

Research Summary 3

Right to request

This summary showcases some experiences of women who have exercised their right to request.

Perceptions of the right to request part-time work or a change in work hours

Overwhelmingly, women supported the idea of having the right to request a change in working hours to accommodate a change in life circumstance, such as having to take on more caring responsibilities of a sick or elderly parent or after having a child. Having a level of flexibility was seen as taking the pressure off people at often stressful stages in their lives.

Many thought that workers were currently disadvantaged (unless they had a compassionate employer) because such a right did not exist. Women felt that employees had to sacrifice their work (and therefore entire income) in order to look after ill relatives.

"I think compassionate leave needs to be longer. My father passed away three years ago and I requested a week and they weren't happy with it. That's ridiculous."

(25-45 years, Carlton)

Some felt that although this was a good scheme for employees, it might actually be to the detriment of employers as it would put businesses under pressure. There was a feeling that the public sector was probably better equipped (financially) and better able to adapt to part-time positions, compared with smaller private companies.

"I agree with the differentiation between private and public business because public's more protected with the funding, whereas a private business...if you've got someone out of the position, you've got to re-employ someone else and the cost...it's harder to fill the void. It's not impossible, but it's harder."

(25 - 64 years, Warrnambool)

There were participants who thought that employers would benefit from the right to request option as it would promote a more loyal and happy workforce and retain staff who know the business, saving excessive recruitment and training costs. A scheme of this sort was seen as employers saying we value what you bring this organisation and we want to keep you, even in a part-time capacity.

"That would be worthwhile to the employer too; wouldn't they have a more loyal workforce?"

(46-64 years, Moorabbin)

Some women felt that in order for the right to request to become a commonplace option for workers, men would have to lead the charge and would ultimately be the decision-makers. Women felt changes would only be made once men recognised the right to request as a legitimate workable option before it would be enshrined in Australian workplace laws.

"Men have to open up their eyes a lot more for it to really happen."

(25-45 years, Geelong)

Source: Auspoll report to the VEOHRC - 'Women, Rights and Equality', October 2007.



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