

## Hours Worked by Australian Church Workers

### Introduction

This Fact Sheet looks at issues related to the number of hours worked by workers in Australian churches. Such workers may be senior ministers, assistant ministers, youth and children's workers or others with a specialised ministry focus, as well as those who work in an administration role.

Many church workers work beyond their expected number of hours in the role outlined for them. This may represent an area of concern for church leaders, particularly if such practices are unsustainable and staff do not stay in their role as a result. There may be numerous pressures on church workers to work beyond their expected hours, such as being one of relatively few staff in an organisation where many non-staff give their time voluntarily, and there being more tasks than time available in allotted hours. Boundary issues may also play a role; where workers are involved in multiple aspects of church life they may work beyond their normal role description because of their staff status.

The 2011 National Church Life Survey included the following two questions in the Leader Survey (available to be filled out by any staff and volunteers who contribute significantly to the life of the church).

*Approximately how many hours in a typical week do you spend in congregational/parish ministry?*

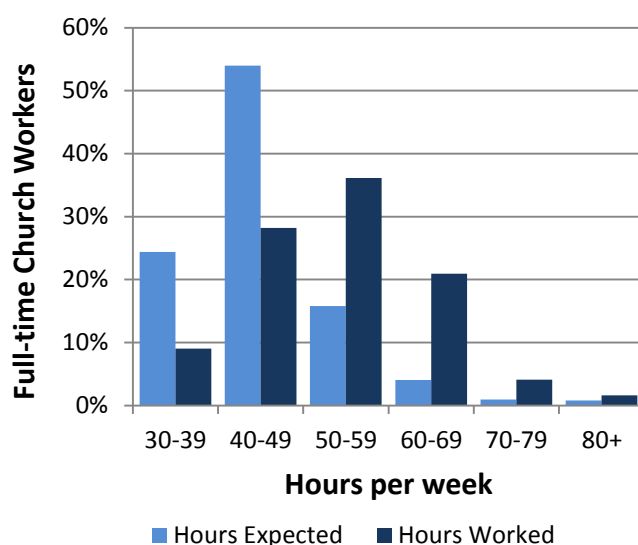
*How many hours a week are you expected to/employed to spend in congregational/parish ministry?*

### Full-time workers

Of those who responded to the survey, church workers who indicated they were expected to/employed to spend over 30 hours in ministry were examined, to capture all those who were close to 'full-time' in their ministry. Figure 1 shows the percentage of this group by how many hours they are expected to/employed to

work, as well as how many hours they estimate they do actually work.

**Figure 1: Hours expected and worked by full-time church workers**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey, full-time church workers (Expected hours >30 per week, n=2,090, unweighted).

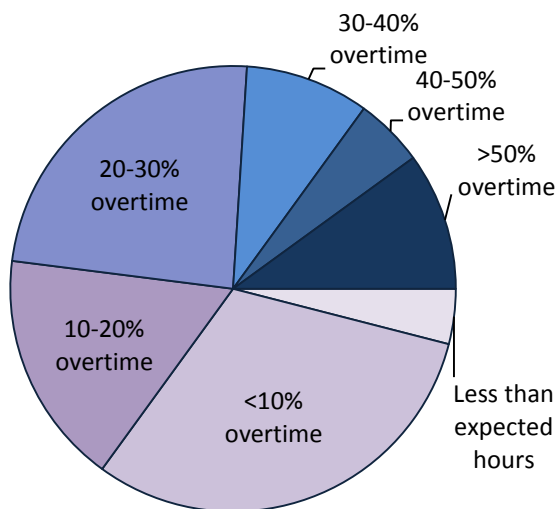
The above figure shows that in general, church workers work more hours than they are expected. For example in the 50-59 hours per week category, there are more than twice as many workers (36%) who work these hours than are expected to (16%), and in the 60-69 hours a week category there are more than 5 times (21% compared to 4%).

Two things are striking about these results: first, there are a considerable number of workers who believe they are expected to work over 50 hours a week (22% in this sample, which includes 4% over 60 hours and 2% over 70 hours). It may be that workers have reached this conclusion based on the number of different tasks they undertake and what they understand to be required, perhaps in lieu of a clear job description. Second, it is striking that so many workers work more hours than they believe they are expected to.

### Overtime is the norm

The percentage of extra hours worked for each worker can be calculated by dividing the number of hours actually worked by the number of expected hours. This shows that the phenomenon of working extra hours of overtime is not just restricted to a small number of church workers. As Figure 2 shows, only a small percentage of full-time workers (4%) work less than their expected hours, by their own estimation. The norm is to work about 19% more hours than expected<sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 2: Amount of overtime by full-time church workers**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey, full-time church workers (Expected hours >30 per week, n=2,090, unweighted).

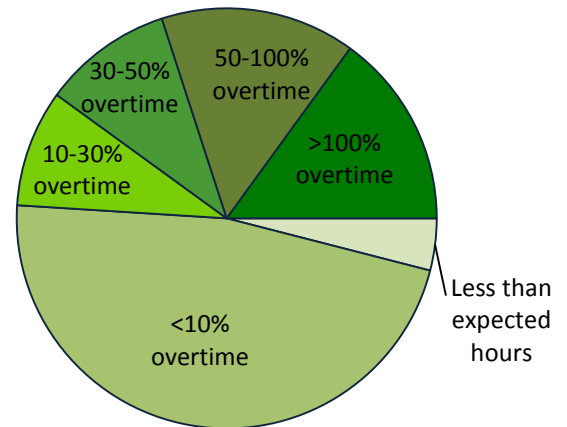
At the high end, 1 in 10 full-time church workers work more than 50% beyond their expected hours, and overall about a quarter work more than 30% beyond.

### Part-time workers

The distribution for part-time church workers shows that some are even more prone to working hours beyond their expected amount than full-time workers are. Church workers who indicated they were expected to work more than 2 hours and less than 16 hours a week were selected as a comparison to full-time workers. From this group, 3 in 10 worked more than 50% beyond their expected hours (three times the rate of full-time

workers) and 15% of them worked more than double their expected hours.

**Figure 3: Amount of overtime by part-time church workers**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey, part-time church workers (Expected hours 2-16 per week, n=1,435, unweighted).

Some church workers who are working well-beyond their expected hours may be in an unsustainable position and consider leaving. While many work extra hours because they consider the work important and experience greater satisfaction in ministry when putting in the extra time, where there is not sufficient recognition of this effort, churches risk losing their most dedicated workers. Becoming disillusioned is a strong theme among those who experience burnout, while workers who are appreciated and rewarded are more likely to thrive in ministry. This is an area where church leadership can make a difference to their workers' welfare.



### Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Leader Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

### Citation

Sterland, S. (2015) Hours worked by Australian Church Workers, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 15003. Adelaide: Mirrabooka Press.

<sup>1</sup> Both the mean (average) and the median (50<sup>th</sup> percentile) for full-time church workers were 19%.