes you don't necessarily physically take the work home but your mind is thinking about it. (Christchurch, employers, male)

Responsibility

Many employees felt a level of personal responsibility to meet deadlines and client expectations, even if these expectations were often unable to be met by working standard hours.

The job I do is not physically demanding but there's a lot of decision-making. That's where I guess the feeling of working hard is, in the decision-making and the quality of that decision-making. (Auckland, employers, small business, male)

Employees gained some satisfaction in meeting these goals and felt disappointed if they were not achieved.

My cell phone is never turned off. It's on 24/7 and I'll get called 24/7. It's not something I have to do. We'll have other technicians on call over the weekend and the reason I leave it on is because if they get into trouble they can ring me, even if it's to say "what button do I push". That's probably more a personal thing, you want to help out the fellow you work with and I'm willing to do that. (Auckland, blue collar, male)

Lack of staff

Operating with too few staff was raised as a common issue impacting on work-life balance. Both white and blue collar employees noted its prevalence in the workplace.

We have the problem also that when people do get sick or go on holiday they don't get replaced. Other staff have to cope and carry on and do the work which causes stress. (Christchurch, employers, female)

Some blue collar workers felt that businesses relied on employees to undertake overtime rather than employing extra staff. Companies with seasonal peak periods were often seen to expect employees to cope with longer hours through these times rather than employ temporary staff to cover the additional workload.

The modern workplace

The nature of the modern workplace was seen to impose certain pressures on employees and employers. There were a number in the groups that were on call, which could intrude on their time outside the workplace.

An issue raised more by white-collar workers, was the expectation that they could be contacted outside work hours if necessary either by cell phone or email. Some white-collar employees also noted that if they travelled as part of their jobs, the time in transit was often not considered part of their work hours by the employer.

I was sitting talking to a friend of mine on the weekend. He's a sales manager. He's got these IPAQs. I said "imagine what life as a salesperson would have been like 15 years ago without a cell phone". You wouldn't have got calls from clients that led you from meeting to meeting to meeting, from sale to sale to sale, because you always went back to the office to a land line to make a phone call or to pick up a letter because faxes didn't exist. Everything has accelerated. [Has that made it better or worse?] It's worse. Internet, cell phones, pagers, faxes, one-hour couriers, 30-minute couriers. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

Organisational culture

Organisational culture was seen to impact on work-life balance. Internal conflict and politics were seen to place emotional stress on employees.

It's a vicious trap because I think with any organisation there's a culture ... they promote it right from the beginning. It's the old scenario. No-one's ever going to say "don't come to work". They're not going to. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

Some organisations were praised for promoting a workplace that frowned on working outside standard hours but many workplaces were seen to foster the practice of working over and above the set hours.

Lack of recognition

Some employees felt that a lack of recognition from the employer of the hard work done by staff placed stress on employees. Recognition was not just viewed as some sort of monetary reward but also in support and verbal recognition of the efforts of workers.

Stereotypical roles

A few participants from a Pacific background claimed to be called upon to undertake additional tasks because of ethnic stereotyping. They felt there was a perception that those from a Pacific background were more amenable and less likely to turn down demands from the employer.

Quite a lot of Pacific people teachers get imposed upon to do a lot of pastoral activities. You get a lot of the issues of the PI kids. Honouring your job description, your job brief. I've had to deal with a lot of issues because I'm Samoan. I don't mind those issues to an extent but when you're constantly imposed upon and they think you don't mind – we're more than just the myth of smiling, laughing, happy people. (Auckland, Pacific people, male)

4.2.3 Additional work hours

Most employees claimed to have worked additional hours at some time. There was general agreement that calls to undertake extra hours were acceptable as long as the employee had the option to refuse and requests were not constant.

While most employees said they had a choice to undertake additional hours, some noted that it could reflect poorly on the employees if requests were constantly refused.

[Fair to do extra hours sometimes?] Yes I think it is, because you have a choice to sign it or not. It's your choice. [But if you don't sign it you probably won't get the job. (Interjection)] Sure but it's still your choice, nobody's forcing you. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

There were a few blue collar employees that wanted more hours to help boost their pay packet.

While most blue-collar employees received payment for overtime hours worked, many white-collar workers claimed to not receive any payment.

The main reasons given by participants for working additional hours were:

Lack of choice: A few (blue collar employees) claimed to have no choice over whether they worked overtime and were just told when they had to do it.

Sense of responsibility/ achievement: Some were willing to work overtime to ensure certain tasks or deadlines were met. Many in this category felt a sense of achievement from completing a project or meeting a deadline.

[Have control over extra hours?] *I control whether I work or not. I'm not forced to do it. That's one point I make quite clear. I'm not forced to work any of these extra hours. [So why do you?] To complete a job. I'm a perfectionist. I like things done and done properly.* (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

[Reason for working extra hours] *To get the work done. [So it's expected, part of the job?] It's a responsibility. If you're sharp and get all your work done on a Friday, good on you, but there's always stuff that carries over and it's up to you to do it.* (Auckland, blue collar, male)

Feeling needed: A few participants acknowledged that they liked to make themselves indispensable to their employer and enjoyed the feeling that they were needed.

I definitely don't have a good work balance but what you've reminded me about is that I'm in control. I have nobody to depend on me. They've all grown up. Sometimes I wonder whether it's because I've got nobody who really needs me, that I put the job first. Maybe it's because I want to feel needed. I'm saying the work needs me but maybe in reality it doesn't. [You need to feel needed] The kids have all gone. It's just John and I at home. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

Enhance image: Some felt that working additional hours enhanced their image as a good employee which improved their chances for promotion or increased pay.

Financial benefits: Many blue collar employees worked additional hours for the extra money this brought in.

I work extra hours now because we're short of staff. Probably 11 hours because after my night-time shift is done I do another three hours. [Why do it?] Because we're understaffed and also I want the money. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

Working from home

Some (mainly white collar workers) claimed to undertake regular additional hours of work from home. Most felt that the employer was aware of these hours and knew that the assigned tasks could not be completed within normal work hours.

[Expected to take work home?] *I work at home. I have a computer that links with work. It goes straight through as if I was at work. When I'm on my trip to the States I'm linked up. I shouldn't but I do because there's so much. At the end of the period I have to do all the balance sheets. [But you work from home?] No, I work at work. I work at work but I go home and when I'm supposed to rest in that 30% I'm on the computer working again. [Are you expected to do that for your job?] I'm hired to complete a set of books and complete all these things.* (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

Most however, accepted working from home as part of the job and saw this as something that reinforced positive perceptions about them and would ultimately aid in advancing their career.

4.3 Group differences

Blue collar employees versus white collar employees

Both blue and white-collar workers felt there was an imbalance in favour of work. The reasons for the imbalance however, tended to be different between these two groups.

Blue-collar workers were driven by the need to earn an adequate income, this goal was seen to be made difficult by poor pay. These workers were generally less likely to consider their job as a career and most would only work additional hours if they were paid. It was also more common for these participants to feel powerless about their situation.

White-collar workers were also driven by money but their goals were more substantive than just providing for the everyday needs of their families. Career development was another factor driving work imbalance with personal responsibility and pressure more evident amongst these workers.

Pacific people participants

Home duties were seen as particularly burdensome by many female participants from a Pacific background. Many male partners were considered unsupportive even when both partners were working. This was seen as a more common problem amongst older men.

Many young people from a Pacific background were seen to have poor life skills such as budgeting and saving, which exacerbated the financial pressure and subsequently the work-life pressure on these individuals.

One participant felt that those from a Pacific background were sometimes taken advantage of and called upon to undertake additional work, as they were viewed as a people that were unlikely to turn down requests from the employer.

Pacific people/ Maori participants

Calls from extended family for money and support were seen as prevalent problem that led to work-life imbalance amongst some Maori and Pacific people.

Christchurch

Christchurch participants appeared to be more satisfied with their work-life balance than their Auckland counterparts.

A number of Aucklanders felt that Auckland was a particularly competitive and fast paced city where many measured their success by what they owned. These were factors that were seen to exacerbate work-life imbalance.

Older participants

A number of older participants appeared to have a better work-life balance. Many in this situation felt that they had learnt from life experiences and had made lifestyle changes to improve their work-life balance.

Two parents working

There were seen to be both positives and negatives to both partners being in paid employment. The additional income helped alleviate financial pressure and some felt that it also made for a more equal partnership with both understanding the pressures of paid employment.

On the negative side, most acknowledged that when two parents were working there was more pressure on time and more planning was required to ensure life ran smoothly. Some also noted that there could be conflict over whose job was more important (and subsequently who was left to deal with unplanned events and home duties) and concerns over the quality of childcare.

Some couples worked opposite shifts so that additional childcare was unnecessary but this meant that they often did not see each other for days on end, which could impact negatively on relationships.

Solo parents

Many solo parents participated in work on a part-time basis so that they were there for their children when school or playgroup finished. The part-time nature of the work meant that there were only limited employment opportunities and the work was often poorly paid.

Some divorced males also felt under pressure from dealing with disputes on visitation rights with their children.

One parent working

There were a few that had made a conscious decision for only one partner to work, although this option was limited to families that had a breadwinner earning enough to support the family. For these families it was acknowledged that while this choice placed the family under greater financial burden, it eased pressure on the family in other ways with the unpaid partner taking on the main responsibility for childcare and household duties.

For this scenario to work, the goals of the partners needed to be in-sync and the paid partner needed to acknowledge the work done by the other.

Self employed/ small employers

Self employed and smaller employers felt under particularly strong cash flow pressures. This meant that they were reluctant to turn down work even if it placed themselves and their workers under immense pressure.

Medium/ larger employers

Internal politics, viewed as more of an issue for large organisations, were seen to place emotional stress on staff, which in turn was seen to impact on work life balance.

Self employed

While self employed acknowledged that they worked just as long or longer hours as when they were employed, the majority still felt their work-life balance was better being self employed.

A number of self employed had been frustrated by the constraints of working for an employer and were disillusioned with the corporate working life.

The major positive of self employment was the sense of control they had over their workload and the ability to schedule activities around their work. While it meant making up the work time later, a number appreciated that they could take time out for activities such as attending school functions or playing golf if they wished.

V. Impacts of Work-Life Imbalance

5.1 Impacts outside work

When discussing the impacts of work-life imbalance, most participants tended to focus on impacts outside the workplace. These seemed to be the areas where most participants felt they were missing out and were coming under significant pressure from others.

Pressure from family members often meant there was an element of guilt associated with an imbalance in favour of work.

Impacts of work-life imbalance on their life outside work are discussed following.

Relationships

In nearly all groups there were a few participants that claimed to have problems with their relationship with their partner due to work encroaching into personal time. A number stated that their relationships had ended in divorce or counselling had been required to mend relationships.

I used to notice just getting wound up. Something would happen and I'd just snap. I could get violent. One day I was at home and I was doing something around the house and the missus said something stupid and I just lost it. Had to go to anger management after that. (Auckland, blue collar, male)

Some friends of mine have been married for seven or eight years and their marriage has just split up because they're both facing the work-life – they're not seeing each other enough and then they meet someone at work that shows a bit of attention and they'll go. (Auckland, Maori, male)

A common symptom of overwork was the person becoming irritable and quick to anger, which was seen to impact on relationships. Some felt that their whole personality had undergone a negative change due to work pressure without their being conscious of it.

[Impact on family life?] A real big one because obviously if you're not satisfied in your job you're going to take it out on someone and as the old saying goes you take it out on the nearest and dearest to you. I take mine out on the spade. You can guarantee it's the family that feels the effects. (Auckland, Maori, female)

Relationships with children were also seen to come under severe pressure when people were placing too much emphasis on their work life. Children were seen to need quality time from both parents to grow into healthy, balanced adults.

[How do the stresses impact on you and your life in general?] When you're stressed and you've had a bad day at work, you go home and you're tired and the

kids will do something and you'll snap at them. Then you think about it later and you think "why did I do that, it wasn't their fault in the first place". [So your relationship with your kids can suffer] Yes. (Auckland, blue collar, female)

[Impacts on the family?] It's the question of cohesion and role modelling and those types of things. Depending on what you believe you're sending out, it's actually what you are and if they don't see you, they don't see you. You might think you're being a good parent but if you're not there, then you might be but they won't know because they can't see you. (Auckland, employers, small business, male)

From a selfish point of view, some parents also noted that while their children may be relatively unaffected, they felt that they were missing out on connecting with their children and seeing them develop and grow.

There's a song, Cats in the Cradle, and that's one thing that scares me. You come along and the son says "come and spend time with me, Dad" and over the years you come and you go back to your kids and you say "let's spend some time together", "no Dad, I'm too busy" and that scares me. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

I get so annoyed because I can't be at home for mine. I can't take them to school and that's what really peeved me off. I brought them into this world and I should be able to take them to school but I can't. [Are they going to be okay?] I think they'll be okay because my mum and dad are there but it's me as a mum. I just miss out on the simple things. Making sure they're safe like my mum did with us. (Auckland, blue collar, female)

Health

Physical health was seen as an area affected by poor work-life balance. Some groups had participants that attributed a colleagues or family member's death to work pressure. Others claimed to have or had health problems which they associated with overwork.

[Health impacts?] You can't afford to be sick. I think down the line I'll probably suffer for this. [How long have you worked two jobs?] For two years now. I think it's just taken an impact on my relationship because I think two years is just too long. [Health okay during that time] On and off. It depends on how much you look after yourself really. [Do you get enough sleep?] I don't think I can remember when the last time was that I slept for a straight eight hours. Four or five hours maximum. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

People overwork, they get very stressed and their health breaks down. I've seen that quite a bit in advertising. (Christchurch, employers, male)

Another issue with health is cancer-related illnesses are often to do with work stress. They reckon there's a correlation. The biggest ones are divorce and work stress. (Christchurch, employers, male)

Lack of sleep or disrupted sleep was also considered an issue when work and life became out of balance. Many noted that they were always tired and rarely felt that they got enough sleep.

Pressure and stress

A number of participants felt that they were always under significant pressure and stress. Most in this situation felt that there was never enough time to do the things they wanted to do and definitely no time to just reflect on life and take stock.

[What do you think you're missing out on?] *I'd like not to have to walk up an escalator because I'm running out of time. It's the speed. I'd just like to slow things down. You get to Sunday afternoon and its five o'clock and you're exhausted. [You want to stop feeling tired so much?] Yes. You just don't know how to blob out any more. You don't know how to wake up on a Sunday morning and just read the newspaper.* (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

Social networks

Many noted that as life became busier, their social networks became smaller. Refusing social commitments was seen as a relatively easy way to free up time for other activities but it also meant that social networks often decreased or were lost.

[What would you like to be doing?] *I'd quite like not to have a guilty conscience occasionally. People ask me out for lunch now and I think "oh God, can I fit this in". That's a terrible attitude to have when you want to stay at home to get this done* (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, female)

Voluntary work

Some participants had given up voluntary work that they enjoyed to make time for other commitments.

[Is it worth it to try and fit it in with the rest of your life?] *I just do it because I like some challenges in my life but it is hard and I feel bad because I've taken time away from my family sometimes. [Do you say no sometimes then?] I have learnt to say that now in the last few years. I was a Brownie leader for a couple of years and it just got too much and I had to say "I'm not doing that any more".* (Auckland, blue collar, female)

5.2 Impacts at work

Participants raised a number of perceived impacts of work-life imbalance on the workplace.

Relationships

Much like relationships outside work, relationships with work colleagues were also seen to be affected by poor work-life balance. Some claimed to be irritable or more likely to get into arguments with colleagues when under pressure.

Mistakes

If a person's work-life balance was poor, it was seen as likely to lead to mistakes on the job. Many employees in the groups claimed to have either personally experienced or witnessed incidents where accidents had occurred due to work pressure.

[Impact on you in the workplace?] *You make mistakes if you're tired. If you're working long hours and you get tired, then your quality or what you're producing or your standard of work will drop.* (Auckland, blue collar, male)

[Mistakes happen as a result of stress and pressure?] *Medication has to be on time because I'm dealing with people and I can't afford to make mistakes. I've seen it happen too many times. Mixed medication. There's 20-30 residents. We're dealing with people, not dealing with machinery and we have to be extra careful. We bath them; put their clothes on, because they're so slow. Some of them can't move. It's a distressing job.* [Have you seen mistakes happen?] *Yes. We can work seven days, we can work double shifts.* (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

[Examples where stress has resulted in things happening?] *You're just so busy and if somebody doesn't check what somebody else is doing, the wrong stuff goes out the door and they ring up the next day and complain so we just send the right stuff out.* (Auckland, blue collar, female)

Quality

Associated with increased mistakes was the view that work quality also diminished if an employees work and life was out of balance.

Job satisfaction

While some derived satisfaction from working hard, there was a point where employees felt that overwork would impact on the level of job satisfaction an employee could gain from their job.

5.3 Work-life balance indicators

Discussion on specific life activities that are missing when a person had poor work-life balance uncovered a number of issues that could be used as an indicator for work-life balance.

Family time

Rather than just the time taken to look after the basic needs of their families, a key area that was sometimes missing was spending quality time with their families. Quality time was described as spending time just enjoying each others company and taking part in fun activities.

Many participants felt that time at work often meant that they also missed out on crucial stepping stones and key milestones in a child's development.

Time with partners away from their children was also considered important.

One thing I'd like to do more is spend more time with my wife, just the two of us as a couple, without the kids. The last time we went away as a couple was probably three or four years ago. We've made a conscious decision that next year it's my wife's 40th birthday and we'll go away somewhere, away overseas somewhere. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

Some felt that time spent with extended family was sacrificed (particularly those from a Pacific people and Maori background). Hearing the stories of their people and bonding with older relatives was seen as a crucial part of their culture.

I'm from the Bay of Plenty. I go down there and visit my grandfather. I love hanging out with my grandfather and listening to the things he has to say. (Auckland, Maori, female)

We have problems going away because we've got a big family. Got two teenagers and three under 10 so it's a bit difficult trying to fit everybody in the car plus we've got extended family with us too. So just having quality family time, especially with the three little ones and my partner, that's a nice day for us. Even taking them swimming out to the pools, having fish and chips for lunch, that's cool. (Auckland, Maori, female)

Time to reenergise

To keep healthy and happy, people felt that an individual had to have time to rest and reenergise. This time was defined in different ways by different participants but all associated activities involved time to reflect and relax. Some examples were:

- sleeping
- making sure weekends were kept free
- going for walks
- taking time to exercise
- reading books.

Because work drives me crazy and you've got to withdraw from it. To me having space to myself as well as all the other obligations you have in life is really important. (Christchurch, employers, male)

Hobbies

For many hobbies were an area that was sacrificed when suffering from poor work-life balance. Some would like more time to spend on hobbies or taking up activities they had an interest in, including:

- 'do it yourself' tasks around the home
- gardening

I thoroughly enjoy doing gardening so if I'm fully committed to working I'm not a nice person if I can't get in the garden. [How important is it to have time to yourself?] To me in my case it's very important. My girls have grown up so every now and then they step in and keep an eye on their father's needs which gives me a couple of hours away just to get out and regenerate my batteries. (Auckland, Maori, female)

Socialising

As mentioned previously many felt that time to socialise was one of the easier activities to sacrifice. A number noted that they would like to socialise more and cited a number of associated activities including:

- BBQs
- drinks
- movies
- watching and taking part in sport.

Volunteer work

Many that took part in volunteer work would like to do more. Most found the work very satisfying and while not rewarded financially they felt the non-financial rewards were immense. Most volunteer work was in areas that were seen to directly help people, which appealed to the altruistic side of people.

It was also seen as an activity that nurtured personal growth and self esteem.

5.4 Group differences

Blue collar employees

Specific examples of mistakes that could or have resulted from work-life imbalance were raised more readily by blue collar employees.

Pacific people/ Maori participants

Spending time with extended family was considered an important part of the Maori and Pacific people culture.

Maori participants

There were a number of activities nominated specifically by participants from a Maori background. The activities clearly illustrated the strong connection Maori had with the land and their people.

For urban Maori leaving the city and connecting with the land was a key goal. Many voiced a desire to visit family land and graves more regularly. There was also a strong desire to have time to fish and harvest indigenous food from the land.

VI. Addressing Work-life Balance

6.1 Communication on work-life balance

Most employees felt some reticence in raising work-life balance issues. New Zealanders were generally viewed as quite reserved and as the impacts of work-life issues spanned both work and personal issues, many felt they would be quite reluctant broaching the subject.

There was also seen to be an element of pride, where those who were able to cope with multiple tasks and duties seen to be viewed as more capable and successful.

Issues of work-life balance were seen to be most commonly raised with the following people.

Employers

If work-life balance was considered serious enough to discuss many claimed that they would raise the subject directly with their employer. If the issue was over hours or conditions that were impacting on other areas of their life it was seen as logical to raise the issue with the person that could address the issue.

In our workshop what my boss says is the ball's always in our tennis court. The door's always open. It's not based on me aiming something at him. It's just what makes us feel comfortable in the workplace and what works for us so if we say something, he'll try his best to make it work for us. (Auckland, Pacific people, male)

A few did note (mainly blue collar employees) that some employers were not open to discussion on such issues. Raising these issues could lead to a person being labelled a trouble maker or a difficult employee.

My boss isn't really approachable. It would have to get pretty bad because you're not normally on talking terms. (Auckland, blue collar, male)

We'd have to approach the boss about it and he says "yes, yes, don't do it, don't do the extra hours, don't do this but still get the job done, keep the customer happy". The bottom line is I've got to get my sales figures, that are it. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

Older employees showed greater reticence about raising work-life balance issues. A number stated that it was 'just not the thing to do' and that it was not the employers role to monitor the effects of work on an employers personal life.

Human resource department/ Supervisory staff

Some employees felt that they would approach their direct supervisor to discuss work-life balance issues. This approach was very dependent on the quality of the relationship the employee had with their supervisor. They would then trust the supervisor to raise the issue with those further up the chain.

Those working for a larger company would often approach their human resource department.

Colleagues

Some blue-collar workers cited instances where they had banded together as a group to approach their employer on conditions that were affecting their work-life balance. If other situations arose they felt it likely that they would approach colleagues to discuss the issue and then approach the employer as a team. This approach was seen to be more effective as they noted that there was 'power in numbers'.

Family

A number felt that they would talk over issues with their partner or other family members.

Friends

Female participants in particular felt that they would talk to friends about issues. It was felt that sharing problems with friends helped alleviate stress and also provided a sounding board on solutions to address the issue.

One of our neighbours, the husband was coming over to my place for a cup of coffee and a chin wag and in the end I said "pack it up, life is not work". He was stressed at work. He's changed jobs since. Everything at his place is all honky dory thank goodness; I was starting to run out of coffee. (Auckland, Maori, female)

6.2 Coping mechanisms

Participants were asked about the ways they managed or coped with work-life balance issues. Most coping mechanisms raised related to ways of managing the impacts of work-life balance outside the workplace, indicating that participants view the issue as one they are personally responsible for.

Organisation skills

Good organisation skills were seen as crucial for managing a busy work and home life. Most claimed to plan and prioritise tasks to ensure life ran smoothly.

[What do you do to make sure your life's balanced?] Plan things and try and be efficient with what I do. If there are two things in the same area I'll do them both at the same time. (Auckland, blue collar, female)

[What can be done at home or out of work to help work-life balance?] *Getting time management down to a 't'. On a certain day we want to wind down and say no to doing jobs or no to people coming over. Be wise. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)*

Some also noted that they had trained their children to be organised and to help with tasks around the home.

This is it with the children at home. My grandchildren, when they come into my house they take their shoes off at the door. They play with the toys and they pick them up and put them away. I find when I go to their home the toys are everywhere. If you taught them to pick up and put away there'd be hardly any cleaning. This is what I say to my daughter. Pick up, put away. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

Unplanned events

Parents were accustomed to having to deal with unplanned events. Most had back-up arrangements, relying on certain friends or family to step in when necessary. Making arrangements when unplanned events arose was clearly viewed as another stress parents had to deal with.

People without work commitments were identified and loose arrangements made in case of emergencies. These individuals were usually family or friends who also had children and were not working or were retired family members.

What you were saying about stress, I find illness in the family the most stressful because everything gets turned upside down. My calendar's got all this writing over it and then someone will be sick and I have to look at what's happening and phone calls and reorganise and I find that really stressful. (Auckland, blue collar, female)

[How do you manage unplanned events? Who do you rely on if you need some support in the family?] *Both of us work so it would be my mother. She's the next in the chain. Then my uncle. (Auckland, Pacific people, male)*

One partner was also often called upon to take leave if an event occurred. This was usually shared between the two partners on the basis of the relative importance of the job to the economic welfare of the family or the numbers of times a partner had already called on special leave entitlements.

[Who looks after your kids when you're at work?] *Daycare. I've got four but the oldest one doesn't live with me, he lives with my mum. [So you've got three in daycare?] One's just started school so there are just two of them now. [What happens when they're sick?] I have no choice but to stay home. That's what I entered on my contract when my boss asked if there were any reasons why I can't come into work and I said if I'm sick or if one of my kids are sick I won't come into work. That's what I put on my contract. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)*

Some noted that their employer had domestic leave allocations for when children were sick or allowed some flexibility in hours to manage unplanned events.

[What do you do when your kids are sick?] *One of the things is (domestic) leave. There's a very strong clause in our agreement about parental (domestic) leave. We can take as much time as we're entitled to. It's discretionary leave. My sick leaves are basically for my wife and my kids. We can just take time out.* (Auckland, Pacific people, male)

Saying no

Many said the best way to manage an imbalance between life and work was to say no in certain situations. These included, saying no to:

- overtime
- working weekends
- social commitments.

[What can be done in a workplace to help work-life balance?] *Just working within your allotted hours.* (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

Some noted that they had chosen to change from full to part-time work to facilitate a better work-life balance. While putting financial strain on the family it was seen to result in other benefits that outweighed the loss of income.

Making time

Referring to the key components of maintaining a healthy and balanced life – some noted that time needed to be made to take part in activities that may not be crucial to the running or financial health of the household but that nurtured emotional and spiritual health.

As these activities were not crucial for survival, they were often the first to be sacrificed when time became scarce.

Some conscious of the need to keep some balance claimed to make time for leisure activities and time out purely for themselves. This often required some household chores to be left unfinished.

My parents just live down the road from me so I take my son around there and say "I need time out" and off I go. [What do you like to do when you have your own time?] I read a lot. I like playing in the garden too, or just cleaning my house. Anything. Just something that I can do for just myself where I don't have to answer to any of my son's demands. (Auckland, Maori, female)

I make an appointment every four weeks. I go into the beauty therapist and I get something done for me. I don't often spend money on myself, just for me personally, and that's just something I go along and do and enjoy and I spoil myself for half an hour. (Auckland, blue collar, female)

Communication

Some felt that good communication was helpful in maintaining work-life balance. This included open discussion of family goals and learning to ask for help rather than trying to cope alone.

I use my extended family a lot more. I just can't do it all on my own. [Is that just recent?] Yes because I thought I could do everything at once and it got to the point where I'd be crying over stupid things like Shortland Street and I was thinking "hello" and then I sat down and said to myself that I can't do this any more. I'm trying to juggle school and I got a resubmit and you should have seen me, it was like "oh my God, I'm going to fail" and it just really made me think. It was an eye opener for me to say "I can't do all this and I need a hand". [Has that helped?] Yes. I've just learnt to leave things. (Auckland, blue collar, female)

Nurturing relationships

Damaged relationships were seen as a common impact of poor work-life balance, therefore nurturing their relationship was a top priority for some participants. This usually entailed spending some one-on-one time with their partner without their children.

One thing I've done in my role is that when I used to be invited out for lunches and things, or even watch games, my golden rule is any invitation that affects the weekends, you must have a ticket for my husband because that's our time together. I could work five days, I could be invited to anything and that's fine because he's at work but come weekends, he's got to be included. That's because it's our weekend. If I've got to go to a function they've got to have an invitation for both of us. The fact that I go to work anyway that's my choice if John and I can't do things, but if it's something that they're asking me to do then he has to be invited too. That's our rule. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

Leaving their job

A few had solved what they saw as poor work-life balance by leaving their job. This was generally when, certain positions had high levels of stress and employees could see no way to cut down the hours worked.

Some who had taken on two jobs to meet their financial goals, had given up one of the positions when it became evident it was impacting on their emotional and physical health.

Being positive

Some felt that maintaining a positive attitude helped work-life balance.

And alongside it just have a winning spirit, a positive spirit throughout the whole day. [Is that realistic though?] I think so. (Auckland, Pacific people, male)

6.3 Group differences

Female participants

Female participants were more open to discussing issues of work-life balance and were more likely to lean on friends if under pressure.

Older participants

Older participants appeared more reluctant to raise work-life balance issues with the employer.

Employees from large organisations

Those from larger organisations were likely to approach their human resource department if they wanted to discuss work-life balance issues.

VII. Initiatives for Work-life Balance

7.1 Current initiatives

Participants were asked about any initiatives their employer currently had in place to manage work-life balance.

On an unprompted basis, most employees could not recall many initiatives that helped manage work-life balance in their workplace, this could be due to the fact that many do not consciously think about work-life balance and subsequently do not link any work initiatives to this issue. The main initiatives cited were flexible hours and being able to take leave at short notice to cater for unplanned events.

One employee noted that there was a gym at their workplace.

[Anything in workplaces currently to help achieve a work-life balance?] Yes we've got a gym upstairs. That's quite good. We go there at lunchtimes. [That's probably about the best thing to do for stress. (Interjection.)] (Auckland, blue collar, male)

Another employee noted that they had counselling services on offer and were encouraged to take 'time-out'.

We've got an employee assistance process which is basically a helpline you can ring up and they'll refer you to counselling experts and things like that if you've got too much stress or anything else going on. [Is that helpful?] I don't know but we also have a chaplain who wanders around twice a week. He comes around and tries to speak to everybody, just talks to you. We're also encouraged to go for walks every now and then, just a quick stroll outside to get some fresh air, get the blood flowing, so that you're more alert you're your job. I find that works quite well. Then of course we play practical jokes on each other. (Auckland, blue collar, female)

One employer was seen to schedule regular meetings to discuss workloads and any issues impacting on work stress.

My employer, I'm pleased to say, is aware of that. In the job I do which can be pretty stressful from time to time because you're dealing with people who themselves are under a fair amount of stress, what my employer has is compulsory professional supervision so every month or at least every two months you go off and offload to someone else and say "this is the stuff I'm struggling with, this is the stuff that I want to talk through or this is some dealing that I had with some person which I found upsetting". They've been quite vigorous in promoting that and I think it's a really good thing actually. I'm quite fortunate there. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

In contrast employers nominated numerous initiatives that were in place at their workplace to help employees manage their work and life.

Communication

Open communication was cited as one initiative used to help with work-life balance. Many managers claimed to have an open door policy where employees could raise issues at any time.

Mine's really just informal. [Do they come and talk to you?] Yes and I talk to them just at staff meetings. I'm constantly telling them that other people's problems are not their problems. A lot of them take on problems on board and I'm always trying to educate them that it's not their problem, it's their job and it's just really informal. [So you're part counsellor as well?] Yes but we just support each other. Everybody has their moments. I encourage them to discuss them and not take them on board. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, female)

I think it's really important – one of the things we've talked a lot about in schools is values in schools. You can say you've got values but if you don't actually walk the walk no-one will feel comfortable to do anything so you've got to put in a huge amount of work so that everyone knows that if they come along and say "my husband left last night" it's not going to be all around the place. You've got to build up that trust and value. You've got to put so much work into it. [Do you think your employees think you walk the talk?] I honestly believe that they would. We've put a hell of a lot of effort into it. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, female)

A number of managers (mainly from larger organisations) scheduled regular one-on-one discussions with staff to monitor satisfaction with their job and provide a forum where staff could raise any issues. Some viewed holding regular appraisals as providing a similar forum.

Some also felt that holding regular group staff meetings were useful to create an atmosphere where issues could be raised openly and debated.

If I sit the staff down one to one, I get the sense that they feel a bit intimidated that I'm the boss and they're the worker and they daren't say too much. If there's a group of them they tend to be able to vocalise things easier because somebody will start something and the other one will reinforce it. That's easier and it works much better. (Christchurch, employers, male)

Monitor staff

Managers claimed to monitor the hours staff worked to ensure staff were coping with their workloads. Employment legislation relating to staff stress was seen to make this a more pressing priority.

I see some of my staff trying to take too much on because they're desperate for money and I have to occasionally say "stop, you can't do that extra shift because you're too tired, you're too worn out, you're too stressed out, you're snapping at the customers". You have to come between them and their desperation for more

money and just say "back off a bit". There is a responsibility of the employer.
(Christchurch, employers, male)

Some employers also tailored strategies around individual employees, which helped the employee cope with certain situations or unplanned events. An example was given where an employee was allowed to work shortened hours to attend marriage counselling. Larger employers were more likely to offer such strategies.

Organisational culture

A few employers claimed that their organisation promotes working only the standard hours with overtime very much the exception to the rule. This was encouraged by a culture where staff on premises after these hours was not lauded.

Some employers had set programmes on staff computers to remind staff to take a break.

Social interaction

Encouraging social interaction (especially between management and other staff) was seen as beneficial to staff morale. This sort of interaction was also seen to keep management abreast of issues and be able to identify issues such as work-life balance.

[As employers, is there anything you do?] I've only got a couple of guys. I try and take them and their partners up to Hanmer twice a year. Productivity for the next week or 10 days is normally up about 30% so it obviously does work. At the end of the day it all comes down to cost. If you're employing someone you've still got to make a profit to pay the government. (Christchurch, employers, male)

[Other measures in place?] Social clubs. Make sure you all get out together. Take duty for other people so whole groups of people can go down and have coffee at lunch. Just be aware of the fact that we've got to be together and get on together. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, female)

Workloads

Most employers felt that ensuring a fair and even spread of work amongst their employees helped to maintain work-life balance.

Some acknowledged that staff needed periods where work was not constant to allow staff time to think and take stock.

Childcare

Very few employers interviewed offered any form of childcare facilities or support but a few allowed children to be brought to the workplace in the event of emergencies.

[Unplanned events, do you let them go?] Yes. You've got to be flexible there too. I've broken down boundaries at work because I've brought the kids to work. If my wife's sick I've got a choice, do I stay home or do I let her look after the kids, so I've brought them in. [Do other staff members do that to?] In the past where the child may be too sick to go to school but not sick enough to stay at home and

that's what's happened which is great. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

Flexible hours/ compressed weeks

A number offered flexible work hours to allow staff to manage commitments outside the workplace.

We work four-day weeks, 10 hours a day. [Does that work well?] The guys love it. [Have you done it for a long time?] Ever since I've had these two guys on. The thing is if they want a day off any day of the week, as long as they let me know they just pick it up at the end of the week. They can actually choose their days. They get a long weekend every weekend. (Christchurch, employers, male)

If my staff said to me "gosh I've got to go to the doctors, is that alright?" to me their health comes first so I let them go. I'm not telling you this to make you think "she's great", I will then do their job or get somebody to do it. We cover each other. So if my staff need to go home early I've no qualms because their health has got to come first. If they've got family problems with children, like today I just came into work and one of my staff had to go to Australia, her brother's sick, I said "just get on the plane and go and we'll cover" so we all cover each other. I will do her job. That's the only thing I can do to help her. We don't have anything else that can support them. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

Rewards for work

Some felt that financial rewards were fair compensation for heavy workloads and helped offset any work-life balance effects.

Counselling

Some of the larger businesses interviewed had counselling services available to staff.

[In your workplace who could these people go and talk to about these issues?] We have 24-hour counselling, an 0800 number nationwide for staff and their family. No questions asked. Three sessions paid for by the company, don't know who they are, don't even know what the issue is. If the counsellor wants to add more they just check it out with me, they say they want three more sessions for this person. [Is it used?] Absolutely. I spend about \$5000 a year across the company. [Is it worth it?] Absolutely... [So they wouldn't necessarily go to you about the issue, they'd go to the counsellor?] Some people want to keep that stuff very private and we'll respect that. They don't want work to know everything about them. That's fine. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

7.2 Suggested initiatives

All participants were asked for suggestions on initiatives employers could offer to help employees balance work-life balance. These suggestions were to be additional to what were already offered by their organisation.

7.2.1 Employee suggestions

More money

Many from low socio-economic and blue collar jobs felt that higher pay rates would make the most difference to their work-life balance. This was seen to enable those that worked regular overtime or more than one job to cut down on hours worked. For these participants the extra jobs or hours worked were seen as a necessity to bring in enough income to survive.

Courses and counselling

There was some interest in companies offering courses, mainly in the areas of team building and stress management.

If she's got somebody in the workplace where she can actually go and say "look I'm having a hard day today, can I just disappear for half an hour, can I just go and sit and have a cup of coffee?" If there's somebody in the workplace – [Having more flexible work practices?] Yes or having a counsellor on site. (Auckland, Maori, female)

The thing is you can change your attitude up here. You can be taught to work smarter and harder. Working extra hours is quite often just a – up here that you're not – with me, the reason I work is because of the goals that are there but I can't get – when I get home I can't switch off so therefore they thought with stress management programmes they can teach you to switch off. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

Social clubs

Social clubs were seen as a good way to build a strong and committed team.

[Things that could happen in the workplace to help work-life balance?] You kind of need to have your workmates as your mates so you have to be doing a lot of – I hate the word but – team building things, not the real cheesy ones. You do need to maybe have a beer after work with your colleagues, have a bit of fun during the day, at lunchtime, go and kick a ball around or play some pool. (Auckland, blue collar, male)

Allowing more time

Some employees would like more realistic timeframes and allocation of time just to think, clear their paperwork and take stock.

Additional staff

There were calls for more staff to cover identified peak work periods and on-call staff to cover unplanned absenteeism.

[What could be done in the work environment to make the private life more happy then?] There needs to be enough staff, just like in the hospitals with the nurses and such like, that they need to have enough staff that those who are working there are not stretched beyond their limits. [That boils down to the profit and the money. (Interjection.)] (Christchurch, employers, female)

Childcare facilities

Offering childcare facilities was seen as an initiative that would encourage many mothers to return to the workforce as it made balancing childcare needs manageable.

Daycare is pretty important to have in the workforce. We don't have one but it would be a good idea because a lot of mothers want to work now but they can't because they can't afford the childcare. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

More fulfilling work

Some employees felt that trying to meet the work goals of employees and provide work that was fulfilling would help work-life balance.

Tailored solutions

Employees noted that an employer that was flexible and could tailor solutions to certain situations that arose in an employees life would help alleviate the stressful times.

If your relationship's not going right or someone in your family's not too happy and you take that stress to work, then it means your work's not going so well either so having a good supportive employer that's aware of those issues and can cut you a bit of slack when those things are happening is really important. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

7.2.2 Employer suggestions

Life skills

Some suggested providing education on life skills such as budgeting and saving. This was seen as particularly relevant to younger people and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

So if you create those skills at work for the employee to take home, they will work at home, and all of a sudden – won't work overnight – but will work through a path slowly. (Auckland, employers, small business, male)

Third party support

Some smaller employers raised the idea of having an independent third party available to counsel and provide support to staff and provide advice to the company.

Someone on the outside. When you're right in it you can't see the wood for the trees basically. You're just caught up into this little thing where you have to do these things and if you've got someone outside who says "you don't really need to do that"... [Outside your department or the workplace?] Just outside that circle that you're caught in. (Auckland, Maori, female)

It was acknowledged that small businesses did not have the resources to have a full-time staff member monitoring work-life issues and an independent organisation offering these types of skills to a number of small businesses was seen as a good solution for this.

[Cost in implementing things that would look at work-life balance?] It depends. A big company can afford to set something up like that if they've got different branches. I think there's a market for somebody to set up something like that that can set themselves up for small businesses at a cheaper rate because I think that's one of the things that small businesses have a problem with. They wouldn't be able to – [Have their own person maybe?] If someone was doing the equivalent of a big company – it's a good idea. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

7.2.3 Suggestions raised by both employees and employers

Flexible hours

Some employees were attracted to the idea of working flexible hours. Examples of this working successfully were raised, although it was acknowledged that this could not be offered by all employers due to the hours they had to operate.

[Seen examples of flexible hours working?] Yes, there were some guys I knew in a computer organisation and they were programmers or whatever you call them, they designed programs. As long as they met their criteria they had this in-house policy that you could work when you want. You could work at two in the morning if you want through to 10 in the morning or something like that. As long as you put in the hours, it was up to you when you put them in. [Was that successful for them?] Very good, yes. (Christchurch, employers, male)

Disclosing company goals

Open discussion on the future direction and goals of a company was seen to help work-life balance. This was seen to help people feel that they had some input into the direction of the company and to feel in more control of their destiny.

Things like clear communication on company objectives and targets and perhaps helping employees with work-related planning actually shows that they care, that they know what you're doing, that they know that you can be put under stress so it's like a realisation from above that "we do want to help you and this is what

we're prepared to do" which can really help attitudes. (Christchurch, employers, female)

Health care

Given that health problems were seen as a likely outcome of work-life imbalance, free health checks were seen as a good initiative. This was considered to be another way to monitor whether staff were coping with their workloads.

On-site gyms were another suggestion to improve the health of workers and help alleviate stress.

7.3 Prompted initiatives

7.3.1 General comments

A list of initiatives was put in front of participants. Employees were asked to nominate their levels of interest in the various initiatives and employers were asked whether they currently offer the initiative and likelihood of implementing the initiative in the future.

The initiatives were generally viewed as being easier for larger businesses to implement as they had greater financial resources. Employers from a number of larger organisations noted that many of the initiatives were already in place.

While helping employees, some of the initiatives were seen to add a greater work burden on senior managers that may have to implement and manage the initiatives. This was a significant issue as most managers already felt under pressure with nearly all acknowledging that their own work-life balance was poor.

Some of the initiatives were not seen to work with the particular type of industry the business operated in, such as the ability to offer flexible hours to retail sales staff.

[Key initiatives that would be really useful to have in a workplace?] There are some which would be really useful but we couldn't have them because of the nature of our business. Things like compressed weeks, working from home, flexible shifts, things like that. [Are these things that could be offered, or do you think most businesses can't fit these things in?] Very difficult for a lot of companies in the nature of their business. (Christchurch, employers, male)

7.3.2 Employee opinion

Employee views of the initiatives tested are summarised in the following Diagram 3. It must be noted that the graphical depiction is not statistically relevant as it is only based on a small number of respondents.

Amongst the initiatives tested the initiatives most commonly offered by organisations currently were communication on company objectives, flexible hours, four weeks annual leave, and workload planning.

Initiatives holding greatest interest for employees were stress management programmes, communication on company objectives, working part-time, counselling, and workload planning.

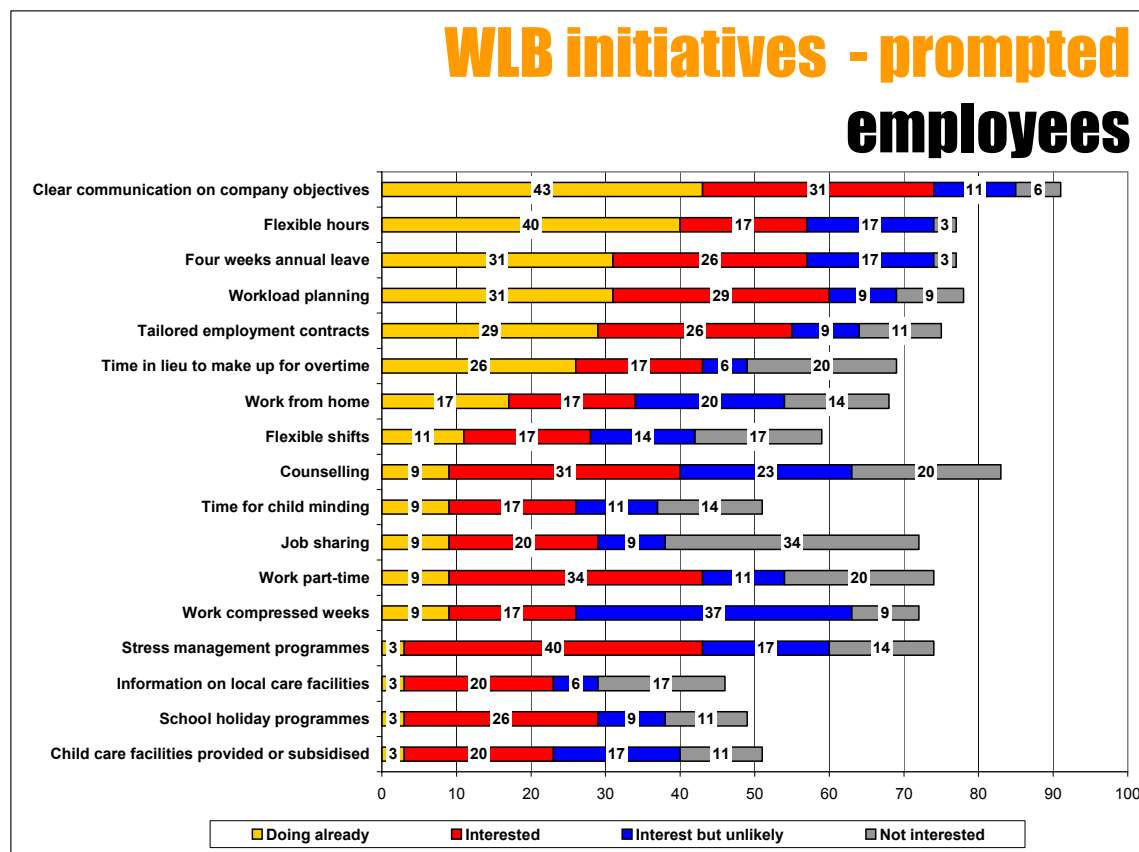
It was noted that many of the initiatives that were of most interest would not be that costly for a company to implement, namely communication on company objectives and workload planning.

Initiatives like stress management programmes and counselling were also not seen as that costly as they were not an on-going costs to a company. A few were more wary and cynical about initiatives such as counselling and the idea of work becoming involved in personal matters.

Stress programmes – that’s a load of codswallop and counselling. If men and women can’t sort their problems out that’s their problem. [Some people can’t though (Interjection).] It’s only a modern thing. (Auckland, Pacific people, male)

Recording quite strong interest but seen as unlikely to be offered by their company were working compressed weeks and counselling.

Diagram 3.



7.3.3 Employer opinion

Employer views of the initiatives tested were quite different. There was significantly higher nomination that initiatives were already in place – this may in part be due to the fact that

employers comfortable taking part in a research exercise are more likely to be good employers. Employer views of the initiatives are summarised in Diagram 4 following. Again it must be noted that these results are not statistically significant.

Initiatives most likely to already be in place were workload planning, being able to work part-time, tailored employment contracts and communication on company objectives.

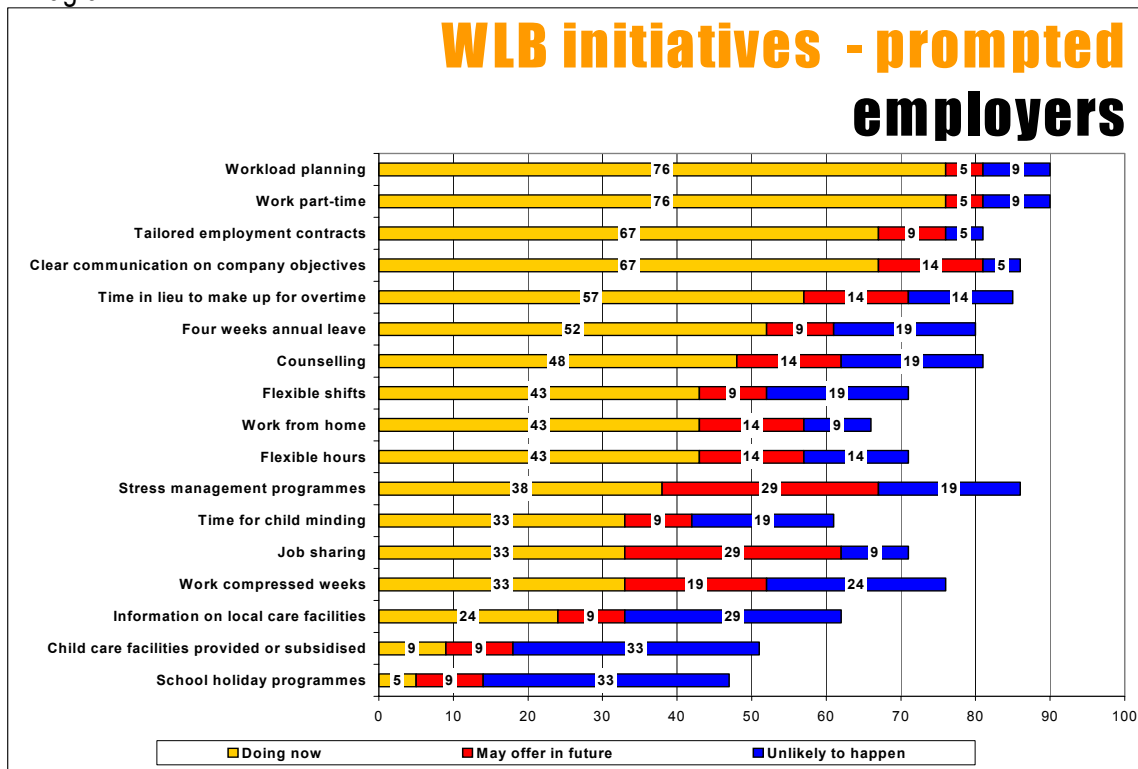
Amongst employers the initiatives that were most likely to be offered in the future were stress management programmes and job sharing.

Child care related initiatives were the least likely to be seen to be offered in the future. This was mainly due to perceived disinterest in the service or the cost of implementing childcare schemes.

[Anything that could be done around childcare issues in the workplace?] *We don't do anything like that. I have one couple employed. He maybe works during the day and she might work in the evening so the baby arrives, gets handed over and the other one goes home. Giving childcare is an expensive operation for most companies to set up with the health and safety and ACC and all these regulations. We used to have a thing where we looked after children while people bowled but the health and safety and all the rules and regulations just put a stop to it in the end.* (Christchurch, employers, male)

[Childcare?] *You can if it's feasible but to be honest with you, in our support office, there's only two people that would be affected. There's only two people with young children. You have to look at the whole thing.* (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

Diagram 4.



7.4 Group differences

Small employers

Most employers generally felt that many of the initiatives would be too expensive and difficult for small employers to implement. If some of the more expensive initiatives became compulsory there was a view that some small employers may not survive.

Medium/ larger employers

Medium to large employers were more likely to have many of the initiatives already in place and generally appeared more open to the prospect of implementing the initiatives.

Structured communication and staff monitoring processes appeared to be very common amongst larger employers.

VIII. Implementing Work-life Balance Initiatives

8.1 The benefits

Both employers and employees acknowledged that there would be benefits from implementing work-life balance initiatives. A key reason employers showed quite strong belief in the measures was that employers could relate to the issue personally and could therefore understand the impact endemic work-life imbalance could have on the workplace.

The main benefits are outlined following.

Staff retention

Many of the work-life balance initiatives tested during the study and that employers currently had in place were seen to enhance the working environment, which in turn was seen to lead to greater staff retention and loyalty.

Retaining quality staff was seen as a key benefit by employers who acknowledged that a lack of skilled staff was a major problem in the current labour market.

Attracting quality staff

A reputation for looking after employees and offering some of the initiatives outlined was also seen to make it easier to attract quality staff. With unemployment low it was seen as becoming increasingly more difficult to attract high calibre staff.

[What else would be a benefit to the employer as a result of this?] *You attract good staff. As I said before the big problem is you can't attract good staff. If it wasn't doing this stuff and didn't have a reputation, then it might even be harder.* (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

Higher productivity

Both employers and employees felt that productivity and subsequently profits would be improved by implementing work-life balance initiatives. Impacts of poor work-life balance raised earlier such as mistakes and lost of quality were seen to be reduced.

[Benefits to your business having these things in place?] *If you've got it all in place you'll have happy employees. If you've got happy employees then things happen, productivity happens.* (Auckland, employers, small business, male)

There's less accidents if people are healthy and happy and not tired and stressed. A lot of accidents when you're stressed. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, female)

I know for a fact that if you've got a happy work staff, you've got a happy workplace, and you do more productivity. There's no doubt about that. (Christchurch, employers, male)

You see these companies that do it and they all said one thing: productivity increased, profit came with it automatically. All they had to do was show the staff that they cared. Everything moved smoothly. They did things for their staff. [What did they do?] Incentives. There were so many. Daycare/crèche. Gym, [Large New Zealand company?] had one. That's so they can keep fit, stress release too. There was so much a lot of these people did. [Is it important?] Definitely. I took my husband to that dinner and he couldn't believe it because everything that we moaned about, these companies were fixing it. Shorter hours. That's the best one, they looked at it and did a three-day weekend so you had four days of 10 hours rather than five of eight. Then you got an extra day at the weekend. They took turns so people all had the extra day. (Auckland, Pacific people, female)

There's less accidents if people are healthy and happy and not tired and stressed. A lot of accidents when you're stressed. In teaching thankfully it doesn't happen very often but you could assault people and that would be huge, that would be the end of you. Some people probably assault people because they're under too much pressure. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, female)

Happier workforce/ workplace

The initiatives were seen to result in a happier and more harmonious workplace.

[What will they achieve?] It's intangible. You can't prove that spending money on counselling and hugging people and giving them certificates and awards and pats on the back and half a day off here and there makes a difference. We still have turnover but when they're there they seem to be more willing or engaged or wanting. They don't have so much of this nitpicking, backstabbing, all of that distracting stuff. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

If it creates less stress and people are happier, they're going to get more productivity. [Reasonable cost incurred compared to benefits] I would think so. (Auckland, blue collar, male)

They'll probably gain in the long run with higher productivity, less time off work, everyone's happy working for the company. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

A happier workforce was seen to result in lower absenteeism.

That's another way for you to measure whether you're successful, absenteeism. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

More motivated

Staff were seen to be more motivated and to feel more connection with an organisation if the organisation was seen to care about them. Having no balance was seen to impact on the level of commitment and fulfilment that could be achieved from a job.

If a rush job arrives then you'll find people are more likely to stay on. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

If you don't have a balance, you lose interest in your work and you lose the enjoyment of your work. It's really important that you keep some equal proportions, particularly in stressful situations. (Auckland, employers, small business, female)

If they make it more attractive to the worker, then the worker will give 100+. The profitability of the company you work for will improve enormously. [Lower staff turnover?] Yes. [Better safety record?] Better safety record, yes. Better education to the worker working in your company. The employer will do that for the worker. More training for the staff. (Auckland, Pacific people, male)

Breakdown management culture

Acknowledging the problems people have outside work was seen to give an organisation a more personal and caring persona. It was seen to help breakdown the barriers between management and other staff.

[Outcomes?] The environment I work in is "we're going to screw over the employers because they screw over us". It's a battle in a way. It's like them versus us. We're going to be as lazy as possible because they're ripping us off. It's just a whole battle mindset. We shouldn't be working in an environment like that. We should be working co-operatively. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

[Benefits?] Employees attitude. [How has the four-day compressed week affected your employees?] Yes they're a lot happier. You do get a little bit more work out of them but that's not the main thing. They're not inclined to go out on a job and bad mouth you like they normally would. They're not so stressed. It's their choice. It's up to them to make it work because that's what they asked for. [I think people like to be given choices. (Interjection.)] (Christchurch, employers, male)

Happier communities

Introducing work-life balance initiatives in the workplace was seen to have wider repercussions than just in the workplace. Enhanced work-life balance was seen to create happier communities and families.

[Likely outcomes of having these things in place?] I think if all these things were in place people would be happy in their work, much more happy than they clearly are now. You'd go away to your family and to other situations a better person for it, more relaxed, less stressed. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

8.2 The barriers - employers

Employers were asked what would be the issues likely to stop them implementing work-life balance initiatives.

Cost

A key consideration was cost. Some of the initiatives were seen as costly to the employer, namely provision of childcare facilities and extra weeks of annual leave.

Provision of childcare facilities on-site was seen to have many associated compliance costs.

Larger organisations were seen as more able to afford the costs of implementing work-life balance initiatives.

It really depends on how big the organisation is you're working for. I know down here in the waterfront industry, they've got all kinds of social activities but they've got a workforce of probably something like 400 people so there's always somebody who's not working. They've got football clubs, gymnasiums, everything. They have inter-sports between other ports and we can tag on to that. They welcome us with open arms to use any of their facilities or join their football teams. Being a small business we spend all our time working. So I think probably the size of the industry – [Less chance in smaller businesses] I certainly think so. (Auckland, employers, small business, male)

Management of initiatives

Many of the initiatives were seen to involve significant time and effort to implement and manage. Unlikely to take on additional staff to manage such initiatives it was acknowledged that owners (small businesses) or senior managers were more likely to have to take on the additional roles, which led to some reluctance to implement what were seen as the more time consuming initiatives.

It was noted that many employers (especially smaller employers) were busy just managing the day-to-day running of their businesses and had limited time to devote to issues not integral to the specific running of the business.

Lack of knowledge

Some admitted to a lack of expertise in implementing many of the initiatives (mainly smaller business owners). This made the decision to implement such a programme a significant decision as it entailed a steep learning curve for the owner or commissioning an outside consultant.

[Key barriers to businesses doing more?] Expertise and knowledge and knowing what to do and being worried. People immediately get worried that it's going to be a terrible huge thing and that it's going to cost them heaps. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, female)

There were calls for concrete cost-benefit information that highlighted the initiatives which worked best for different types and sizes of organisation.

Raising expectations

There were a few employers that felt that implementing the initiatives would just raise the expectations of employees and make them want more. The cynical view was that employees were never happy with what they received.

8.3 Group differences

Small employers

Smaller employers were more likely to be concerned about the costs involved in implementing work-life balance initiatives. Some initiatives were also only considered viable for large organisations that had the resources and manpower to implement them.

Small businesses felt under pressure just running their businesses and were not keen to take on additional work implementing initiatives they were not necessarily sure would effect their bottom line.

Small employers were also more likely to lack the expertise to implement initiatives.

Medium/ larger employers

Human resource departments of larger organisations were seen to be implementing many of the initiatives already. There was general acknowledgement that addressing work-life balance issues would benefit their organisation and that implementing initiatives enhanced their image as a good employer.

XI. Roles and Responsibilities

9.1 Responsibility for work-life balance

9.1.1 General

Responsibility for maintaining a healthy work-life balance was primarily seen to lie with the individual. Most employees felt that people needed to stand up for themselves if they got into a work situation that was impacting on the rest of their life. It was also acknowledged that employers may not know what is happening outside work that may be impacting on work-life balance.

[Who should be responsible to ensure there is a good work-life balance?] It's got to be yourself. It's your life. You control it. (Auckland, blue collar, male)

[Who is to blame for work-life imbalance?] I think you have to take it on yourself really because only you can change it really. You have to try and do it yourself because you're the one that's working. (Auckland, Maori, female)

[Who has to be responsible for achieving a work-life balance?] The individual. You can't force another person to do it. It has got to come from their own motives. I really feel that people have to be responsible. They create their own work-life balance. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

You make lifestyle choices. If we lived somewhere cheaper our bills would be less. (Auckland, blue collar, female)

9.1.2 Employer role

Asked directly if the employer had a role to play in ensuring there was effective work-life balance for employees there were two distinct views put forward.

On the one hand, participants felt that it was unfair to expect the employer to be responsible for an issue that may be affected greatly by factors outside the workplace.

[Do you feel sorry for employers now?] You can't put an individual's responsibility back on the employer. The employer will have a responsibility to create a work environment that's pleasing. However if someone chooses to live life at both ends and come to work absolutely shattered and falls over because of exhaustion but I think they're charged with creating a work environment that people can enjoy and putting a balanced workload or putting the process in place or putting the people in place to control that. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

I don't think there is such a thing as a work-life balance. That's to be expected from an employer because he expects you to come in and do what he pays you to do. There's no buddy buddies. You have your breaks and you're finished. You've done the job properly and your eight hours is up. That's as far as it goes. He treats you fairly and civilly. That's all that's expected. Because if you don't, you can turn up, punch him in the snout, pick up the tools and bugger off. (Auckland, Pacific people, male)

On the other hand, it was seen to be fair to expect an employer to provide a good working environment, with many of the initiatives tested seen as the basic components of such an environment. Most employers agreed that it was their role to provide a good working environment.

We've got to improve the quality of the staffroom in the childcare centre. A much more comfortable couch and better tea and coffee-making facilities. We need to put in a shower because these are the things now that employees are making judgement about whether this is a good or a bad workplace, or if they've got a job offer here and a job offer there, this one's got all this other stuff. You get to the point where it actually becomes part of a whole proposition of being a good employer. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

It was also considered the responsibility of the employer to ensure a job was generally able to be completed within standard working hours.

As employers we have to make sure they have time off. What they do with their time is up to them. [There is a role for employers?] Definitely, we roster them on and provide the jobs. (Auckland, employers, small business, female)

[Who is to blame for imbalances?] I think it's really the employer's responsibility – I don't say blame – but to make a job doable. A job's got to be within parameters that a human being can actually do within a 40-hour week because I don't know where we abandoned the 40-hour week because our forebears fought for it and I think it's our turn to fight for it again. I think we just gave it up. If one person can't do one job then that's where it's wrong. We've seen, people in their 50s, one job become two jobs becomes one person doing three jobs. I do think that's a responsibility of the employer. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, female)

Larger employers were seen as more likely to consider issues such as work-life balance and have measures in place to alleviate and help employees manage these issues.

I would think the average small employer wouldn't give a lot of thought to whether his staff are stressed or not. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, female)

9.2 Government role

Posed with the role Government could play in fostering healthy work-life balance, there was an emphatic rejection by employers of any form of legislation.

[If the government said "do these things, they'll benefit you", do you think the smaller employer would believe that?] No-one likes things forced upon them.

Business mentors are fantastic. Looking at small businesses, looking at this legislation, how they're going to enforce it in the business, but enforcement is not right. Where I am because of the mass, the size, we will basically employ someone to make sure it happens. A small business is a totally different situation. It tends to be a one-man band. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

[Has the government got a role in trying to achieve work-life balance?] I feel that the government has better things to organise, to keep out of some parts of your life. Don't legislate what you can and can't do. People have choices to make. (Auckland, employers, small business, female)

Education

Some participants felt that it would be beneficial for the Government to raise awareness and education on the benefits of maintaining a healthy balance between work and life. Currently most people were not seen to consciously consider work-life balance, this was seen as one way to make people consider and assess their own and their employees' work-life balance.

There was also seen to be a role in educating people on the best ways to manage and cope with work-life balance issues. These needed to cover both aspects at work and outside work.

Government and the media have a role to play in re-educating people in terms of what a good balance is because I think for so long we've assumed that the more work you do the better it is. I saw the DNZ documentary on workaholics the other week that was saying hang on a minute, maybe these people have an abnormal condition and maybe they need help and that the average person would like to work 30–40 hours but not 60–70 and shouldn't feel guilty and a failure because they're not. I think if the media and the government start like smokefree health and good eating practices, say this is good mental health because the goods that come from that benefit are voluntary groups, the person themselves, their relationship with their children and their partner and that creates a sense of wellbeing that we currently haven't got or we don't have enough of, so I think the media and the government can have a role to play in terms of education in terms of what's a fair measure of work. (Christchurch, white collar, male)

[Do you think the government could raise awareness on it?] A little bit more education because I think the majority, 80% of businesses, have five employees or less. It's just something that's not really focused on. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, female)

Best practice/ cost-benefit information

Called for more by employers, were work-life balance best practice guidelines tailored to different types of organisations.

[Is there a role for the government in all this?] I think the government, with health and safety and stuff like that, I think they've got a role there to set certain guidelines but not get too carried away. [I don't think they're going to over-regulate. (Interjection.)] (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

Employers requested cost-benefit information on the impact implementing the various initiatives would have on their business. There were suggestions these could be presented in a case study format.

One of the things that might get the message across even more is one of those cost benefit things. I know they do it with motor vehicle accidents when they're trying to get big firms to take on trainers. The same thing, once you get back to absenteeism, what's it costing you in lost staff turnover, having to train someone, how many hours you spend training new people. If someone said it's costing you \$20,000 a year because you've got lost time here and here, for \$5000 I can set up systems that will save those people, I'd do it. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

Role model as an employer

It was seen that as a large employer, the Government should be acting as a role model on issues such as work-life balance.

Subsidies

Employers would like to receive subsidies for implementing some of the more costly initiatives such as setting up childcare facilities.

Private childcare facilities tend to put more pressure on the pocket and expenses for the employers ... providing childcare facilities which are subsidised that would definitely make employers happy. I have an employee with a small kid and she said it costs so much to send a child to a childcare facility. Too much cost. (Auckland, employers, small business, male)

The government could step in and make childcare a bit cheaper, more subsidies too. I was going to go out to work when one of them was younger but it wasn't worthwhile the amount of hours I could work for the amount of childcare I would pay. Even like solo parents, there's no incentive for them to get out there and work. There's not enough of a bonus in it for them. At the end of the day they're not making a lot of money between what they're paying in childcare – whereas Australia have got a good system that childcare is really cheap and they're really pushing for these solo parents or parents of children to get back out to work again. (Christchurch, employers, female)

Provider of services

There was a suggestion that the Government could set-up a service that provided services to small businesses that could not afford to provide the facilities in-house such as counselling and expertise in setting up different services.

If they had the facilities under the government's umbrella of a counsellor available that small businesses could use if they had a problem, they could send their staff there. I don't know quite how you'd pay for it. [The taxpayer would pay for it. (Interjection.)] (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, female)

In education if you have a child with special needs then you can go and get an occupational therapist, a physiotherapist, or whatever. The government could set

up little groups like that around the country that were a facilitation area, more of an expertise sharing, something like that. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, female)

Tax breaks

A not uncommon call by employers was for the Government to reduce company tax rates on the basis of alleviating the cost of implementing work-life balance initiatives.

A tremendous tax break to take on board the culture. There must be some financial incentive. (Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

Shaping society

Some felt the Government could help to shape different societal values. Current societal values were seen to be very focused on money, a focus which was seen to contribute to an imbalance between life and work.

9.3 Information

9.3.1 Information on work issues

Employees said they gained most information on general work issues from the following sources.

- Work colleagues
- Friends and family
- The Department of Labour
- The Internet
- Company protocol and procedure manuals
- Unions

9.3.2 Information on work-life balance issues

Participants were asked where they would be likely to seek information on work-life balance issues. Answers to this question were quite different to general information sources on work issues.

It was clearly viewed as an issue with a wider scope than the workplace and many felt extensive research would be available on the issue.

Main sources of information were:

- The internet
- The library
- The Department of Labour

- The Inland Revenue Department
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Company health and safety officer
- Their employer
- Unions

Unions

As most union members do not have day-to-day contact with union representatives other sources of information on work-life balance were more likely to be used before the union.

Unions were also viewed as more concerned with issues such as pay and conditions rather than “grey areas” like work-life balance.

[Unlikely your union would get involved in this issue?] *I think more at the shop level but at the shop level it's more how they're paid and the conditions of work.*
(Auckland, employers, medium-large business, male)

Employers also raised the following organisations as possible sources of information on work-life balance:

- OSH
- Employer networks such as EMA
- EEO Trust

9.4 Group differences

Small employers

While all employers were against legislation on work-life balance issues, possible legislation was particularly frowned upon by small employers.

Possible legislation was seen to hurt small businesses the most, as they would be less able to afford any associated compliance costs.

X. Rural Mothers – Work-life Balance

10.1 The definition of work

While rural mothers were not in formal paid work, most defined much of what they did as work. Some broadly considered work to be anything that gave life meaning and could be described as productive, which included raising children and looking after relatives.

For me work is anything that gives your life meaning. When you're spending your time productively whether it's raising a child or being an executive in a company or whatever, it's whatever you are doing that's being productive and gives your life some sort of meaning. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

I thought of it slightly different. I thought of the work as the hard graft whether it be 10 loads of laundry every day, and the life is the fun bit going down to the ski fields. I think we're all actually working. I thought of hard graft, fun. [In today's society being at home you're not seen as that but we are sure. (Interjection.)] People say, "What do you do all day?" (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Some also did office work for their business and did work on their property.

We've got our own business so I also do all my husband's correspondence and quotes and accounts and stuff like that. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

[Work?] One would be children, a five-year-old and a 15-month-old. The rest of the time is the land. We've got 20 acres. [What do you do on that?] Lambing, vegetable garden, gardens, fencing, mowing. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

10.2 Defining work life balance

The key difficulty for rural mothers relating to work life balance was that for them the distinctions between work and private life were often blurred.

The problem I have with this is that they are one and the same. Work and private life are the same. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Work life balance for this audience was viewed broadly and not just in terms of their own personal balances. For some achieving work life balance was about bringing balance to their family as a whole. For these respondents the more traditional family environment where one partner worked while the other provided quality care for their children was thought to bring balance in their lives.

I suppose for me at the moment it's something about wanting to give my children a good quality of life. That means for me being there for them at the moment. In that sense I feel like I have got a good balance because I'm fortunate that my

husband's earning enough that we can have that balance, that I'm there for them and he's working. For our work-life balance at the moment, I think that means that I don't work and that we're giving quality to our children. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Choosing not to work in favour of looking after children presented trade offs as financial stability was often eroded.

I guess it's having enough money to cover your basic costs but at the same time being able to give quality too and that can be a difficult thing because sometimes we feel financially we're pretty stressed and in that sense you could argue we're not giving our kids best quality compared to if I was working kind of thing. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

For most, however, staying home to look after children was a short-term plan. In the long-term, as children aged, some rural mothers desired more complementary roles where both partners worked part-time and both were actively involved in raising children.

I suppose ultimately what we would like to aim for is a situation where perhaps he could even cut back in hours and I could work part-time, something like that. Before we had kids we were both working full-time and we both like the idea of being in a more complementary situation where perhaps we're both working part-time and he has more involvement with the kids, but at the moment that's just not really possible. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Some noted that work life balance should not be viewed as a point in time but rather as part of a wider picture of different life stages.

I think you tend to look at your life in a whole sense as well like at the moment I'm a full-time mother but prior to having my kids I've had a career over a decade or whatever and so in that sense I feel okay. I've had that period of time when I was knocking myself out working the long hours at a full-time job so I suppose in a certain sense it's just that this is a different phase. I probably will ultimately get back into a job; it's just that at the moment I'm not. I guess that's part of the balance as well that you look at your life – you're not just living at a point in time. You have got this history and you're balancing that up as well in a way. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

In line with other participants in the research, rural mothers also noted that balance was about meeting all those needs that were important including physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and social needs.

Balance for me is basically having the basic needs met so that you are getting your physical needs met whether that be rest or nutrition or whatever, your emotional needs met, mental needs so you're not constantly physically or emotionally stressed with whatever you're doing, and even like spiritual needs. So it's just having all those elements in balance. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

There are three distinct areas of your life. There's your business area or whatever you do that's productive during the day whether it be childcare or whatever. Then you've got like a social aspect of your life and a personal aspect of your life. If any one of those three gets out of balance then I think that on some level you end up suffering. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

10.3 Finding a balance

For this audience finding a balance was a challenge. The attitude of partners was crucial. Some noted that their partners often did not understand how relentless the role of a mother was, while partners worked nine to five and then switched off, mothers were seen to need to keep going.

I'm in the typical nuclear family situation being the full-time mother. I have worked full-time before but I think when you're full-time home with the kids the difference you notice is when your husband comes home from work, he has an expectation that he's not expected to work when he gets home whereas as a woman at home you still basically have to be there on call all the time for the kids. They get up at six, they go to bed at half past eight and you're the main – he'll take a book outside sometimes and go out and read for half an hour outside or something whereas I don't – I think men who have never had full-time care of kids don't really understand what a – [Their working day starts at nine and finishes at five, and yours starts at six in the morning. (Interjection.)] It's not like you can step away from it really, not at the moment anyway. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

The lack of predictability in the role that mothers played meant that at any time something could crop up and throw out any sense of balance that they may have momentarily achieved.

What you're trying to actually achieve is getting that balance perfectly right and you think sometimes you're there and then a curve ball comes and suddenly it's all skew whiff so you have a week where you're running around like a mad thing and then the next week you might actually have some time to do something that you want to do. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

10.4 Impacts of a work life imbalance

It was clear that rural mothers had many roles to play. Trying to do too much could take its toll. One rural mother spoke from experience about the impact of not having balance in their life, which had resulted in depression.

I was actually oblivious to how my life needed to be balanced until I started getting depressed and I now see that it's really huge. I pretended I could do everything and I could do nothing. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

For most rural mothers a key impact of a work life imbalance was not being able to be involved in activities that were completely separate from their kids. Some were frustrated at their lives being defined only by their role as mother. Others noted that their lives were structured around the timetables of others.

I love having the kids but they drive me nuts and I need time out. I want to be there for them after school but it would be really nice to have something different as well. I'm a solo mum as well now. You get sick of being so and so's mother or your husband's wife. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

My life revolves around still nine to three. I basically drop my daughter off at school and I'm usually there to pick her up because she doesn't live within walking distance of school. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

[Examples of things that make the balance hard to achieve?] *It's literally the kids for me. I would like to achieve something more for myself but at the moment the need for me to be there for the kids I think is making me put that on the back burner.* (Christchurch, rural mothers, female)

Being involved in an activity that was just for themselves was viewed as important for helping to achieve that work life balance.

I think too perhaps what sometimes you do miss is actually achieving something that's completely separate from your kids. If you have had a life before you had kids, I found that quite hard to give up. I suppose that's a personal frustration for me at the moment that I'd quite like to be doing and I have tried dipping my toes in the water a wee bit, trying to do something after they've gone to bed but there's just really not enough time to do a lot. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

There is just no time that fits in where I can actually do something for myself. That's where mine is actually out of balance at the moment because I don't have a lot of time to myself. I think it would be nice but I just can't see any way of actually fitting it in, so without compromising something else. I still want to be there for my children. [Because in their teens it's still as important. (Interjection.)] Exactly. She's 16 and I want to be there. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

For some rural mothers, especially solo-mothers, the social aspect to their lives was particularly important. They noted that a lack of social time to interact with other adults left them feeling isolated.

I found one of the hardest things for me being a mother, and a solo mother too, never having any personal time and then feeling isolated because of lack of social time where you get to actually interact with other adults. That's something that I've personally have had to work at is making sure I got enough social personal time so I didn't feel like I was suffering emotionally. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Others noted that living in rural areas made it harder to find activities for themselves outside of the family. As a rural mother extra effort was required to find activities that suited as they often had to drive into town, which required extra effort and did not seem worth the hassle.

[If you had more time for yourself, what would you be doing?] *I'd like to be able to have time for study. People keep saying to me tennis and golf. I just don't do that because I don't have time. It is my own fault because my husband's always telling me to do this and do that but it's just too much of an effort sometimes because you're knackered. You get home and you can't be bothered getting back into the car and going back into town to do something. It's probably the fact of living out of town, that travel thing. I can stay in town which I have done, to do things but you get home about 9.30/10.00 at night and you're shattered again so the rewards I'm going to reap are probably not enough for me to make that extra effort.* (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Some noted, however, that it was important not to feel guilty if you were unable to achieve anything apart from taking care of your children.

Perhaps it's also about not making yourself feel guilty about the things that you're not doing. I'm trying to get into that mindset. If all I do after the kids go to bed is have a hot bath, a cup of tea and a chocolate biscuit, it's like that should be enough, and maybe read a book for a little while. One of the struggles I have is I always think I should be achieving something apart from the kids. Maybe it's because having had that working life, but at the moment in order to be happy I think I just need to let go of thinking like that at the moment. I just have to live life and let go. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Rural mothers agreed that imbalances in their lives also impacted widely on other family members.

Mum tends to be the centre of the family and if she's stressed and unhappy then everyone else is going to be too. There can't be anything worse than Dad coming home to a stressed Mum after a hard day at work. That's the last thing he wants to deal with. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

[Key impacts of having a work-life imbalance?] Unhappiness. Relationship stress with children and partners. Mental illness. Financial takes the balance out too. The gin bottle gets a bit of a knock. (Christchurch, rural mothers, females)

10.5 Current measures to control imbalances

Finding time for yourself

Some rural mothers were able to find small amounts of time for themselves, which helped to bring balance. Hobbies that made people feel useful or activities that allowed for a little bit of self-indulgence were important for achieving balance.

[Anything you're currently doing within your home to help bring balance?] For me it's the painting thing because it's making me feel a wee bit useful as well as doing something I enjoy doing. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

I like to sometimes go to a nice coffee shop or go and treat myself to an eyelash tint or something. A little bit of self-indulgence. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Support networks

Some relied on both their immediate and extended family for support when they needed extra help. Local support networks had also been developed through meeting other parents in similar situations who were able to lend a hand in times of need.

In my particular case, if something was wrong with the kids or I got really sick, my husband would take time off work. I've also got a very supportive mother-in-law and she's a great source of support as well. Also there are people who I've met through having kids who live locally a couple of doors down or whatever who I know in an emergency I could turn to. I think you naturally tend to generate your own little networks. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

It depends what really has happened. Mainly family. I used to have a girlfriend who lived around the corner and if either of us was held up the other one would

go and pick the kids up. You just build up these little support networks. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

We're quite isolated and nobody has anything to do with each other in my little wee neighbourhood but our Plunket group has been really the only contact. We're all a similar age with something in common. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Some noted that traditional family and community support networks were eroding as more people were now working and had less time to help others.

Is it the fact that the support that say our mothers had is not there. Everybody you know is working. There was a network of support that was there. You could go to your neighbour, your sister, your aunt. That solid fabric that was there is not there any more. Everything's fragmented that way. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

10.6 Work life balance initiatives for rural mothers

Most rural mothers felt that there was a role for government in helping people achieve a work life balance. One key area identified was the need for government to more actively value the role of mothers/ parents.

[Has the government a role to play in any of these things?] I think parenting needs to be – mothering probably – needs to be valued more and whether that's by paying mums to stay at home or helping them out or I don't know what, I think there should be something there that makes us feel more valuable. [Financial or advice?] Maybe advice, maybe the opportunity to study. I don't know, that would be a hard thing to work out but I just think it isn't valued at all. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Some suggested courses that taught parents how to find a good balance in their lives. Courses, however needed to be affordable.

Perhaps courses available for people about parenting. Whether they're having problems with children or for whatever reason. Also maybe other courses on helping us find the balances, not putting so much pressure on ourselves. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

There's a lot of parenting with confidence courses out there now, which are really good but really expensive. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Many rural mothers were interested in further study to improve their prospects of finding fulfilling jobs that they could fit around family commitments. They were reluctant to commit to study however, as fees were seen as expensive.

I think the fees are an issue. I'm tossing around the idea of teaching as I'm sure every woman with young children thinks about that one because of the hours but the fees are horrendous. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

The general cost of living was another area that put pressure on families. One rural mother felt that the Goods and Services Tax (GST) should be removed from basic food items like fruit and vegetables.

[Key things that could be done to help balance work?] I was thinking generally that the government should maybe look at taking GST off basic food and fruit and vegetables. I think that would actually be a very good thing. I find one of our biggest expenses is groceries and it is expensive. [Is cost a major factor?] In some ways it's a minor issue but I'm still saying if you're talking about taking off a little bit of pressure I think that would be something. Why is there GST on things like flour? (Christchurch, rural mothers)

10.7 The place of work

Some rural mothers felt that there was an expectation that mothers should return to paid employment, which added to pressure their situation.

[Is there a stronger expectation that you stay at home or go back to work?] Go back to work. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

I lived in the Middle East for eight years and I came back to New Zealand. I hadn't worked. I had my children over there and hadn't worked. I was amazed at how many people would ask me what are you doing and I'd say I've got three children and they'd say "yeah but what do you do for a job". (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Some felt that an expectation that mothers should return to work was related to the general under valuing of the roles of mothers in society.

When I said to someone that I had three children, they said, "Don't put yourself down, you must be capable of other things". I just said I think I'm privileged to be able to stay at home. It was a male. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

I think a lot of working people; probably particularly younger people tend to look at women wheeling their kids around as basically being losers. That's the reality of it. A lot of the people I work with seem to have a pretty low opinion of women who weren't out in the workforce. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Working at some stage was a goal for most of these rural mothers but the timing had to be right.

[Having the chance to work?] It's not something I'd immediately like to do tomorrow but something I'd like to achieve – like you were saying once they're at school I guess your options open up. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Some rural mothers were interested in working (paid work) and felt that working may bring some balance into their lives. For some the opportunity to work was viewed as the chance to do something for themselves away from the family. Some also felt that being able to contribute financially to the well-being of their family was important.

[Is working about having something for yourself?] *For me it would be partially about having something that I was achieving for myself. Also the money. There's no doubt about it. Maybe there is an element of having two girls; I quite like the idea of them seeing me go to work as well.* (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Women have become more liberated and women do like to stand by themselves? I suppose in my first marriage I felt the same way. I felt I wasn't a person; I was his wife and their mother. I thought my life was very unbalanced then. Nowadays people decide that if they want to work and get money and do what they want to do. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Why should my husband be the full provider now when I can hopefully go out and be contributing to the family and our lifestyle now? I don't have pressure put on me but its part of me that I would like to be doing that. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

The social aspect of work was also an attraction for some.

[Anything you miss out on because of imbalance?] *Socially. Don't see friends or you don't have colleagues as such.* (Christchurch, rural mothers)

For rural mothers, however, most job opportunities in rural areas were viewed as unappealing and characterised by low rates of pay.

[Are there different issues for people living in rural areas trying to achieve a work-life balance?] *Distance and jobs available. If I wanted to get a job locally they'd be limited.* (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Its terrible money locally, not something I'd want to do all the time. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Some had tried to work but resigned, as the work was unsatisfying. Some rural mothers indicated that the enjoyment that work could bring was more important than levels of remuneration.

My youngest is six, I've got eight and 12 as well, and when my daughter hit five I felt that I wanted to go back and do some work just to get some extra money and I hated the job so I just left. I did feel like I wanted to go and earn some money but I decided that the quality of work was going to be better for me. I want to do something that's going to be meaningful. Doing something that I enjoy doing. I'd rather get paid less for doing something I really enjoy. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Others noted that childcare facilities were not readily available in rural areas and they tended to be expensive and of poor quality.

I find that childcare is a lot more expensive in rural areas. You don't have the choice like you would in town so if you are wanting someone to look after the children after school for a couple of hours it's horrendous prices and they're not particularly good facilities. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

The expense of childcare and other related costs of getting back into the work force were too great for some rural mothers who felt that they would be financially worse off if they went back to work

I looked into it. If I went back to the bank part-time and worked those hours between nine and three, if I wanted to work longer than that by the time I paid for childcare, travel costs, make-up, hair and all the rest of it that you're expected because you're a frontline person, then I was actually financially worse off. I didn't want to go back to the bank anyway. I thought I'd do something I really want to do so that by the time I go back out there I can be working full-time and doing something I really enjoy and hopefully I'll never be in this position again. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Others were also concerned about the social cost of putting children into childcare.

I think people who think that the solution for them is to go back and work full-time and put a two-year-old in childcare full-time, I think you would soon discover that there was an imbalance there. Maybe some kids do adapt to it but I think you would end up paying the price with the child – (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Further to issues of childcare some rural mothers felt that the workplace was not sensitive to the needs of mothers wishing to return to paid employment. They felt that work opportunities needed to be more in tune with the realities that mothers faced.

One thing I've been thinking about a lot recently is the way the workforce is so totally out of touch with the needs of women, just simple things like the school day starting at nine. You've got to get your children to school by nine o'clock and that is actually quite a big mission. When does the work day start? 9am or 8:30am? I think perhaps the workforce still has yet to catch up with the realities of what people are dealing with in their lives. When I was working full-time I was always able to start at half past eight because I didn't have any kids but there'd be people arriving a bit late and they'd always get chewed out about it and that just seems ridiculous given what people have to deal with. (Christchurch, rural mothers)

Appendices

Work-Life Balance Question-line - Employees

<p>Work place issues Looking at this stage just to see whether work-life balance comes up spontaneously as a major issue</p>	<p>General warm-up question.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss current job and industry they work in. Probe to if they do more than one job? • What are the good things about their jobs; what are the bad things?
<p>Definition of work-life balance</p>	<p>Definition of “work-life balance” (write down).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of definitions that emerge. • Explore the language used. [EG. terms like boss/employer etc]
<p>Exploration of satisfaction with work-life balance</p>	<p>Unprompted: General rating of their level of satisfaction with current work-life balance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would they describe the balance between their family/private life and work? <p>Use continuum to illustrate personal circumstances: WORK ←————→ PRIVATE LIFE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What realistically is an ideal work-life balance for them? • Picnic / Watch kids sport Indicator [to be developed]
<p>Work-life balance issues</p>	<p>Unprompted: ‘What are some examples of work-life imbalance? What do they find hard to juggle?’</p> <p>Prompted discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing levels • Stress, pressure • Hours of work • Lack of control over own work • Expected to be available (communication – mobiles, email) • Expected to take work home • Expectations to participate in voluntary/community activities eg. Marae • Unpaid work in home • Expectations singles make up the workload for parents • Taking care of elderly relatives
<p>[Follow-up discussion on some aspects of work-life balance. Will be raised on a prompted basis if not raised spontaneously.]</p>	
<p>Staffing levels</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there adequate staffing at their workplace?
<p>Stress/Pressure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have they (or seen others) make mistakes as a result of stress? (Explore incidents)

<p>Hours of work Including exploration of reasons for working longer hours if applicable.</p>	<p>Paid work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they work extra hours? [If work multiple jobs: which jobs do they work extra hours for?] • Do they have control over whether they do additional hours? • Do they get paid? • Can they do their job within the hours of work paid for? • Do they work fewer hours than they'd like? <p>Unprompted if work extra hours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore reasons for working longer hours. <p>Prompt on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoy; stimulated by job • Committed to job • Necessary for career advancement • Get overtime - need the money • No choice – part of the job • Valued by employer • Expected of them <p>Unpaid work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they do unpaid work? If so: what types of work? • Reasons for undertaking unpaid work. • Would they like to do less/ more? • Is it hard to fit into their lives? <p>Voluntary work/ community work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they do voluntary/community work? If so: what types of work? • Reasons for undertaking voluntary/ community work. • Would they like to do less/ more? • Is it hard to fit into their lives?
<p>Explore impact of poor work-life balance</p>	<p>Unprompted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of impact of poor work-life balance (own experience). • How do they think their children/ family, community, society view work-life balance? (similar or different to own view)? • How has their own work-life (im)balance impacted on their life and outcomes • How has their own work-life (im)balance impacted on the outcomes for their families <p>Prompt on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on family life; time with children; personal relationships • Impact on health / sleep • Involvement in the community • Capacity to pursue leisure activities • Levels of energy for activities outside the workplace. • Impact on workplace • Considered or left a job?
<p>Whose responsibility to ensure there is work life balance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do they think their employers view work-life balance? • Why does work-life imbalance happen? Who is to blame? • Do they think there is a role for their employer to ensure that there is effective work-life balance for employees? Does anything need to be done?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it reasonable to expect employees to work beyond standard hours if the business does need that on a short term basis?
Managing work-life balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do they do in the home to try to achieve work-life balance? • What measures are in place in their workplace to support staff to achieve work-life balance? • Who do they talk to about issues relating to work-life balance? Do they feel they are able to discuss these issues with their employer/supervisor/boss? • How do they manage unplanned events? Who else do they depend on? [Prompt on partner, grandparents, older kids, friends, paid home support, childcare etc] • How do they manage childcare? (parents) • Have they ever changed jobs, thought about changing jobs or heard of someone that has changed jobs to achieve better work-life balance? Or is not working because of these reasons?
Work life balance initiatives	<p>Unprompted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What could be done at home (out of work) to help balance work-life? • What could be done in the workplace to help balance work-life? <p>Prompted discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible work practices • Child care issues • Managing stress • Open management planning • Contracts • [Checklist of work-life balance options to assess interest: flexible hours, work compressed weeks, work part-time, have time in lieu, job sharing, work from home, flexible shift patterns, time for child minding., child care facilities provided or subsidised, school holiday programmes, information on local care facilities, counselling and stress management programmes, clear communication on objectives and targets, discussion of workload planning, term to term contracts] • Discussion of responses to checklist
Resulting benefits to employer of implementing work-life initiatives	<p>Benefits of work-life initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would they respond to their employer having work-life balance policies such as outlined? <p>Prompt on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher productivity • Less absenteeism • Happier, more committed workforce • Better safety record • Lower staff turnover <p>Which initiatives covered earlier would have the most positive impact on their work-life balance (if any)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What cost would there be to their employer? Are these costs reasonable?
The future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would encourage them to address work-life balance issues – in the home/ at work?

Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where do they currently go to get information on entitlements and work related issues? <p>Prompt on:</p> <p>Citizens Advice Bureau</p> <p>Friends/family</p> <p>Lawyers</p> <p>DOL Infoline</p> <p>Other co-workers</p> <p>Newspapers/magazines</p> <p>Television/Radio</p> <p>Internet</p> <p>Any others?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do they see the role of Unions in this?• How would they go about finding out more about work-life balance?
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Work-life Balance Question-line - Employers

<p>Work place issues Looking at this stage just to see whether work-life balance comes up spontaneously as a major issue</p>	<p>General warm-up question.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss industry they operate in. • What do they think are the major issues affecting their business and employees at the moment?
<p>Definition of work-life balance</p>	<p>Definition of “work-life balance” (write down).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of definitions that emerge. • Explore the language used. [EG.. terms like employee/workers etc]
<p>Exploration of satisfaction with work-life balance</p>	<p>Unprompted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would they view their own work-life balance? • How do they think their employees view work-life balance? <p>Use continuum to 1) illustrate current personal circumstances, 2) circumstances of average employee in their organisation:</p> <p>WORK ←————→ PRIVATE LIFE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What realistically is an ideal work-life balance for them? And their employees?
<p>Work-life balance issues</p>	<p>Unprompted: What are some examples of work-life imbalance?</p> <p>Prompted discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing levels • Stress, pressure • Hours of work • Lack of control of your own work • Expected to be available (communication – mobiles, email) • Expected to take work home • Unpaid work in home • Expectations singles make up the workload for parents • Taking care of elderly relatives • Expectation of participation in community/ voluntary work
<p>Explore impact of poor work-life balance</p>	<p>Unprompted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of impact of poor work-life balance. <p>Prompt on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace productivity • Workplace safety • Impact on family life; time with children; personal relationships • Impact on health / sleep • Involvement in the community • Capacity to pursue leisure activities • Levels of energy for activities outside the workplace • People leaving, considering leaving

<p>Whose responsibility to ensure there is work life balance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are work-life balance issues just part of the modern workplace/ modern life? • What industries are more prone to work-life balance issues? • Why does work-life imbalance happen? Who is to blame? • Do they think it is an employer /employee responsibility to ensure that there is effective work-life balance for employees? Does anything need to be done? • Is it reasonable to expect employees to work beyond standard hours if the business does need that on a short term basis?
<p>Managing work-life balance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What measures do they have in place to support staff to achieve work-life balance? • Do staff have the opportunities to discuss issues affecting work-life balance? What is the best forum for staff to discuss these issues? • How do they manage unplanned events that affect their staff? [EG sick child, school events, illness] • Do they think any staff have left or are thinking of leaving because of work-life balance issues?
<p>Work life balance initiatives</p>	<p>Unprompted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What other things could be done in the workplace to help balance work-life? <p>Prompted discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible work practices • Child care issues • Managing stress • Open management planning • Contracts • [Checklist of work-life balance options to assess employer reaction: flexible hours, work compressed weeks, work part-time, have time in lieu, job sharing, work from home, flexible shift patterns, time for child minding., child care facilities provided or subsidised, school holiday programmes, information on local care facilities, counselling and stress management programmes, clear communication on objectives and targets, discussion of workload planning, term to term contracts] • Discussion of responses to checklist, do they currently or would they in the future consider implementing any of the initiatives. Reasons why, why not.
<p>Resulting benefits to employer of implementing work-life initiatives</p>	<p>Benefits of work-life initiatives.</p> <p>Unprompted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would their business benefit from implementing some of the work-life balance initiatives discussed? <p>Prompt on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher productivity • Less absenteeism • Happier, more committed workforce • Better safety record • Lower staff turnover <p>Explore:</p> <p>Would any of these benefits move them to implement initiatives? What would encourage them to implement more work-life balance initiatives?</p>

Resulting costs, drawbacks of implementing work-life balance initiatives	Drawbacks of work-life initiatives. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the barriers for their business benefit from implementing some of the work-life balance initiatives discussed? How insurmountable? • What costs would there be for their business?
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do they see the role of Unions in this? • How would they go about finding out more about work-life balance?