



UNIONSWA
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***Job and Wage
Insecurity in
Western
Australia
Survey Report 2022***

Overview

Job insecurity and wage insecurity, when costs of living are high or rising, create financial and other pressures on affected working people and their families.

Job and wage insecurity takes several forms including fixed term contract employment, labour hire arrangements including sub-contracting as well as casual work. Casual work, sub-contracting and labour hire arrangements typically result in a loss of entitlement to paid sickness, paid holiday or long service leave, in addition to the risk of a loss of paid employment entirely, typically unrelated to the standard of work performed.

During earlier phases of the pandemic, we've seen how insecure work, often low-paid, contributed to people having to hold down one or more jobs just to get by. In turn, that exposed them, their co-workers and family, to infection. Even without the consequence of the pandemic, insecure, low-paid work, often means having to hold down more than one jobs, increasing essential costs of living such as transportation costs.

Since the beginning of 2022, the Australian economy has been in recovery, including some growth in employment after a significant spike in joblessness associated during the early wave of the pandemic in 2020. That spike in unemployment was felt most gravely by those in insecure jobs.

The economy in WA has been on a somewhat different trajectory from the rest of Australia. An extended period of border closures and an extended period without any outbreaks, meant that key sectors of the WA economy were able to function strongly, although there was a loss of employment in other sectors.

This survey, which commenced in January 2022 and concluded in April 2022, provides a snapshot in what is a dynamic economic environment for jobs, job security and wages as well as related costs of living.

The quantitatively analysis that follows charts the financial impact of insecure work and insecure wages. Equally important, are the stories of those affected. Such qualitative aspects are highlighted here through some quotations from, and case studies of those in insecure work. Most of these stories are told anonymously using assumed, not real first names only, at the request of respondents who were fearful of consequences if they, and therefore their employer, were to be identified. That also speaks to the silence that is too often the experience of such insecurity and that this report seeks to redress.

"Misha" worked casually for four years while studying for one of the major retail grocery stores. She'd been promised more secure work, but this never eventuated.

"When it came to being ill and turning up for work, you basically had to be coughing on the customers before they'd believe you. What could I do as a casual? Now I'm in a secure job in a field related to my studies and can plan a holiday and think about getting a mortgage."

Methods

UnionsWA, The WA Council of Social Service (WACOSS) and the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) designed the survey instrument consisting of 13 questions designed to assess respondents' employment status, rate of pay, annual household income, weekly disposable income, job security, financial stress, and weekly budget priorities (see Appendix A for all questions posed through the survey). The survey consisted of both open-ended and close-ended questions. Open-ended questions were designed to provide additional qualitative data, focusing on respondents' views in relation to job security and its impacts, how their household is coping financially, and COVID-related impacts on the workplace.

In advance of the distribution of the survey, a pilot online survey was distributed in January 2022 to a sample of respondents. The full survey was launched in late January 2022 through to early April 2022. The primary mode of distribution was through emails sent to a 15,000-email list managed by UnionsWA. The UnionsWA list is mostly of working people and mostly of union members. The survey was additionally advertised through the WACOSS Sector News fortnightly newsletter, with approximately 4,850 subscribers, and internal email lists managed by WACOSS. The survey was further advertised in the YACWA newsletter, with approximately 2,900 subscribers, and promoted on the YACWA Facebook page. The survey was hosted online via the UnionsWA website.

In total 1,394 respondents commenced the survey, though not all respondents replied to all questions. Case studies and quotes included in this report are drawn from telephone interviews with selected respondents, with the details and permission to publish confirmed by those respondents in writing.

With the engagement of academic expertise, outlined below, a weighting of responses was undertaken to strengthen the representativeness of results. As a result, those aged under 25 years and those aged 65 years or over were excluded and together with other weighting, this significantly enhanced representativeness. The final respondent number utilised here are for a maximum of 970. In the charts that follow the number of these prime workforce age (25–64-year-old) respondents is denoted by "n=".

"Stacy" lives in a mining town in regional WA. Her partner, with whom she raises four children – works in the mines. While they are financially secure because of his work, they face high costs of living. Stacy works on a project supporting Indigenous children that is funded by the Federal Government resulting in three one-year contracts of employment

"Two working parents and four kids, means that our leave time is especially important to us. Being in fixed contract work, a portable long service leave scheme would help me cope."

To make our survey results more representative of the general working age population, efforts have been made to weigh and adjust our results with reference to *Australian Bureau of Statistics* (ABS) data on household and personal incomes. We have also undertaken a separate comparison using data from the *Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey*. HILDA was initiated and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) and is managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Melbourne Institute). The findings and

views reported in our work should not, however, be attributed to either the DSS or the Melbourne Institute.

Using ABS data – we derived a more representative yearly income range by using a weighted average based on the numbers of responses. We were then able to make a comparison with the ABS results. This was deliberately cautious and prudent approach which made our working age cohort responses comparable to those of the ABS¹.

Using HILDA data – a comparison was done with the results for the same income groups in the HILDA survey, using similar questions which asked people to rate their personal financial situations. The trend results between those responders who say that they are ‘just getting by’ in HILDA are like those in the Survey who say that ‘my/our income just meets cost of living’².

Thanks are given to Jose Loureiro, PhD Candidate at the School of Accounting, Economics and Finance Curtin University, for his work with the ABS data and to Professor Alison Preston of the UWA Business school for the HILDA comparison.

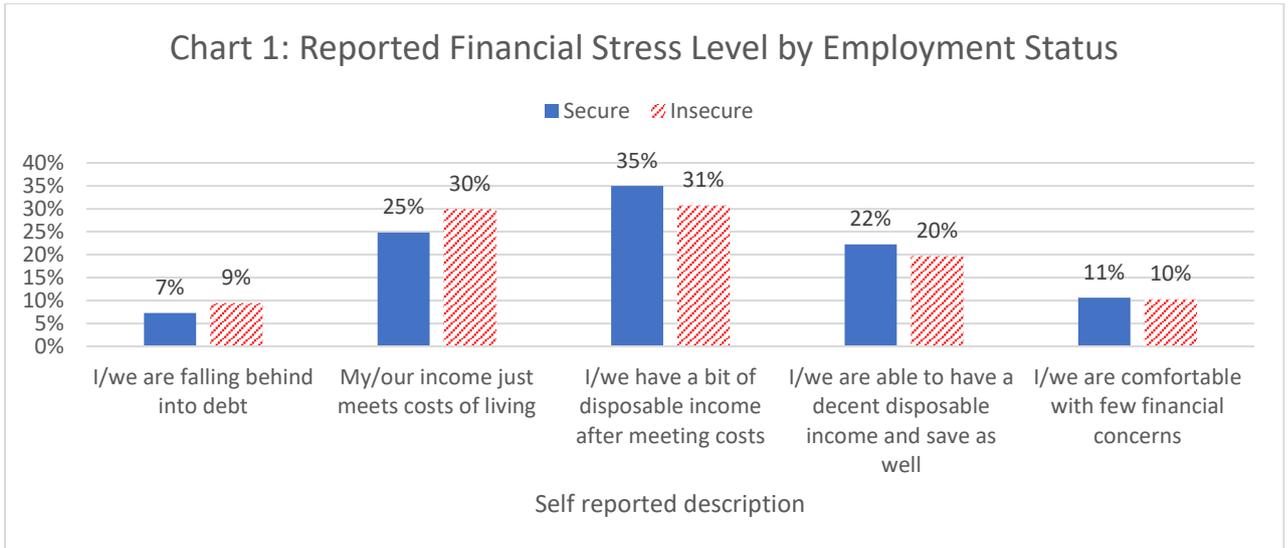
“Victoria” works casually as a cleaner and has been in the same role through several changes of business owners.

“I have to find my own replacement when I want leave and, at Christmas time, it does your head in because you’re stuck doing the job.”

¹ ABS, Personal Income in Australia (released 17/12/2021)
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/personal-income-australia/latest-release>

² Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey background information can be found here: <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/hilda>

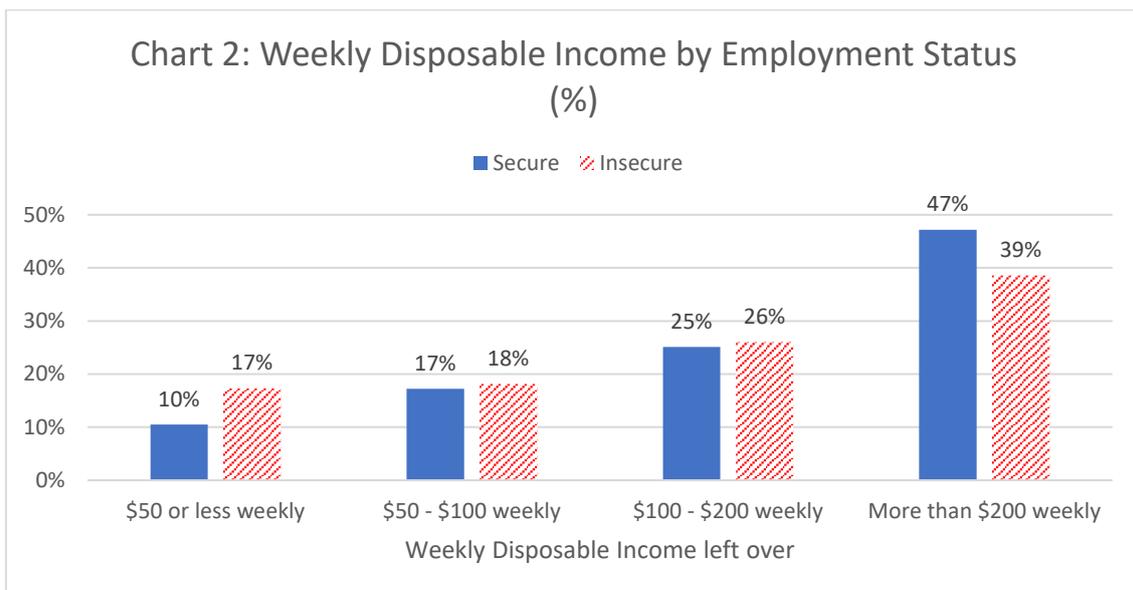
Findings



n=936

“Sam” is 27 years of age. He has worked since leaving school but has never held a permanent job. Sam lives independently with his partner.

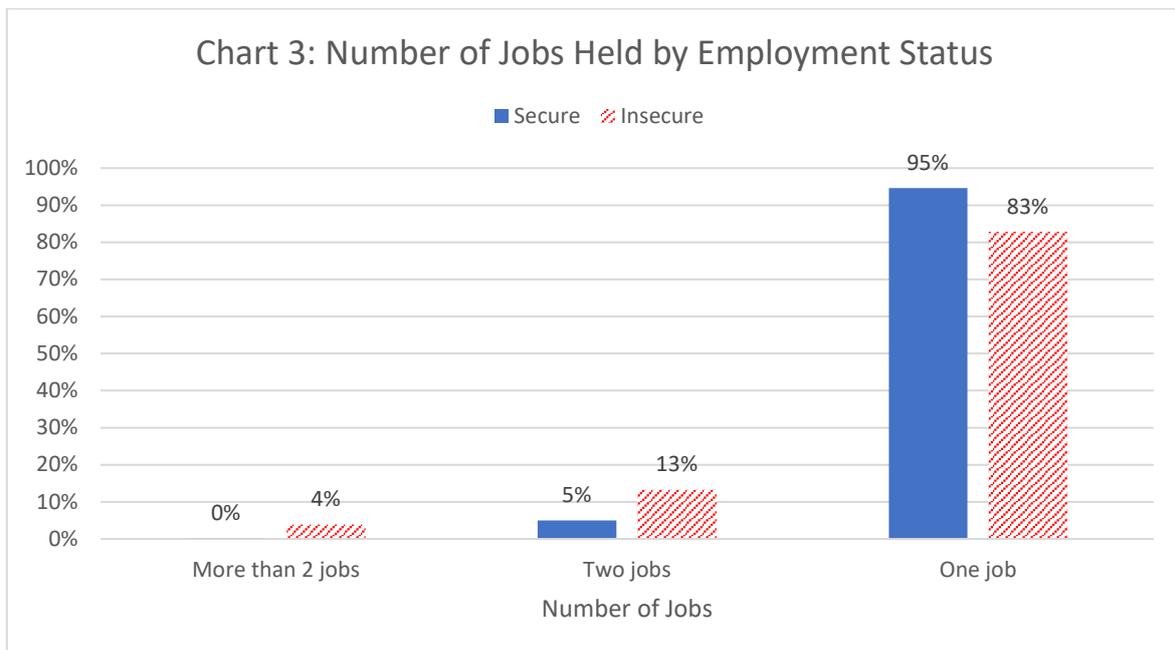
“Home ownership is just something I’ve never considered. Being from an immigrant family, I hope one day to be able to travel overseas to visit family. But being in insecure work makes it difficult to plan or pay for a holiday even interstate.”



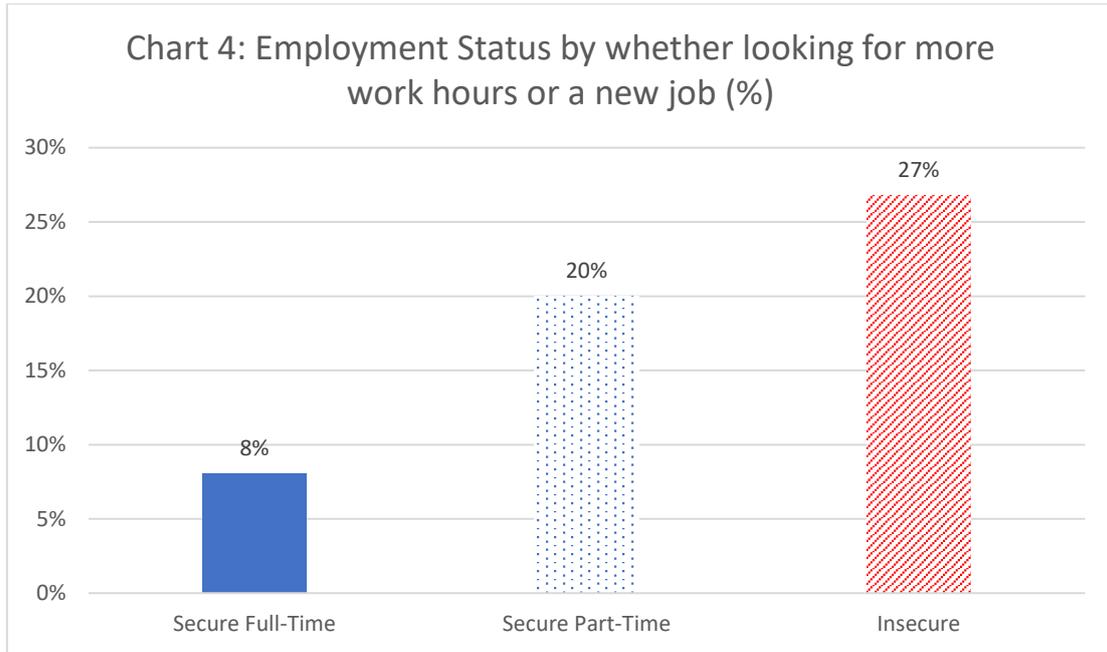
n=928

“Marita” has worked casually for the past three years as a Retail Assistant for a large corporation. This is her sole source of income. She lives with her partner in a house owned by their parents.

“The shifts can vary a lot from week to week and I have to draw on savings when there’s not enough work. I have to give plenty of notice if I need a break from work such as for my birthday, and find someone to fill my allocated shift, but they give very little notice if I have to come in or if they cancel.”



n=970



n=968

Barni (her real name) works in three part time insecure jobs, casually in retail and as a transport carer in health sector and on a fixed term contract for administrative work. In two of those roles, she requested to be provided with shifts on a regular day of the week to allow her to juggle other jobs and family commitments. One of the employers agreed to this, the other did not. Felicity's impression was that the rejected was because the employer didn't want to provide conditions that might create a claim for her to be made permanent.

“There’s a lot of organising and uncertainty with insecure work.”

Discussion

The most easily measured impact of job and wage insecurity is financial. Chart 1 shows that **among those in insecure work, two in five (39%) report that they are either going further into debt or barely meeting costs of living.** To a lesser extent, even for those in secure jobs experience, life is often lived close to the financial breadline with one in three (32%) reporting that they are either going further into debt or just meeting costs of living. Reflecting this experience of financial hardship, Chart 2 identifies that 17% of those in insecure jobs compared with 10% for those in secure jobs, report having less than \$50 a week available in disposable income after paying for necessities.

Not surprisingly given the precarious nature of insecure jobs and wages, those in insecure jobs are often hold multiple jobs. **Those in insecure jobs (Chart 3) were three time more likely to hold down two or more jobs (17%) compared with those in a secure job (5%).**

Only 8% of those in secure full-time jobs reported seeking additional hours of work or a new job compared with 20% of those in secure part time jobs (Chart 4). **Almost three times (27%) of those in insecure jobs were seeking additional hours of work or another job compared with those in full time secure jobs.**

The case studies and other qualitative information such as written comments in response to open-ended questions in the survey highlight a range of other consequences that flow from job and wage insecurity. This highlights that **insecure work has a negative impact on diet, mental health and family relationships, often affected by having no access to paid recreational or sickness leave.**

Jaxon is 29 years of age and has only ever worked in insecure jobs. For several years he lived independently but is currently living with his parents. He works in a call centre, mostly after hours. The work hours vary, which means his income can fluctuate considerably. He is also attempting to establish his own business, which at present isn't providing income.

“There’s a lack of free time and stress with long and unusual hours of paid and unpaid work. This often means not eating well, ironically when doing so is most important.”

Appendix A: Survey Questions



Trusting us with personal details and your honest views about work really does make our advocacy stronger, whether that's for better pay, income support or for safe and healthy workplaces. We will respect your privacy. Those who respond to this survey will go into a draw for the chance to win a \$100 gift voucher. This survey is co-hosted by UnionsWA (the peak body for unions in WA), the WA Council of Social Service (WACOSS, the peak body for community service organisations) and the Youth Affairs Council of WA (the peak youth body).

What is your current employment status?

(Please Circle One)

- Full-time - ongoing
- Part-time – ongoing
- Full-time – fixed term contract
- Part-time – fixed term contract
- Casual
- Labour Hire/Temporary/Flexible
- Unemployed- looking for work
- Jobless – not looking for work
- Maternity/paternity leave
- Not working – rely on Workers' Compensation
- Other

1. How many jobs are you currently employed in? *(Please Circle One)*

- Not employed at all
- 1
- 2
- More than 2 jobs

2. Are you in a job and seeking more hours of work or an extra job?

(Please Circle One)

- Yes
- No

3. What are the average number of hours you work per week?

4. If you are working, what is your hourly wage rate in whole dollars?

\$ _____

5. Income often varies by age, within which of the following age range are you now? *(Please Circle One)*

- Under 15
- 15 to 19
- 20 to 24
- 25 to 34
- 35 – 44
- 45 – 55
- 55 – 64
- 65 or over

6. **Within what of the following ranges does your own personal income before tax fall? Please include all forms of income you receive, such as wages, Government income support or other. (Please Circle One)**

Less than \$31,199 a year = less than \$615 per week = less than \$16.18 per hour

\$31,200 to \$51,999 a year = \$615 to \$1000 per week = \$16.18 to \$26.31 per hour

\$52,000 to \$64,999 a year = \$1001 to \$1250 per week = \$26.31 to \$32.89 per hour

\$65,000 to \$77,999 a year = \$1251 to \$1500 per week = \$32.89 to \$39.47 per hour

\$78,000 to \$103,999 a year = \$1501 to \$2000 per week = \$39.48 to \$52.63 per hour

\$104,000 to \$155,999 a year = \$2001 to \$3000 per week = \$52.63 to \$78.94 per hour

Greater than \$155,99 a year = more than \$3001 per week = more than \$78.95 per hour

7. **When you have paid for all necessary things that you don't have any choice about (e.g. rent, food, bills), how much in your household budget is usually left each week to save or spend on whatever you choose? (Please Circle One)**

\$50 or less weekly

\$50 - \$100 weekly

\$100 - \$200 weekly

\$200 - \$500 weekly

More than \$500 weekly

8. **Please select your TOP priority when managing your weekly budget. (Please Circle One)**

Rent/mortgage

Food

Paying for utilities (water, power, gas)

Communications (telephone, internet)

Transport (car expenses, public transport)

Entertainment

Medical and healthcare expenses

Repaying debts or loans (credit card, personal loans, car)

Education/Skills development costs (course fees, supplies, tools)

9. **Please select your SECOND or next highest priority when managing your weekly budget (Please Circle One)**

Rent/mortgage

Food

Paying for utilities (water, power, gas)

Communications (telephone, internet)

Transport (car expenses, public transport)

Entertainment

Medical and healthcare expenses

Repaying debts or loans (credit card, personal loans, car)

Education/Skills development costs (course fees, supplies, tools)

11. Thinking about income and costs for you or your household (e.g. including the income or costs for any partner or child, if relevant), which best describes how your household is coping financially? (Please Circle One)

I/we are falling behind into debt

My/our income just meets costs of living

I/we have a bit of disposable income after meeting costs

I/we are able to have a decent disposable income and save as well

I/we are comfortable with few financial concerns

12. The COVID pandemic, associated lockdown and border closures have affected the work of some people more than others. In your own words, how has the pandemic affected your work e.g. safety practices, tasks performed, job security, work hours, workload etc?

13. Job security, whether permanent, casual employment fixed term contract work or labour hire, can suit some people but not others. In your own words, how does the security or insecurity of your job impact on you?

14. In your own words, how are you or your household coping financially?

If you wish to go into a draw for the chance to win a \$100 gift voucher, please provide some contact details so we can let you know if you win!

Name (first name is enough)

Mobile: _____

Email: _____