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COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TOWARDS UNEMPLOYMENT, ACTIVITY TESTING AND MUTUAL OBLIGATION

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Tony Eardley
Editor

Abstract

Those elements of activity testing described as 'mutual obligation' are becoming increasingly important in social security policy towards unemployed people. In order to provide more information about public attitudes to this policy, the SPRC included a set of questions in its survey on Coping with Economic and Social Change, carried out in 1999. The survey found broad support for the application of many, though not all, aspects of mutual obligation principles to young unemployed people and, to a lesser extent, to the long-term unemployed. When applied to other groups, however, especially older unemployed people, those with disabilities and those with parental responsibilities, this support was considerably more qualified. Respondents made clear distinctions in how they viewed the requirements appropriate for different groups.

In relation to most unemployed groups except the young, attitudes varied according to respondents' age, labour force status, income, education, political affiliation and housing tenure. In particular, attitudes to mutual obligation seemed to soften with older age, while they hardened as income and education levels rose. There was also some support for reconsidering the rules of eligibility for income support for sole parents, but no overwhelming view that they should automatically be expected to seek paid work when they still have young children to care for. Although there are differing views on what should be done about unemployment, most Australians believe that government still has an important role. In this sense, people see obligations as needing to be *mutual*, not just a one-sided burden of compliance to be shouldered by the unemployed.

1 Introduction

In 1998, the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) carried out a study commissioned by the former Department of Social Security reviewing the evidence on community and employer attitudes to unemployment and unemployed people in Australia (Eardley and Matheson, 1998, 1999). The study found that by international standards Australians seemed to take a relatively hard line on the responsibilities of unemployed people - especially the younger unemployed - to actively seek and accept work. The limited survey evidence available suggested that Work for the Dole, in principle at least, commanded substantial support among the population in general (Morgan Poll, 1997), amongst employers (Morgan and Banks, 1999) and amongst participants themselves (DEWRSB, 1999). A small-scale independent study of the views and experiences of participants has also found that although there were a number of criticisms of the schemes, both in principle and practice, there were still fairly high levels of overall satisfaction (Sawer, 1999).

On the other hand, there was also considerable sympathy for unemployed people. Although there was some tendency to blame unemployed people for their own predicament - a tendency that seemed to fluctuate over time according to the level of unemployment - there was also resistance to the idea that 'welfare cheating' is widespread. The evidence suggested that the Australian community saw an important and continuing role for government, both in helping unemployed people to find work and in providing income support during periods of unemployment.

The study identified a number of information gaps. In particular, while unemployment clearly remained a matter of deep public concern, there was little detailed information available on what people thought the Government should be doing to solve the problem. Also, although there appeared to be considerable support for schemes like Work for the Dole, it was not clear how far this could be read as generalised support for the whole regime of activity testing for unemployed people. There was little evidence either on what kinds of activities unemployed people should be expected to undertake in return for income support payments, or on whether such expectations should apply across the board to all recipients. It was also unclear what support existed for the sanctions operating for non-compliance with the activity test.

Since 'mutual obligation' has become a central plank of government policy on social security, especially in the context of the current Welfare Review, the answers to these questions take on a particular importance. We therefore decided to include a number of items on activity testing and mutual obligation in a wider survey of attitudes to social and economic change already under preparation at the SPRC.

The survey, *Coping with Economic and Social Change* (CESC), was carried out between April and June 1999. The data as a whole are still being analysed, but this paper presents and discusses initial findings specifically concerned with community attitudes towards unemployment and mutual obligation. Section 2 discusses the policy background underlying current interest in mutual obligation. Section 3 provides a brief description of the survey methods and data. Section 4 presents the survey results concerned with views on the causes of and solutions to unemployment. Section 4 then looks at public attitudes to mutual obligation and activity testing. The final section draws out the main conclusions from the study.

2 Policy Background

Despite several years of strong economic growth, unemployment remains high. Recent improvement in the rate of job creation has begun to lower the official unemployment rate - though less so than might be expected because the participation rate has revived (ABS, 1999), presumably because better job prospects have attracted some discouraged workers back into the labour force. This of course is a national picture within which there is substantial regional and local variation. There are areas where something approaching an economic definition of full employment has been reached and where there are effectively skills shortages, and others where unemployment is still well into double figures.

Although work tests have long been a condition of entitlement to unemployment benefits, the persistence of high unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, even in periods of economic growth has focused policy attention on the supply side of the labour market. Thus social security policy towards people of working age over the last decade has become increasingly conditional on their

demonstrating thorough and continuing job search effort. The argument has been that over-reliance on 'passive' systems of income support can put already disadvantaged people at further disadvantage by allowing them to become dependent on welfare and thus increasingly unable to compete for the jobs that are available.

Initial moves in this direction began under the Labor Government in the mid-1980s, in line with the OECD's 'active society' policies (Kalisch, 1991). Amongst other changes, the work test was widened to take in activities beyond just job search, in recognition that there are other ways in which unemployed people can both improve their job prospects and make a contribution to society. Under Labor's *Working Nation* package, from 1995, there was also an expansion of labour market programs and a guarantee of a job placement for those receiving unemployment allowances for more than 18 months, in return for which penalties for breaches of job search requirements were increased. This was described in the Green Paper which preceded *Working Nation* as a system of 'reciprocal obligations' (Prime Minister's Committee on Employment Opportunities, 1993: 6).

The Coalition Government has taken this approach considerably further since 1996, whilst reducing the role of labour market programs. Recent changes have included a requirement to provide more details of job search activity in the course of fortnightly registration; an increase in the issuing of Employer Contact Certificates, which are used to verify job seekers' approaches to prospective employers; and the introduction of the 'Jobseeker Diary' and 'Mutual Obligation Diary', for recording job search and participation in related activities.

Penalties for non-compliance with activity testing have been increased, and a number of other measures have been put in place to ensure that unemployed people draw on their own resources before receiving public assistance. Benefit control has also been further intensified through periodic and targeted reviews of eligibility for unemployment payments (Nolan, 1997).

In 1997, a number of pilot schemes of Work for the Dole were introduced, initially just for people aged under 25. Since then funding for

Work for the Dole has been expanded in order to provide 50 000 places by 2000/2001, with coverage being extended to those aged up to 34.

The organising principle within which the Government has presented many of these changes has been that of 'mutual obligation'. Currently, eligible unemployed benefit recipients aged between 18 and 24 (who have received payments for six months) and those aged between 25 and 34 (who have received payment for 12 months) must undertake one of a range of mutual obligation activities, in addition to job search. There are 14 ways in which to fulfil a mutual obligation requirement, one of which is to participate in a Work for Dole scheme. Since September 1999, unemployed people who do not commence a mutual obligation activity within six weeks of being required to do are referred to Work for the Dole, while job seekers who are 18 years old or over can also participate voluntarily. They must be receiving the full rate of Newstart/Youth Allowance and have been receiving unemployment payments for six months or more.

In January 1999 the Government also announced that young unemployed people with literacy and numeracy problems would be obliged to undertake remedial courses or face reductions in their benefits.

Alongside these changes in the level and scope of activity test requirements there has been a radical reorganisation of the way in which services to unemployed people are delivered. The responsibility for income support delivery, along with registration and referral of unemployed recipients, has been devolved to a separate agency, Centrelink, while the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) has been abolished. The delivery of employment services has, since May 1998, been contracted out on a competitive basis to a network of community sector, private and public agencies (the Job Network). In the second round of contracts, which began in March 2000, the corporatised public employment agency, Employment National, lost a substantial proportion of its market share in the Job Network. This means that the responsibility for reporting breaches of activity test requirements now lies, more often than not, with organisations outside the public sector.

In 1999 the Prime Minister outlined his view of mutual obligation in a speech to the Australia Unlimited Roundtable.

Another defining aspect of our modern conservatism in social policy lies in our strong support for the principle of Mutual Obligation.

Just as it is an ongoing responsibility of government to support those in genuine need, so also it is the case that - to the extent that it is within their capacity to do so - those in receipt of such assistance should give something back to society in return, and in the process improve their own prospects for self-reliance. (Howard, 1999: 7)

In differentiating the current Government's approach from both older conservatism built on 'noblesse oblige' and from laissez-faire libertarianism, the Prime Minister also noted that obligations are two-way.

We recognise the obligation on government to support those in need, but we also provide real incentives and assistance to avoid welfare dependency. (Howard, 1999: 7)

These views have been restated by other Ministers in a range of policy announcements. The Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Dr Kemp, for example, described Work for the Dole as being based on

one ... fundamental value – that welfare is a two-way street. The Government is willing to provide financial support to people looking for work. But in return, it is fair and reasonable to ask those people to put something back into their community. (Kemp, 1998)

In October 1999, the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Newman, made a policy statement underlining the Government's aim of dealing with what it sees as a problem of 'welfare dependency' (Newman, 1999). Focusing on three groups in particular - older unemployed people, people with disabilities, and recipients of Parenting

Payment, especially sole parents - the speech foreshadowed further application of mutual obligation principles in the context of a Green Paper on welfare reform, to be developed during the first half of 2000. Senator Newman stated that mutual obligation was

a much broader and more comprehensive concept than some of the superficial treatment and analysis would have people believe ... Mutual Obligation, more properly understood, is a broad set of policy initiatives established on the simple yet compelling premise that responsibility between the community and the individual flows both ways. (Newman, 1999: 4)

Yeatman (1999) has argued that mutual obligation is a potentially rich and complex concept which taps in to a new consensus in social policy between approaches such as the 'Third Way' social democracy of UK Labour (Giddens, 1998), the US 'new paternalists' (Mead, 1997) and contemporary communitarians (Etzioni, 1995). Certainly it is clear that there is a new paradigm emerging in social policy, particularly in the English-speaking countries, which seeks to replace static concepts of entitlement with active principles of personal responsibility.

In Australia the policy of mutual obligation still has a fairly narrow application, concerned mainly with maintaining incentives through attachment of behavioural requirements to benefit receipt. The focus has also tended to be on the welfare recipient's obligation to society rather than that of the Government's, or society's, obligations to the unemployed.

The Interim Report of the committee set up by the Government to review current welfare arrangements was released in March 2000 (Reference Group on Welfare Reform, 2000). As expected, it proposed that some groups of recipients not currently subject to activity testing, including sole parents and disability support pensioners, should have to demonstrate some form of social or economic participation in return for continuing income support. Although much of the report is framed in terms of support and assistance for participation, it is underpinned by an extension of mutual obligation and sanctions, including withdrawal of all payment

'as a last resort'. The Reference Group's final report is not due for release until June 2000, and the Government has not yet indicated what its formal response will be. However, ministerial statements suggest support for many of the recommendations.

In emphasising mutual obligation as a guiding policy principle in recasting social security for the unemployed, the Government argues that it is going with the grain of public opinion. But how far is this right? Does the policy shift over the last decade also represent or reflect a movement in public opinion? Do Australians support the idea that benefits should only be available to unemployed people on condition that they demonstrate ever greater efforts to find work? If so, does this apply across the board or only to particular groups of the unemployed, such as young people? Furthermore, what does the public see as the other side of the mutual obligation contract - the responsibility of government towards the unemployed?

A number of items designed to throw further light on these questions were included in the SPRC's survey *Coping With Economic and Social Change*, and the next Section provides a brief description of the survey.

3 The Survey

Full details of the CESC survey methodology are given in SPRC Discussion Paper No. 106 (Saunders, Thomson and Evans, 2000). The survey was carried out by post between April and June 1999, and involved a national sample of adults selected randomly from the February 1999 microfiche version of the National Electoral Roll. A total of 4041 questionnaires were distributed and 2403 were returned completed. Allowing for a small number which were returned indicating that the person had moved, the effective response rate was just over 62 per cent - a good result for a national postal survey of this kind.

Although the survey achieved a good response rate, there were a number of ways in which the characteristics of respondents differed from those of the general adult population. Census data were therefore used to create weights in order to adjust for response bias. There remain some differences in family type, income, housing tenure and country of birth, but broadly speaking the weighted data set is now reasonably

representative of the Australian adult population. The analysis reported below is based on the weighted sample.

The main topics covered in the survey as a whole were as follows.

- standards of living and attitudes to change
- perceptions of poverty and its causes
- causes of and solutions to unemployment
- social security treatment of the unemployed
- personal characteristics (including age, sex, family, housing, labour force and health status, job security, income and perceived distributional position).

The questions about mutual obligation and social security policy for unemployed people covered community views on four main issues:

1. the *level of support* currently provided for different groups of unemployed people,
2. the *requirements* unemployed people should face under an activity test,
3. the *level of penalties* people should face if they fail to meet these requirements, and
4. when *sole parents* might reasonably be expected to seek paid work in return for receiving social security support.

We begin reporting results from the survey by looking at people's views on the problem of unemployment generally, including their estimation of its extent, their own experiences of unemployment, and their ideas about the causes of and solutions to the problem.

4 Unemployment: Knowledge, Experience, Causes and Solutions

In order to get a sense of how serious people thought the issue of unemployment was and how well informed they were about the scale of

the problem, respondents were asked to state, within given bands, what they thought the official unemployment rate was at the time of the survey. They were also asked to indicate what proportion of those officially unemployed they thought had been out of work for one year or more. Tables 1 and 2 give the results for the sample as a whole.

Table 1: Estimates of the Current Unemployment Rate (percentages)

| Question | Less than 3% | 3-6% | 7-9% | 10-12% | More than 12% | Don't know | Total |
|--|--------------|------|------|--------|---------------|------------|-------|
| <i>What do you think the current official unemployment rate is in Australia?</i> | 0.2 | 3.9 | 53.5 | 20.6 | 11.5 | 10.3 | 100.0 |

Unweighted n = 2275, missing = 128

Table 2: Estimates of the Current Level of Long-term Unemployment (percentages)

| Question | Less than a quarter | Between a quarter and a half | More than half | Don't know | Total |
|---|---------------------|------------------------------|----------------|------------|-------|
| <i>What proportion of people who are officially unemployed do you think have been out of work for one year or more?</i> | 10.7 | 38.1 | 31.5 | 19.7 | 100.0 |

Unweighted n = 2272, missing = 131

Just over half correctly assessed official unemployment as being in the 7-9 per cent range (it was approximately 7.5 per cent in June 1999). However, almost one-third saw it as higher than this, while 10 per cent could not say. A substantial proportion also over-estimated the extent of long-term unemployment, which stood at around one-third of total unemployment in June 1999, while nearly one-fifth were unable to make an estimate.

There was some variation in the distribution of answers to these questions by respondents' characteristics. The detailed breakdown is provided in Appendix Table A1. The greatest differences were by sex, usual voting behaviour, income and education. In general, men, Liberal voters, higher earners, home owners and those with higher qualifications were less likely to overestimate the severity of unemployment.

In themselves, these results may not be particularly meaningful. It is difficult to know whether they simply indicate that many people are poorly informed about the unemployment figures, or whether there is a distrust of official statistics and a sense that the problem is more severe than is presented. Taken in conjunction with other views, however, they can help to indicate whether opinions about the causes of unemployment and the treatment of the unemployed are linked to people's perception of the scale of unemployment itself. These analyses are reported further below.

Another question in the survey asked whether the respondent or a member of her/his family had been unemployed during the last three years. Overall, 40 per cent had experienced unemployment to this extent, suggesting that many people's views will be influenced at least partly by some direct experience. Later we show to what extent this experience is associated with differing attitudes towards activity testing of unemployed people.

In order to gauge how people perceived the causes of the current high level of unemployment, respondents were asked to indicate agreement or disagreement with a set of statements. Table 3 presents the statements and the responses they generated.

The first pattern to be observed is that on the whole people were more likely to agree with the various propositions offered than to disagree. This is an effect frequently found in attitudinal surveys, but it may also reflect a realistic understanding of the multi-causality of unemployment. Despite this pattern, there was still noticeable variation in the strength of views on different statements. First, looking at the strongest levels of agreement, job loss through technology tops the list at 23 per cent, followed closely by increased ease of obtaining social security and then cheap imports. Looking at broad agreement as a whole, it is clear that people are most inclined to blame technology (76 per cent), followed by cheap imports and then access to social security benefits. Not far behind come skills mismatches and then excessive working hours. The one statement which breaks the pattern of broad support for the questions posed is that concerning migrants. It is interesting in the light of the populist anti-migrant views promoted by groups such as One Nation to see that 46 per

Table 3: Explanations for High Unemployment (percentages)

| | <i>Nowadays machines do more of the work and that means there are fewer jobs</i> | <i>There just aren't enough jobs for all the people who want to work</i> | <i>There aren't enough jobs because the Government isn't managing the economy properly</i> | <i>Fewer people want to work these days</i> | <i>Cheap imports from overseas have destroyed Australian jobs</i> | <i>It's easier to get social security these days</i> | <i>Migrants are taking the jobs of Australian -born workers</i> | <i>Trade unions demand wages that are too high, so employers can't afford to take on more workers</i> | <i>Some people aren't skilled enough to fill the jobs that are available now</i> | <i>People who have jobs are working longer hours, so employers don't have to take on more workers</i> |
|----------------------------|--|--|--|---|---|--|---|---|--|---|
| Strongly agree | 22.8 | 12.0 | 10.8 | 9.8 | 20.8 | 21.2 | 9.2 | 9.4 | 7.9 | 13.2 |
| Agree | 53.6 | 36.9 | 22.3 | 34.3 | 43.1 | 34.6 | 17.3 | 23.8 | 46.1 | 37.6 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 8.3 | 14.0 | 28.7 | 16.2 | 14.6 | 13.8 | 19.7 | 20.4 | 15.0 | 17.7 |
| Disagree | 8.2 | 25.9 | 23.8 | 25.6 | 11.5 | 16.0 | 32.8 | 26.5 | 20.0 | 19.3 |
| Strongly disagree | 1.1 | 4.0 | 3.8 | 6.4 | 1.5 | 4.1 | 12.8 | 9.1 | 2.8 | 1.8 |
| Don't know | 0.6 | 1.5 | 5.0 | 1.8 | 2.9 | 4.5 | 2.7 | 5.3 | 2.4 | 4.8 |
| Missing | 5.4 | 5.6 | 5.6 | 5.8 | 5.5 | 5.9 | 5.7 | 5.5 | 5.7 | 5.5 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Unweighted n = 2403

cent disagreed with the proposition that migrants are a cause of unemployment, and less than 27 per cent agreed.

Opinions were most polarised about the following two statements – ‘*Trade unions demand wages that are too high, so employers can’t afford to take on more workers*’ and ‘*There aren’t enough jobs because the Government isn’t managing the economy properly*’. In both cases, around one-third were in agreement and one-third disagreed. However, these statements also attracted the highest levels of ‘agnosticism’, with 29 per cent neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement on the Government’s management of the economy, and 20 per cent unwilling to offer a view on the role of trade unions. It is also interesting to note very similar patterns of responses to two somewhat contradictory statements – that there are not enough jobs for those who want to work, and that fewer people want to work. This does not necessarily represent contradictions in individual attitudes, however, as the correlation between responses to the two questions was negative (though only weakly so)¹.

The relatively high level of support for the idea that reluctance to work is a cause of high unemployment (44 per cent) is in line with the growth in support for a similar statement recorded in the Morgan Polls in the early 1990s, noted in Eardley and Matheson (1999). We speculated there that the population may have been influenced by the ‘active society’ discourse being promoted by government. Thus people may be more inclined to see unemployment as a question of individual responsibility, even while also recognising the problem of insufficient demand in the economy.

Appendix Table A2 presents the mean responses as scores on a five-point scale from –2 (strongly disagree) to +2 (strongly agree), broken down by respondent characteristics. There were significant differences, particularly by age, labour force status, housing tenure, voting behaviour, education, and, for some questions, residential location. Also, respondents who experienced unemployment in the last three years (either being unemployed themselves or having had a family member unemployed) were significantly less likely to attribute high unemployment to ease of

1 Correlation coefficients ranged from –0.060 to –0.350, depending on respondents’ level of education. Thus those with higher levels of education were more likely to see the two positions as contradictory.

getting social security or to fewer people wanting to work. They were more likely to blame the lack of demand for labour and government mismanagement.

Further views on unemployment and who should be held responsible for solving it were sought through another similar question (Table 4). This shows that there is a widespread pessimism about the possibility of returning to full employment (however respondents conceived of this), with 76 per cent agreeing with the statement that ‘some people will always be unemployed ...’. Perhaps as a result, the percentage blaming the unemployed themselves was less than 14 per cent, with 58 per cent disagreeing. Thus, despite the earlier finding that nearly half the respondents thought that reluctance to work was contributing to unemployment, it does not appear that ‘blaming the victim’ is widespread in Australia in relation to unemployment.

Table 4: Views on the Responsibility for Solving the Unemployment Problem (percentages)

| | <i>People who are unemployed only have themselves to blame</i> | <i>Businesses should be required to create more jobs</i> | <i>Solving unemployment is the Government's responsibility</i> | <i>Some people will always be unemployed – we will never get back to full-employment</i> | <i>There's enough work available now – we just have to share it around more evenly</i> |
|----------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Strongly agree | 3.9 | 8.9 | 13.0 | 17.7 | 4.8 |
| Agree | 9.6 | 34.9 | 34.2 | 58.1 | 24.6 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 23.9 | 26.3 | 23.4 | 8.7 | 25.3 |
| Disagree | 44.4 | 22.6 | 22.3 | 7.6 | 33.1 |
| Strongly disagree | 13.4 | 1.9 | 2.3 | 2.0 | 4.5 |
| Don't know | 1.5 | 1.9 | 1.7 | 3.0 | 4.7 |
| Missing | 3.4 | 3.6 | 3.2 | 3.0 | 3.1 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Unweighted n = 2403 | | | | | |

In spite of the pessimism about returning to full employment, 48 per cent agreed that solving the unemployment problem was the government's responsibility and 45 per cent thought business should contribute by creating more jobs. Only just over a quarter disagreed with these two propositions.

The patterns of variation by respondent characteristics were similar to those of previous questions, though fewer differences were significant at the one per cent level. Appendix Table A3 presents the results, again as mean scores on a five-point scale.

In order to assess more precisely what people thought the responsibility of government consisted of, we provided respondents with a list of 13 possible actions that the government could take to solve unemployment, and asked them to indicate which *three* they thought were the most important. Table 5 summarises the responses, grouped according to what we judge to be an implied view of the role of government². The alternatives are grouped into:

- 1) those which clearly involve more government intervention – shown in the top panel;
- 2) those which imply support for a restructuring of existing intervention, without necessarily supporting more or less state intervention overall – shown in the middle panel; and
- 3) those which suggest support for either less state intervention and/or increased reliance on market-based solutions to unemployment – shown in the bottom panel.

One further alternative – to keep economic growth as high as possible – is presented separately, as it does not easily fit into this tripartite grouping.

Table 5 gives both the percentage of all responses accruing to each proposal (of which each respondent could provide up to three) and the percentage of all individual respondents in the sample who ticked one of the alternative proposals.

2 The alternatives were not listed in the survey question in the order shown in the figure.

Table 5: The Role of Government in Solving Unemployment

| | Percentage of responses | Percentage of respondents |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Increased Intervention | | |
| <i>Give more help to small business</i> | 13.7 | 40.9 |
| <i>Provide more training for unemployed people</i> | 12.1 | 36.1 |
| <i>Give employers subsidies to take on unemployed people</i> | 11.1 | 33.1 |
| <i>Create more public sector jobs</i> | 5.1 | 15.1 |
| <i>Expand regional employment policies</i> | 4.4 | 13.0 |
| 2. Restructured Intervention | | |
| <i>Make it easier for people to combine work and family responsibilities</i> | 11.2 | 33.2 |
| <i>Improve work incentives in the tax and social security systems</i> | 10.6 | 31.5 |
| <i>Reform the tax system</i> | 9.1 | 27.1 |
| 3. Reduced Intervention/Market - based strategies | | |
| <i>Make it harder to get unemployment benefits</i> | 8.2 | 24.5 |
| <i>Freeze pay awards</i> | 1.3 | 3.9 |
| <i>Deregulate the labour market further</i> | 1.0 | 3.1 |
| Keep economic growth as high as possible | 10.3 | 30.7 |
| Totals | 100.0 | 297.7 |
| Unweighted n = 2299, missing = 104 | | |

The two most popular proposals (plus the fourth most popular) - *provide more help to small business, provide more training for the unemployed* and *give employers subsidies to take on the unemployed* - all fall into the ‘increased intervention’ category. The third and fifth most popular – *make it easier for people to combine work and family*, and *improve the incentive structure* – can both be seen as examples of a ‘restructured intervention’. Very few people thought that the government should pursue policies such as freeze award wages or further deregulate the labour market, which involve more reliance on market forces, in order to reduce unemployment. Tax reform and the pursuit of high economic growth were both relatively popular, however, as was making it more difficult to receive unemployment benefits.

Here there is evidence of a pattern beginning to emerge - one in which the great majority appear to support the need for government to both increase its intervention, and to restructure existing policies, in order to help reduce the level of unemployment.

Whether people think such increased intervention should also involve extra public expenditure is another question (although it is implied in the way the survey questions were phrased). The earlier SPRC study (Eardley and Matheson, 1999) found that support in Australia for extra spending on the unemployed was low by international standards. In this survey we asked respondents the question 'what do you think about the overall level of support the Government provides to the following groups of unemployed people at the moment?'.

Table 6 shows that public opinion is divided on whether current levels of support are sufficient, insufficient or too high, but that this varies across different groups. One group stands out. There is clearly a widespread view that older unemployed people do not receive enough help and very few people thought that they currently receive too much support. About a quarter of the respondents thought that other groups, apart from people with young children, received too much; a fairly consistent 26-39 per cent felt that support was about right across the board; and nearly one-third thought that both the long-term unemployed and people with young children did not get enough support.

It is also worth noting that a fairly large proportion said they did not know (including about two per cent missing responses), especially when it came to the amount of support provided to migrants. This presumably reflects a lack of knowledge of what support these groups actually do receive at present. Another interesting point, which came up consistently in responses to other questions, is that there appears to be a distinction in people's minds between the older unemployed and the long-term unemployed, many of whom are in fact one and the same³. To some

3 ABS Labour Force Survey figures show that in October 1999 people aged over 55 made up just over 11 per cent of those unemployed for one year or more and 13 per cent of those unemployed for two years or more (ABS, 1999). The age categories used do not allow a precise estimate for those aged 50+, but it is likely that at least one-fifth of the LTU are in this age group.

Table 6: Views on Levels of Government Support for Unemployed People (percentages)

| | Young single unemployed (under 25) | Older unemployed (over 50) | Long-term unemployed | People constantly in and out of work | Unemployed people with young children (under 5) | Unemployed migrants |
|-------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Too much | 25.7 | 1.6 | 24.2 | 26.0 | 13.6 | 28.1 |
| About right | 39.1 | 25.8 | 26.4 | 33.8 | 34.5 | 27.1 |
| Not enough | 21.5 | 57.9 | 31.6 | 15.8 | 32.1 | 13.4 |
| Don't know | 13.7 | 14.6 | 17.8 | 24.5 | 19.7 | 31.4 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Unweighted n = 2331 to 2359

extent this may be a result of the way the question was posed, but it does suggest that many people may be unaware of long-term unemployment being a particular problem for older people.

We now move on to look at views on ‘mutual obligation’, in terms of the kinds of things unemployed people might be required or expected to do in order to qualify for social security payments.

5 Activity Test Requirements and Mutual Obligation

As was outlined earlier, unemployed people receiving Newstart or Youth Allowance are currently obliged to demonstrate active job search or preparation for job-readiness in a number of ways. In addition, young people who are unemployed for more than six months must undertake one of a range of mutual obligation activities, which could include Work for Dole.

In order to assess community views on activity testing and mutual obligation, the survey included two questions which listed activities that people might be required to do in order to receive unemployment benefits and asked which, if any, respondents thought should apply to different groups of the unemployed. The list was not related specifically to precise legislative requirements. Rather, it provided a broad summary of the kind of activities or expectations commonly referred to in current discussions about mutual obligation. Table 7 shows the level of support for the various requirements as they applied to different categories of unemployed people⁴.

A striking feature of these results is that the variation is much greater across the rows than down the columns. This suggests that in relation to certain groups of the unemployed, people support a range of different benefit requirements, but they make a distinction between the treatment of different groups according to their circumstances or characteristics. Thus it appears that notions of mutual obligation cannot be seen as of equal relevance or application to all of the unemployed.

Support for the kinds of requirements listed in Table 7 clearly does exist, especially as applied to young unemployed people, but it cannot be seen as whole-hearted or generalisable to all of the unemployed. Young people are the group most people feel should face the greatest requirements, followed by the long-term unemployed, but even for these groups the obligation to accept any work offered commands substantially less support (65 per cent) than some other items. Nearly everyone thought that the young unemployed should have to look for work, but the idea that they should have to move in order to find work did not even receive a bare majority support. This suggests that people prefer policies designed

4 Since respondents were simply asked to tick a box if they thought a particular requirement should apply, it is possible that some of those failing to tick a box were not positively disagreeing with the proposition but were just not responding. In order to allow for this, those cases where respondents also failed to complete other related questions on the same page of the questionnaire were treated as missing. These amounted to only 1.2 per cent of cases. Of those cases counted as valid, only 0.4 ticked no boxes and 2.6 per cent ticked less than five boxes. At the other extreme, only six per cent ticked 40 boxes or more and less than two per cent ticked all 45 boxes. This suggests that the vast majority of responses can be seen as valid and considered.

Table 7: Levels of Support for Activity Test Requirements

| Requirements | Young unemployed (under 25) | Older unemployed (50+) | Long-term unemployed (of any age) | Unemployed people with young children (under 5) | People affected by a disability |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| | per cent | | | | |
| Look for work | 92.8 | 53.7 | 81.2 | 51.6 | 33.5 |
| Complete a 'dole diary' detailing efforts to find work | 79.9 | 40.9 | 71.1 | 42.7 | 25.7 |
| Take part in a 'work for the dole' scheme | 82.5 | 38.2 | 72.3 | 35.6 | 24.6 |
| Undergo a training or re-training program | 81.8 | 61.5 | 80.5 | 55.5 | 51.8 |
| Undertake useful work in the community | 78.4 | 62.8 | 77.0 | 47.7 | 46.3 |
| Accepted any paid job offered | 64.9 | 32.8 | 64.5 | 29.7 | 18.1 |
| Move to another town or city to find work | 49.1 | 9.4 | 40.8 | 11.0 | 5.3 |
| Change appearance (eg. get a haircut) | 71.2 | 33.8 | 57.6 | 34.5 | 25.4 |
| Improve reading and writing skills | 83.9 | 51.1 | 74.9 | 53.7 | 45.4 |
| Unweighted n = 2373, missing = 30 | | | | | |

to bring jobs to where people live, rather than forcing them to move to where jobs are available.

It is also striking that nearly half the respondents thought that neither the older unemployed nor those with young children should even have to look for work – a requirement which one might have thought most people would see as a minimum.

The Jobseeker Diary, training, useful community work and remedial literacy were all somewhat more popular for these groups, but still only between two-fifths and two-thirds were in favour of them being

obligatory. This suggests that once people begin to view unemployed people as facing certain disadvantages, such as older age, or circumstances that might conflict with a strong employment focus, such as the presence of young children, they tend to soften their attitudes on what activities should be obligatory.

This is particularly the case when it comes to ‘people affected by a disability’. We do not know how respondents understood this phrase, or what type and level of disability they ascribed in their minds to people in this category. However, taking the results at face value, it does appear that extending many aspects of the mutual obligation principle to people with disabilities, as is canvassed by the Reference Group on Welfare Reform, may have only minority support.

We look in more detail below at variations in respondents’ views by age and other characteristics, but it is worth mentioning here that Work for the Dole, which represents the Government’s flagship mutual obligation program, is as popular amongst the young themselves as it is amongst other age groups. This finding supports earlier Morgan Poll data cited in Eardley and Matheson (1998).

However, looking across the categories of unemployed people, including older people and those with a disability, the activity that received the broadest level of support, aside from simple job search, was the traditional area of training and retraining. This is an element of employment service provision that has received less emphasis in recent years because of its perceived ineffectiveness at producing employment outcomes, but it appears to have retained popularity in the wider community. It is also interesting to note that a relatively large proportion of people thought ‘useful work in the community’ could appropriately be expected of the older unemployed and people with disabilities. This might be interpreted as recognition that other more employment-focused activities are less likely to achieve outcomes for these groups than for others.

The pattern on literacy improvement was similar to that for training and useful community work. It had the highest level of support in relation to young people of all the propositions other than simply requiring them to look for work.

Overall, we can summarise the results in Table 7 as indicating a high level of general support for the idea that young unemployed people and the long-term unemployed can reasonably be expected to fulfil certain requirements, and to take action to improve their own prospects, in return for benefits. However, people were much less likely to assume that these obligations should apply across the board to other groups of the unemployed, especially the older group, whom, as we saw earlier, many people feel receive insufficient support at present. There was also relatively little support for extending mutual obligations to people with disabilities. Where there was more widespread support for some expectations being placed on these other groups, it was mainly in the areas of training, requiring them to undertake useful work in the community and remedial literacy. This suggests that the Government may need to be cautious about the extension of mutual obligation to these groups if it wants to carry public opinion with it.⁵ Certainly it seems that emphasis would need to be placed on providing effective assistance and support to make it possible for older people and those with a disability to get back to work.

The results above are aggregated across the whole sample, and we might expect some variation by respondent characteristics. In order to summarise the overall level of support for the concept of mutual obligation we created an individual indicator for each group of unemployed people, based on responses to the nine questions described in Table 7. This indicator calculates the total number of activities which respondents, on average, felt that the different groups of unemployed people should be required to do in order to retain their income support. Table 8 gives the responses on this indicator broken down by a range of respondent characteristics.

Across the whole sample, the average number of activities respondents felt young unemployed people should be required to undertake was nearly

5 It is interesting to note that the patterns of responses to mutual obligation for young people and people with a disability are almost diametrically opposed. A total of 2.5 per cent of respondents ticked no boxes at all for young unemployed people and 28.9 per cent ticked all nine boxes, whereas 29.7 per cent ticked no boxes for people affected by a disability and only 2.1 per cent ticked all nine boxes.

Table 8: Support for Mutual Obligation, by Respondent Characteristics

| Respondent Characteristics | Unemployment Group | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| | Young (under 25) | Older (over 50) | Long-term Unemployed | With young children (under 5) | Affected by disability |
| | Scores out of 9 | | | | |
| Total | 6.9 | 3.8 | 6.2 | 3.6 | 2.8 |
| Sex: | | | | | |
| Male | 6.8 | 3.8 | 6.1 | 3.7 | 2.7 |
| Female | 6.9 | 3.9 | 6.3 | 3.6 | 2.9 |
| Age: | | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| 18-24 | 6.8 | 4.1 | 6.9 | 4.0 | 3.6 |
| 25-34 | 6.8 | 4.1 | 6.6 | 4.0 | 3.4 |
| 35-44 | 6.7 | 4.1 | 6.7 | 4.0 | 3.2 |
| 45-54 | 7.0 | 3.9 | 6.3 | 3.9 | 2.7 |
| 55-64 | 7.1 | 3.7 | 6.0 | 3.5 | 2.0 |
| 65 and over | 6.9 | 3.2 | 4.9 | 2.6 | 1.6 |
| Labour force status: | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| Self-employed | 7.1 | 4.5 | 6.5 | 4.1 | 3.2 |
| Employed F/T | 7.0 | 4.3 | 6.8 | 4.2 | 3.3 |
| Employed P/T | 6.8 | 3.8 | 6.4 | 3.5 | 2.7 |
| Unemployed | 5.8 | 3.2 | 5.5 | 2.8 | 2.3 |
| Retired | 7.0 | 3.3 | 5.1 | 2.8 | 1.7 |
| Studying | 6.5 | 4.0 | 6.4 | 3.8 | 3.4 |
| Voluntary work | 7.5 | 3.6 | 5.5 | 2.5 | 2.1 |
| Home responsibility | 6.8 | 3.6 | 6.0 | 3.3 | 2.7 |
| Other | 7.0 | 3.7 | 6.1 | 3.4 | 2.4 |
| Housing tenure: | * | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| Mortgage | 6.9 | 4.2 | 6.6 | 4.0 | 3.1 |
| Own home outright | 7.0 | 3.8 | 6.0 | 3.4 | 2.3 |
| Private renter | 6.5 | 3.7 | 6.2 | 3.5 | 2.9 |
| Public renter | 6.6 | 2.5 | 4.9 | 2.3 | 1.6 |
| Boarder | 6.9 | 3.7 | 6.6 | 3.7 | 3.2 |
| Other | 7.0 | 3.9 | 6.7 | 4.2 | 3.4 |
| Usually vote for? : | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| Liberal | 7.4 | 4.2 | 6.6 | 4.0 | 2.9 |
| Labor | 6.5 | 3.4 | 5.8 | 3.1 | 2.4 |
| National | 7.7 | 4.6 | 6.8 | 4.5 | 3.0 |
| Democrat | 6.4 | 3.4 | 5.5 | 3.1 | 2.9 |
| Swinging voter | 6.9 | 4.3 | 6.6 | 4.1 | 3.2 |
| Other | 6.3 | 3.8 | 6.0 | 3.6 | 2.7 |
| Gross income of family: | * | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| Less than \$400 pw | 6.7 | 3.2 | 5.5 | 2.9 | 2.0 |
| \$400-699 pw | 6.9 | 3.8 | 6.4 | 3.8 | 2.8 |
| \$700-1249 pw | 6.9 | 3.8 | 6.4 | 4.1 | 3.2 |
| \$1250 or above | 7.1 | 4.7 | 6.9 | 4.3 | 3.5 |

Table 8: Support for Mutual Obligation, by Respondent Characteristics (cont.)

| Respondent Characteristics | Unemployment Group | | | | |
|--|--------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| | Young (under 25) | Older (over 50) | Long-term Unemployed | With young children (under 5) | Affected by disability |
| Highest educational qualification: | | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| Primary or less | 6.9 | 2.8 | 4.9 | 3.0 | 1.6 |
| Some secondary | 6.8 | 3.4 | 5.8 | 3.3 | 2.3 |
| Completed secondary | 7.0 | 4.0 | 6.5 | 3.7 | 2.8 |
| Trade certificate | 6.8 | 3.8 | 6.5 | 3.8 | 2.9 |
| Bachelor degree | 6.6 | 4.4 | 6.5 | 4.0 | 3.4 |
| Postgraduate degree | 6.8 | 5.1 | 6.7 | 4.1 | 3.9 |
| Other | 6.7 | 4.2 | 6.5 | 3.8 | 3.1 |
| Unemployed in last 3 years? | ** | * | ** | | |
| Yes | 6.7 | 3.8 | 6.1 | 3.6 | 2.8 |
| No | 7.0 | 4.0 | 6.5 | 3.8 | 2.9 |
| Estimate of current unemployment rate: | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| < 3% | 6.6 | 3.7 | 7.8 | 6.0 | 4.1 |
| 3-6% | 7.1 | 3.9 | 6.5 | 3.9 | 2.7 |
| 7-9% | 7.0 | 4.2 | 6.5 | 3.8 | 3.0 |
| 10-12% | 6.9 | 3.8 | 6.1 | 3.5 | 2.8 |
| >12% | 6.7 | 3.3 | 6.0 | 3.4 | 2.5 |
| D/K | 6.3 | 2.9 | 5.4 | 2.8 | 2.1 |
| Disability or illness | | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| Yes | 6.7 | 2.9 | 5.0 | 2.8 | 1.8 |
| No | 6.9 | 4.0 | 6.5 | 3.8 | 3.0 |
| Current living arrangements | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| Live alone | 6.9 | 3.4 | 5.5 | 3.0 | 2.1 |
| Live with parents | 6.8 | 3.7 | 6.7 | 3.8 | 3.2 |
| Live with spouse/partner | 7.0 | 4.0 | 6.0 | 3.5 | 2.5 |
| Live with spouse/partner and children | 7.0 | 4.1 | 6.6 | 4.0 | 3.0 |
| Live just with children | 6.4 | 3.6 | 6.3 | 3.4 | 2.7 |
| Other (including house share) | 6.3 | 3.8 | 6.0 | 3.3 | 3.0 |
| Area | ** | * | | ** | |
| Major urban | 6.7 | 3.7 | 6.1 | 4.5 | 2.7 |
| Other urban | 7.1 | 3.8 | 6.2 | 3.6 | 2.7 |
| Rural and remote | 7.1 | 4.1 | 6.4 | 3.9 | 2.9 |

Unweighted n = 2,147 to 2,373

Analysis of Variance:

* *f* test significant at the 5 per cent level ** *f* test significant at the 1 per cent level

seven (6.9) out of a possible nine, while for unemployed people affected by a disability, the average score was less than three (2.8).

The views of men and women were not significantly different overall, even though women appeared to take a slightly firmer line than men in relation to all groups other than those with young children. Age patterns were more interesting, in that support for mutual obligation with respect to young people was almost as strong amongst young people themselves as amongst other age groups. In relation to other groups, however, we can see a linear decline by respondent age in support for these requirements being applied. The post-retirement age group (65 +) seem, in particular, less likely to take a hard line on many of these questions than younger people, even though we might expect this age group to exhibit more conservative values. For example, their score in relation people with disabilities was less than half that of those aged under 25. This suggests a potentially important cohort effect. The views of older people may reflect ideas and expectations formed in an earlier era of social security provision, and may also stem from earlier notions of family responsibility (such as that people with young children should care for them rather than look for work). The young, on the other hand, seem more willing to accept and support new benefit requirements.

There was also significant variation by respondents' labour market status, with - not surprisingly - lower levels of endorsement for mutual obligation by unemployed people themselves than by those in work.

The main point of interest in relation to housing tenure was that public tenants offered distinctly lower levels of support for mutual obligation, when applied to groups other than the young, than did those in other forms of housing tenure.

Given the politics of welfare state provision, it is not surprising to find that there are noticeable differences in views according to the political party people normally vote for. As might be expected, we find stronger views in favour of mutual obligation among Coalition voters, especially National Party voters, than among others, with Democrat voters taking the softest line on the issue overall.

Table 8 also shows that family income and educational qualifications are significant sources of attitudinal variation. In relation to most groups, support for mutual obligation appears to rise with both income and education.

There is an interesting pattern to be seen in the responses broken down by people's estimates of the current official unemployment rate. It appears that the more unemployment people believe there to be, the less inclined they are to support mutual obligation. Perhaps surprisingly, however, there was little variation according to whether respondents had actually experienced unemployment in their family over the last three years. Those who had recently been affected by unemployment were slightly less inclined to support mutual obligation, but the differences, while significant for some groups, were still small.

Having an illness or disability which interferes with the ability to work also appears to reduce people's inclination to support these requirements, especially, as one might expect, in relation to disabled beneficiaries.

Finally, in the current context of debate over the social problems facing rural and regional Australia, it is of interest to compare the views of those living in different regional settings. Overall, the results were in line with expectations, in that people in rural and remote areas were more supportive of mutual obligation than city dwellers, but the differences, while statistically significant for some groups, were small.

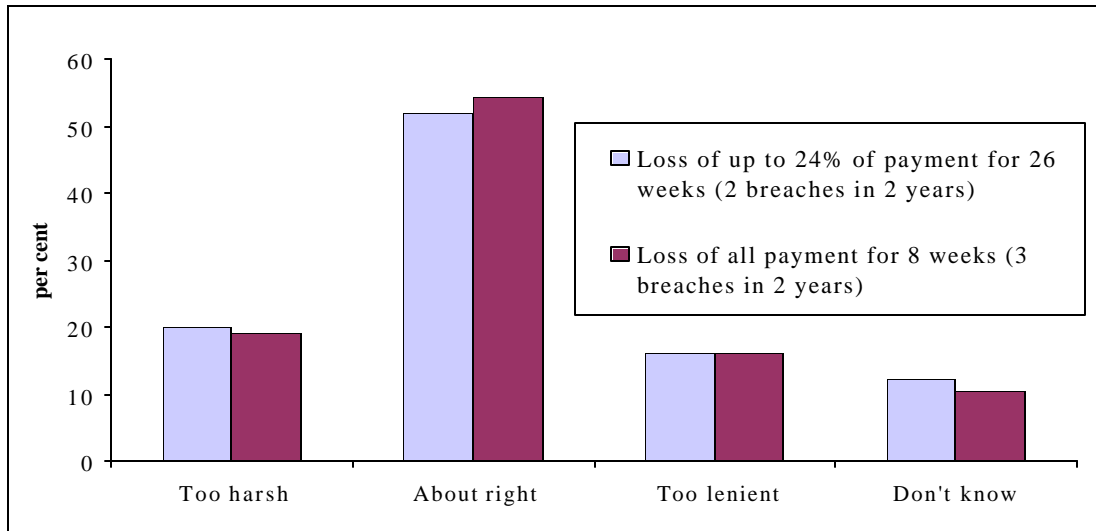
Views on Sanctions for Breaching Activity Test Requirements

A further topic explored in this section of the survey was whether people felt that the existing levels of penalties for breaching activity test requirements were reasonable. These sanctions have been increasing in severity over the last decade. Currently, the first breach can lead to a loss of 18 per cent of the basic payment (excluding any payment to a partner or Family Allowance payable) for 26 weeks, while two breaches in a two-year period can result in a 24 per cent reduction. Three breaches in two years can lead to a loss of the whole basic payment for eight weeks.

Figure 1 shows the overall responses to this question. Between 52 and 54 per cent saw both levels of penalties as being about right, with most of

the rest fairly evenly divided between those seeing them as too harsh and those seeing them as too lenient. About 12 per cent could not say. It is worth noting that we did not, in the questionnaire, state the dollar value of these potential fines or invite respondents to consider the impact they might have on recipients with already very low incomes. It is possible that if we had the responses might have been somewhat different.

Figure 1: Views on Penalties for Not Meeting Social Security Requirements



Appendix Tables A4 and A5 present these results broken down by respondent characteristics. Notable features are that unemployed respondents and Democrat voters were much more likely than others to see the penalties as too harsh.

Sole Parents and the Expectation to Seek Work

The final question on activity testing and mutual obligation was designed to explore when people thought sole parents could reasonably be expected to look for paid work in return for access to income support. In 1999 the Minister for Family and Community Services raised questions about whether it is in parents' best interests to remain out of work and on Parenting Payment until the youngest child is aged 16, as is currently permitted (Newman, 1999). Research has indeed shown that by this time many mothers have become so detached from the labour market that it is often difficult for them to return (Shaver et al., 1994). The average length of time that sole parents remained on what used to be the Sole Parent Pension was just over three years in 1996, and of those leaving the

pension in that year about 13 per cent had been in continuous receipt for five years or more (Chalmers, 1999). Many, however, return to income support of one kind or another at some point after moving off the pension.

There have been attempts in recent years to help and encourage sole parents to find paid employment, through programs such as the Jobs Education and Training (JET) scheme. Nevertheless, Australia remains one of a fairly small number of (largely English-speaking) countries where sole parents are able to receive means-tested income support without any requirement to be available for or seek work until their youngest child turns 16.

The survey asked two questions concerning sole parents' eligibility for income support. First, we asked 'Currently sole parents can receive the pension⁶ without being expected to seek paid work until their youngest child turns 16. When do you think it is appropriate for a sole parent to be expected to undertake *part-time* work?' Secondly, we asked 'When do you think it is appropriate for a sole parent to be expected to undertake *full-time* work?' Respondents were offered a number of alternatives.

Table 9 shows the responses to these questions, by the sex of respondents. Overall, just over half thought that once a child goes to primary school, at about five years old, it is reasonable to expect sole parents to look for part-time work. The rest were divided between higher age thresholds or leaving it up to the mother to decide when she feels ready (10 per cent). Only about 13 per cent preferred the status quo (once the youngest child turns 16).

The pattern was quite different in relation to full-time work, however. Here only 17 per cent opted for a full-time work expectation when the child first goes to primary school. Just under one-third opted for the status quo and 29 per cent for unrestricted eligibility to until the youngest child reaches high school age (about 11 years). A further 16 per cent would rather leave it to the parent to decide for herself (the vast majority of sole parents receiving income support being women).

6 Although sole parents now receive Parenting Payment (Single) rather than the Sole Parent Pension, we judged that respondents would be more likely to recognise the older nomenclature.

Table 9: When Sole Parents Should Be Expected to Seek Paid Work, By Sex of Respondent (percentages)

| | Men | Women | All |
|--|-------|-------|-------|
| A: Part-time? | | | |
| As now, once the youngest child turns 16 | 13.5 | 13.3 | 13.4 |
| Once the youngest child goes to high school | 20.0 | 17.6 | 18.7 |
| Once the youngest child goes to primary school | 50.8 | 51.8 | 51.3 |
| Only when the sole parent feels ready | 8.5 | 11.3 | 10.0 |
| Other | 7.1 | 6.1 | 6.6 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| B: Full-time? | | | |
| As now, once the youngest child turns 16 | 34.2 | 32.1 | 33.1 |
| Once the youngest child goes to high school | 29.8 | 26.8 | 28.3 |
| Once the youngest child goes to primary school | 16.6 | 17.5 | 17.0 |
| Only when the sole parent feels ready | 12.8 | 18.4 | 15.7 |
| Other | 6.6 | 5.2 | 5.9 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Unweighted n = 2305 to 2310

Appendix Tables A6 and A7 presents the breakdown of these results by respondent characteristics. The pattern of variation was, overall, similar to that found for other questions, but it is interesting to note that while sole parents themselves were somewhat more inclined to support the status quo or to let the parent decide for herself, they did not stand out as having radically different views from those other respondents.

The results seems to suggest that there is some community support for reconsidering current arrangements, but no overwhelming view that sole parents should be expected to seek paid work when they still have relatively young children to care for.

These findings are broadly in line with those reported in a recent review of attitudinal evidence on welfare state provision carried out by the UK Department of Social Security (Williams, Hill and Davies, 1999). This review reports that nearly half the respondents in a national survey in the UK (Snape and Kelly, 1999) thought that lone mothers with school-aged

children should go out to work, but a similar proportion thought they should be able to choose. There was also recognition that lone parents needed substantial support and assistance to be able to do this, and policy approaches which could be seen as placing pressure on them, including reductions in benefits, were largely seen as inappropriate.

We do not know what factors people were taking into account when they answered the SPRC survey questions. A number of other countries with large and generous welfare states, like Denmark, Sweden or Finland, generally expect sole parents to be available for and actively seeking paid work once a child is about three years old or even younger (Eardley et al., 1996). But they also provide substantial support to enter work, both in the form of municipal child care, education and training and other employment assistance.

International comparisons do not reveal very clear patterns in factors that are likely to lead to greater participation in work by sole parents (Bradshaw et al., 1996). While it is true that countries like the UK, Australia or Ireland, which have the most liberal work tests in relation to sole parenthood, also tend to have low levels of employment amongst sole parents, others, like France, have much higher percentages in work. A great deal seems to depend on the availability and affordability of essential services like childcare and on other factors like housing and transport. It may be that many of our respondents were aware of how difficult it can actually be for many sole parents to get back into work that allows them to move off income support and stay off it.

6 Conclusions

This paper has presented and discussed preliminary results from a nationally representative survey of opinions and attitudes on unemployment, including those concerning activity testing of unemployed people and mutual obligation. The data as a whole are still being analysed and further information will be available at a later stage.

In general, it is possible to say that there is broad support for the application of many, though not all, aspects of mutual obligation principles to young unemployed people and, to a lesser extent, to the long-term unemployed. When applied to other groups, however,

especially to older unemployed people, those with disabilities and parents of young children, this support is considerably less strong and more qualified. Views also vary significantly in relation to most unemployed groups according to characteristics such as population age, labour force status, income, education, political affiliation and housing tenure.

There is some support for a reconsideration of the conditions of eligibility under which sole parents can receive income support without being obliged to seek paid work. However, there is no overwhelming view that sole parents should be expected to seek paid work, especially full-time work, when they still have young children to care for.

There are, of course, uncertainties about how to interpret the findings reported here. On the whole, people are unlikely to be particularly well informed about the intricacies of social security rules, even though in a period of persistent high unemployment many people will know someone who is or has been unemployed and may have heard about some of their experiences. Indeed, 40 per cent of our sample said that either they or a member of their family had been unemployed at some point in the last three years. However, much of the discourse around unemployment and ‘dole bludgers’ has been created or reinforced in media commentary and by some politicians. Thus people may often simply be reflecting back what they have heard from such sources.

Nevertheless, it is interesting that people do make clear distinctions in how they view the requirement that can reasonably be placed on different groups and Australians do not seem inclined simply to offer unconditional support to the notion of mutual obligation *per se*. This suggests a refined and reflective approach to both the theory and practice of such a policy.

Also, as we saw earlier, even though there are differing views on what is to be done about unemployment, most Australians clearly believe that government still has an important role and support the expansion of this role in many areas in order to increase employment. As we saw in Table 4, more than 50 per cent believe that solving unemployment is the government’s responsibility. In this sense, people do see the obligation as *mutual*, not just a one-sided burden of compliance to be shouldered by unemployed people.

Appendix A: Breakdown of Selected Survey Results By Respondent Characteristics

Table A1: Estimates of the Rate of Unemployment, by Respondent Characteristics
 Question: *What do you think the current official unemployment rate is in Australia?*

| Respondent characteristics | Less than 7% | 7-9% | 10-12% | More than 12% | Don't know | Total |
|----------------------------|--------------|------|--------|---------------|------------|-------|
| | per cent | | | | | |
| Sex:** | | | | | | |
| Male | 3.7 | 61.4 | 18.3 | 10.7 | 5.9 | 100.0 |
| Female | 4.5 | 45.7 | 22.9 | 13.1 | 13.9 | 100.0 |
| Age:** | | | | | | |
| 18-39 | 3.5 | 48.4 | 24.3 | 13.3 | 9.5 | 100.0 |
| 40-64 | 4.4 | 57.6 | 19.5 | 10.8 | 7.7 | 100.0 |
| 65 and over | 4.8 | 53.8 | 20.9 | 12.0 | 15.9 | 100.0 |
| Labour force status:** | | | | | | |
| Self-employed | 2.3 | 62.5 | 20.3 | 8.6 | 6.3 | 100.0 |
| Employed | 4.2 | 54.5 | 22.3 | 11.5 | 7.6 | 100.0 |
| Unemployed | 3.3 | 50.0 | 16.4 | 21.3 | 9.0 | 100.0 |
| Not in labour force | 4.2 | 50.6 | 18.8 | 12.0 | 14.4 | 100.0 |
| Housing tenure:** | | | | | | |
| Home owner | 4.9 | 58.9 | 16.5 | 10.2 | 9.5 | 100.0 |
| Home buyer | 4.4 | 57.4 | 21.0 | 9.8 | 7.5 | 100.0 |
| Renter | 3.4 | 42.1 | 24.4 | 15.4 | 14.7 | 100.0 |
| Other | 1.6 | 43.2 | 28.4 | 18.4 | 8.8 | 100.0 |
| Usually vote for :** | | | | | | |
| Liberal | 6.0 | 59.8 | 17.0 | 8.5 | 8.8 | 100.0 |
| Labor | 3.9 | 49.0 | 21.6 | 14.3 | 11.1 | 100.0 |
| National | 0 | 56.2 | 15.7 | 11.2 | 16.9 | 100.0 |
| Democrat | 4.9 | 53.7 | 30.5 | 6.1 | 4.9 | 100.0 |
| Swinging voter | 2.3 | 54.2 | 21.5 | 12.2 | 9.7 | 100.0 |
| Other | 6.2 | 40.7 | 27.2 | 14.8 | 11.1 | 100.0 |

Table A1: Estimates of the Rate of Unemployment, by Respondent Characteristics (Cont.)

| Respondent characteristics | Less than 7% | 7-9% | 10-12% | More than 12% | Don't know | Total |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|------|--------|---------------|------------|-------|
| | per cent | | | | | |
| Gross income of family:** | | | | | | |
| Less than \$400 pw | 3.8 | 45.2 | 20.4 | 17.0 | 13.5 | 100.0 |
| \$400-699 pw | 4.3 | 48.3 | 22.1 | 14.2 | 11.0 | 100.0 |
| \$700-1249 pw | 4.6 | 58.4 | 21.0 | 8.6 | 7.4 | 100.0 |
| \$1250 or more pw | 3.9 | 67.1 | 18.3 | 6.1 | 4.6 | 100.0 |
| Highest educational qualification:** | | | | | | |
| Primary/ some secondary | 3.6 | 44.3 | 20.8 | 14.5 | 16.8 | 100.0 |
| Completed secondary | 4.9 | 50.8 | 22.2 | 13.4 | 8.8 | 100.0 |
| Trade certificate | 3.3 | 52.0 | 24.3 | 12.3 | 8.3 | 100.0 |
| Bachelor/postgraduate degree | 4.9 | 73.0 | 16.1 | 3.6 | 2.4 | 100.0 |
| Other | 2.8 | 50.9 | 18.5 | 20.4 | 7.4 | 100.0 |
| Unemployed in last 3 years?:** | | | | | | |
| Yes | 3.5 | 48.5 | 23.5 | 15.3 | 9.2 | 100.0 |
| No | 4.3 | 57.2 | 18.4 | 10.1 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| Area:** | | | | | | |
| Major urban | 4.6 | 53.0 | 20.8 | 10.8 | 10.7 | 100.0 |
| Other urban | 2.5 | 55.2 | 21.1 | 12.6 | 8.5 | 100.0 |
| Rural and remote | 4.0 | 52.9 | 20.8 | 14.4 | 10.4 | 100.0 |

Unweighted n = 2060 to 2275

** Pearson's chi square test significant at the one per cent level

Table A2: Explanations for High Unemployment, by Respondent Characteristics

Question: *Unemployment in Australia is higher now than it was 30 years ago. Below are some statements about why unemployment is higher today. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement.*

| | Nowadays machines do more of the work and that means there are fewer jobs | Cheap imports from overseas have destroyed Australian jobs | It's easier to get social security these days | People who have jobs are working longer hours, so employers don't have to take on more workers | Some people aren't skilled enough to fill the jobs that are available now | There just aren't enough jobs for all the people who want to work | Fewer people want to work these days | There aren't enough jobs because the Government isn't managing the economy properly | Trade unions demand wages that are too high, so employers can't afford to take on more workers | Migrants are taking the jobs of Australian-born workers |
|----------------------------|---|--|---|--|---|---|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Respondent characteristics | Mean scores on a five point scale 2 = Strongly Agree to -2 = Strongly Disagree | | | | | | | | | |
| All: | 0.95 | 0.77 | 0.59 | 0.46 | 0.40 | 0.29 | 0.17 | 0.14 | -0.02 | -0.25 |
| Sex: | | | | | | | | | ** | |
| Male | 0.91 | 0.74 | 0.53 | 0.46 | 0.40 | 0.28 | 0.11 | 0.14 | -0.15 | -0.27 |
| Female | 0.98 | 0.79 | 0.64 | 0.45 | 0.38 | 0.31 | 0.22 | 0.15 | 0.10 | -0.23 |
| Age: | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| 18-39 | 0.79 | 0.61 | 0.51 | 0.38 | 0.27 | -0.00 | 0.20 | 0.02 | -0.14 | -0.25 |
| 40-64 | 0.98 | 0.77 | 0.55 | 0.42 | 0.38 | 0.39 | 0.05 | 0.16 | -0.06 | -0.37 |
| 65 and over | 1.22 | 1.13 | 0.91 | 0.73 | 0.76 | 0.82 | 0.39 | 0.37 | 0.42 | 0.07 |
| Labour force status: | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| Self-employed | 0.85 | 0.72 | 0.83 | 0.44 | 0.41 | 0.06 | 0.46 | -0.10 | 0.47 | -0.48 |
| Employed | 0.79 | 0.66 | 0.58 | 0.38 | 0.33 | 0.04 | 0.17 | 0.02 | -0.25 | -0.34 |
| Unemployed | 1.12 | 0.65 | 0.03 | 0.77 | 0.43 | 0.83 | -0.66 | 0.62 | 0.14 | 0.14 |
| Not in labour force | 1.13 | 0.94 | 0.65 | 0.54 | 0.53 | 0.60 | 0.25 | 0.29 | 0.21 | -0.14 |
| Housing tenure: | ** | ** | ** | ** | | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| Home owner | 1.06 | 0.94 | 0.68 | 0.55 | 0.50 | 0.55 | 0.20 | 0.20 | 0.18 | -0.22 |
| Home buyer | 0.86 | 0.68 | 0.61 | 0.41 | 0.34 | 0.16 | 0.14 | 0.04 | -0.16 | -0.44 |
| Renter | 0.91 | 0.71 | 0.34 | 0.48 | 0.38 | 0.25 | 0.07 | 0.28 | -0.13 | -0.13 |
| Other | 0.84 | 0.58 | 0.63 | 0.35 | 0.32 | -0.11 | 0.38 | 0.03 | -0.11 | 0.01 |

Table A2: Explanations for High Unemployment, by Respondent Characteristics (Cont.)

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Usually vote for: | ** | | ** | ** | | ** | ** | ** | ** | |
| Liberal | 0.82 | 0.74 | 0.96 | 0.41 | 0.43 | 0.13 | 0.44 | -0.35 | 0.49 | -0.26 |
| Labor | 1.04 | 0.77 | 0.27 | 0.53 | 0.39 | 0.50 | -0.10 | 0.50 | -0.46 | -0.31 |
| National | 0.96 | 0.77 | 0.96 | 0.41 | 0.53 | 0.15 | 0.64 | -0.08 | 0.93 | -0.02 |
| Democrat | 0.99 | 0.78 | 0.03 | 0.85 | 0.38 | 0.26 | -0.32 | 0.46 | -0.57 | -0.49 |
| Swinging voter | 0.95 | 0.78 | 0.56 | 0.43 | 0.39 | 0.24 | 0.14 | 0.12 | -0.09 | -0.26 |
| Other | 0.81 | 0.71 | 0.64 | 0.30 | 0.20 | -0.05 | 0.54 | 0.22 | -0.05 | -0.08 |
| Gross income of family: | ** | ** | | | | ** | | ** | ** | ** |
| Less than \$400 pw | 1.13 | 0.94 | 0.55 | 0.48 | 0.39 | 0.57 | 0.16 | 0.43 | 0.21 | 0.01 |
| \$400-699 pw | 0.97 | 0.81 | 0.62 | 0.47 | 0.40 | 0.31 | 0.26 | 0.26 | -0.03 | -0.18 |
| \$700-1249 pw | 0.81 | 0.71 | 0.59 | 0.34 | 0.31 | 0.10 | 0.10 | 0.04 | -0.16 | -0.34 |
| \$1250 or more pw | 0.71 | 0.46 | 0.50 | 0.45 | 0.37 | -0.02 | 0.07 | -0.30 | -0.20 | -0.72 |
| Highest educational qualification: | ** | ** | ** | | | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| Primary/ some secondary | 1.16 | 0.99 | 0.72 | 0.50 | 0.52 | 0.54 | 0.37 | 0.37 | 0.19 | 0.11 |
| Completed secondary | 0.86 | 0.75 | 0.65 | 0.43 | 0.33 | 0.19 | 0.19 | 0.08 | 0.07 | -0.25 |
| Trade certificate | 0.96 | 0.85 | 0.66 | 0.40 | 0.35 | 0.16 | 0.25 | 0.14 | -0.21 | -0.03 |
| Bachelor/post-graduate degree | 0.72 | 0.36 | 0.22 | 0.50 | 0.40 | 0.13 | -0.22 | -0.16 | -0.34 | -1.00 |
| Other | 0.72 | 0.64 | 0.89 | 0.51 | 0.40 | 0.13 | -0.01 | 0.10 | -0.00 | -0.40 |
| Unemployed in last 3 years?: | | | ** | | | ** | ** | ** | | |
| Yes | 0.97 | 0.79 | 0.42 | 0.49 | 0.40 | 0.38 | -0.02 | 0.23 | -0.09 | -0.20 |
| No | 0.89 | 0.73 | 0.69 | 0.42 | 0.37 | 0.18 | 0.28 | 0.03 | 0.01 | -0.31 |
| Area: | ** | | ** | | ** | ** | ** | | ** | ** |
| Major urban | 0.86 | 0.72 | 0.54 | 0.44 | 0.34 | 0.20 | 0.14 | 0.10 | -0.11 | -0.35 |
| Other urban | 1.06 | 0.79 | 0.59 | 0.59 | 0.49 | 0.45 | 0.05 | 0.20 | -0.05 | -0.37 |
| Rural and remote | 1.07 | 0.86 | 0.73 | 0.43 | 0.49 | 0.43 | 0.30 | 0.21 | 0.20 | 0.05 |

Unweighted n = 1957 to 2255

** Analysis of variance *f* test significant at the 1% level

Table A3: Responsibility for Solving Unemployment, by Respondent Characteristics

Question: *We would like your opinion on some commonly expressed views about unemployment.
Please circle a number for each statement to show how much you agree or disagree with it.*

| | Some people will always be unemployed – we will never get back to full employment | Solving unemployment is the Government's problem | Businesses should be required to create more jobs | There's enough work available now – we just have to share it around more evenly | People who are unemployed only have themselves to blame |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|--|--|
| Respondent characteristics | Mean scores on a five-point scale 2 = Strongly Agree to -2 = Strongly Disagree | | | | |
| All: | 0.87 | 0.35 | 0.28 | -0.09 | -0.57 |
| Sex: | | | | ** | |
| Male | 0.84 | 0.40 | 0.27 | -0.18 | -0.55 |
| Female | 0.90 | 0.30 | 0.29 | 0.00 | -0.58 |
| Age: | ** | ** | | ** | ** |
| 18-39 | 0.75 | 0.21 | 0.20 | -0.11 | -0.56 |
| 40-64 | 0.92 | 0.35 | 0.31 | -0.17 | -0.65 |
| Labour force status: | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| Self-employed | 1.04 | 0.10 | -0.29 | -0.10 | -0.37 |
| Employed | 0.79 | 0.24 | 0.26 | -0.14 | -0.57 |
| Unemployed | 0.89 | 0.63 | 0.44 | -0.26 | -1.15 |
| Not in labour force | 0.95 | 0.52 | 0.38 | 0.03 | -0.51 |
| Housing tenure: | ** | ** | | | |
| Home owner | 0.97 | 0.46 | 0.26 | -0.07 | -0.51 |
| Home buyer | 0.87 | 0.27 | 0.22 | -0.14 | -0.63 |
| Renter | 0.82 | 0.41 | 0.43 | -0.10 | -0.55 |
| Other | 0.66 | 0.21 | 0.23 | 0.01 | -0.60 |
| Usually vote for: | ** | ** | ** | | ** |
| Liberal | 0.91 | 0.10 | 0.03 | -0.05 | -0.39 |
| Labor | 0.77 | 0.58 | 0.57 | -0.10 | -0.71 |
| National | 1.09 | 0.21 | -0.02 | -0.04 | -0.43 |
| Democrat | 0.96 | 0.34 | 0.48 | 0.02 | -0.86 |
| Swinging voter | 0.92 | 0.30 | 0.16 | -0.18 | -0.59 |
| Other | 0.82 | 0.55 | 0.31 | 0.07 | -0.47 |

Table A3: Responsibility for Solving Unemployment, by Respondent Characteristics (Cont.)

| | Some people will always be unemployed – we will never get back to full employment | Solving unemployment is the Government's problem | Businesses should be required to create more jobs | There's enough work available now – we just have to share it around more evenly | People who are unemployed only have themselves to blame |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|--|
| Gross income of family: | | ** | ** | | |
| Less than \$400 pw | 0.87 | 0.50 | 0.49 | 0.00 | -0.55 |
| \$400-699 pw | 0.91 | 0.38 | 0.27 | 0.07 | -0.62 |
| \$700-1249 pw | 0.79 | 0.28 | 0.21 | -0.14 | -0.57 |
| \$1250 or more pw | 0.87 | 0.12 | 0.02 | -0.18 | -0.59 |
| Highest educational qualification: | | ** | | | ** |
| Primary/ some secondary | 0.94 | 0.51 | 0.37 | -0.03 | -0.50 |
| Completed secondary | 0.87 | 0.26 | 0.24 | 0.09 | -0.55 |
| Trade certificate | 0.82 | 0.37 | 0.25 | -0.19 | -0.47 |
| Bachelor/postgraduate degree | 0.84 | 0.23 | 0.20 | -0.12 | -0.83 |
| Other | 0.65 | 0.29 | 0.34 | 0.06 | -0.60 |
| Unemployed in last 3 years?: | | | ** | | ** |
| Yes | 0.84 | 0.34 | 0.34 | -0.13 | -0.69 |
| No | 0.88 | 0.33 | 0.21 | -0.07 | -0.49 |
| Area: | ** | | ** | | |
| Major urban | 0.81 | 0.37 | 0.35 | -0.04 | -0.54 |
| Other urban | 0.93 | 0.32 | 0.21 | -0.17 | -0.65 |
| Rural and remote | 0.97 | 0.32 | 0.19 | -0.14 | -0.57 |

Unweighted n = 2013 to 2287

** Analysis of variance *f* test significant at the 1% level

Table A4: Views on Penalties for Breaching Activity Test Requirements (A), by Respondent Characteristics

Question: *At the moment, if unemployed people fail to meet their requirements under the Social Security regulations they could lose up to 24 per cent of their basic payment for 26 weeks. How does this penalty seem to you?*

| Respondent characteristics | Too harsh | About right | Too lenient | Don't know | Total |
|----------------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------|
| | Per Cent | | | | |
| All: | 20.0 | 51.9 | 16.0 | 12.1 | |
| Sex:** | | | | | |
| Male | 21.6 | 48.0 | 20.4 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| Female | 18.3 | 55.6 | 11.9 | 14.2 | 100.0 |
| Age:** | | | | | |
| 18-39 | 19.5 | 49.2 | 19.7 | 11.6 | 100.0 |
| 40-64 | 21.4 | 51.3 | 14.3 | 13.1 | 100.0 |
| 65 and over | 17.3 | 58.2 | 11.5 | 12.9 | 100.0 |
| Labour force status:** | | | | | |
| Self-employed | 14.4 | 47.7 | 27.3 | 10.6 | 100.0 |
| Employed | 18.2 | 51.3 | 19.9 | 10.6 | 100.0 |
| Unemployed | 37.0 | 51.2 | 3.9 | 7.9 | 100.0 |
| Not in labour force | 20.4 | 53.6 | 11.1 | 14.9 | 100.0 |
| Housing tenure:** | | | | | |
| Home owner | 18.1 | 57.1 | 13.6 | 11.2 | 100.0 |
| Home buyer | 17.9 | 51.5 | 18.6 | 12.0 | 100.0 |
| Renter | 25.7 | 45.8 | 16.3 | 12.2 | 100.0 |
| Other | 19.0 | 50.2 | 17.0 | 13.8 | 100.0 |
| Usually vote for:** | | | | | |
| Liberal | 12.4 | 57.7 | 21.5 | 8.5 | 100.0 |
| Labor | 29.1 | 45.7 | 11.8 | 13.5 | 100.0 |
| National | 3.1 | 71.1 | 17.5 | 8.2 | 100.0 |
| Democrat | 38.8 | 46.3 | 3.8 | 11.3 | 100.0 |
| Swinging voter | 14.0 | 53.8 | 17.8 | 14.4 | 100.0 |
| Other | 26.5 | 47.0 | 19.3 | 7.2 | 100.0 |

Table A4: Views on Penalties for Breaching Activity Test Requirements (A), by Respondent Characteristics (Cont.)

| Respondent characteristics | Too harsh | About right | Too lenient | Don't know | Total |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------|
| | Per Cent | | | | |
| Gross income of family:** | | | | | |
| Less than \$400 pw | 26.7 | 52.8 | 9.9 | 10.5 | 100.0 |
| \$400-699 pw | 21.4 | 52.2 | 15.5 | 11.0 | 100.0 |
| \$700-1249 pw | 15.0 | 53.8 | 18.9 | 12.3 | 100.0 |
| \$1250 or more pw | 14.3 | 51.1 | 21.7 | 12.8 | 100.0 |
| Highest educational qualification:** | | | | | |
| Primary/ some secondary | 23.6 | 48.8 | 13.2 | 14.4 | 100.0 |
| Completed secondary | 16.9 | 57.7 | 15.1 | 10.2 | 100.0 |
| Trade certificate | 18.6 | 49.6 | 22.7 | 9.0 | 100.0 |
| Bachelor/postgraduate degree | 18.5 | 51.7 | 17.1 | 12.8 | 100.0 |
| Other | 21.8 | 50.9 | 13.6 | 13.6 | 100.0 |
| Unemployed in last 3 years?:** | | | | | |
| Yes | 25.0 | 51.1 | 12.1 | 11.8 | 100.0 |
| No | 16.0 | 52.8 | 19.8 | 11.5 | 100.0 |
| Area: | | | | | |
| Major urban | 20.3 | 50.4 | 16.3 | 13.0 | 100.0 |
| Other urban | 19.5 | 55.3 | 14.0 | 11.2 | 100.0 |
| Rural and remote | 19.3 | 53.8 | 16.5 | 10.4 | 100.0 |

Unweighted n = 2143 to 2365

** Pearson's chi square test significant at the one per cent level

Table A5: Views on Penalties for Breaching Activity Test Requirements (B), by Respondent Characteristics

Question: *At the moment, if unemployed people fail to meet their requirements under the Social Security regulations three times in two years, they could lose their payment altogether for 8 weeks. How does this penalty seem to you?*

| Respondent characteristics | Too harsh | About right | Too lenient | Don't know | Total |
|----------------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------|
| | Per Cent | | | | |
| All: | 19.1 | 54.4 | 16.0 | 10.2 | 100.0 |
| Sex:** | | | | | |
| Male | 19.8 | 51.0 | 20.4 | 8.8 | 100.0 |
| Female | 18.2 | 58.0 | 12.1 | 11.8 | 100.0 |
| Age:** | | | | | |
| 18-39 | 18.9 | 52.1 | 19.9 | 9.1 | 100.0 |
| 40-64 | 18.1 | 56.5 | 14.1 | 11.3 | 100.0 |
| 65 and over | 19.3 | 55.9 | 12.1 | 12.7 | 100.0 |
| Labour force status:** | | | | | |
| Self-employed | 15.9 | 53.0 | 23.5 | 7.6 | 100.0 |
| Employed | 17.2 | 54.5 | 19.6 | 8.7 | 100.0 |
| Unemployed | 34.6 | 48.5 | 6.9 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| Not in labour force | 19.0 | 55.2 | 12.4 | 13.4 | 100.0 |
| Housing tenure:** | | | | | |
| Home owner | 17.3 | 56.0 | 15.6 | 11.1 | 100.0 |
| Home buyer | 16.2 | 56.5 | 18.5 | 8.8 | 100.0 |
| Renter | 25.5 | 48.8 | 14.2 | 11.5 | 100.0 |
| Other | 20.0 | 52.5 | 17.3 | 10.2 | 100.0 |
| Usually vote for:** | | | | | |
| Liberal | 10.9 | 62.7 | 19.4 | 7.0 | 100.0 |
| Labor | 27.7 | 48.2 | 13.3 | 10.8 | 100.0 |
| National | 5.1 | 62.2 | 22.4 | 10.2 | 100.0 |
| Democrat | 40.5 | 39.2 | 5.1 | 15.2 | 100.0 |
| Swinging voter | 13.7 | 56.4 | 18.2 | 11.7 | 100.0 |
| Other | 27.4 | 41.7 | 22.6 | 8.3 | 100.0 |

Table A5: Views on Penalties for Breaching Activity Test Requirements (B), by Respondent Characteristics (Cont.)

| Respondent characteristics | Too harsh | About right | Too lenient | Don't know | Total |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------|
| | Per Cent | | | | |
| Gross income of family:** | | | | | |
| Less than \$400 pw | 23.7 | 55.8 | 9.9 | 10.5 | 100.0 |
| \$400-699 pw | 18.8 | 56.4 | 15.7 | 9.1 | 100.0 |
| \$700-1249 pw | 16.0 | 55.2 | 18.7 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| \$1250 or more pw | 16.5 | 50.1 | 24.9 | 8.5 | 100.0 |
| Highest educational qualification:** | | | | | |
| Primary/ some secondary | 21.6 | 55.8 | 12.6 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| Completed secondary | 16.9 | 56.4 | 16.4 | 10.2 | 100.0 |
| Trade certificate | 16.4 | 53.4 | 21.3 | 8.8 | 100.0 |
| Bachelor/postgraduate degree | 18.6 | 49.4 | 20.0 | 11.9 | 100.0 |
| Other | | | | | 100.0 |
| Unemployed in last 3 years?:** | | | | | |
| Yes | 24.3 | 52.7 | 13.3 | 9.7 | 100.0 |
| No | 15.4 | 55.0 | 19.6 | 9.9 | 100.0 |
| Area: | | | | | |
| Major urban | 19.7 | 53.7 | 17.0 | 9.5 | 100.0 |
| Other urban | 20.4 | 54.9 | 13.1 | 11.6 | 100.0 |
| Rural and remote | 16.5 | 56.2 | 16.1 | 11.2 | 100.0 |

Unweighted n = 2142 to 2365

** Pearson's chi square test significant at the one per cent level

Table A6: Views on When Sole Parents Should be Expected to Return to Part-time Work, by Respondent Characteristics

Question: *Currently, sole parents can receive the pension without being expected to seek paid work until their youngest child turns 16. When do you think it is appropriate for a sole parent to be expected to undertake part-time work?*

| Respondent characteristics | As now, once the youngest child turns 16 | Once the youngest child goes to high school | Once the youngest child goes to primary school | Only when the sole parent feels ready | Other | Total |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| | Per Cent | | | | | |
| All: | 13.4 | 18.7 | 51.2 | 10.1 | 6.6 | |
| Sex: | | | | | | |
| Male | 13.6 | 20.0 | 50.8 | 8.5 | 7.1 | 100.0 |
| Female | 13.3 | 17.6 | 51.8 | 11.3 | 6.1 | 100.0 |
| Age:** | | | | | | |
| 18-39 | 11.9 | 16.6 | 52.6 | 9.6 | 9.3 | 100.0 |
| 40-64 | 11.4 | 18.1 | 56.3 | 9.3 | 5.0 | 100.0 |
| 65 and over | 19.7 | 24.8 | 38.3 | 12.7 | 4.5 | 100.0 |
| Labour force status:** | | | | | | |
| Self-employed | 9.9 | 17.6 | 56.5 | 8.4 | 7.6 | 100.0 |
| Employed | 10.1 | 17.5 | 57.5 | 7.7 | 7.2 | 100.0 |
| Unemployed | 22.4 | 16.8 | 39.2 | 14.4 | 7.2 | 100.0 |
| Not in labour force | 17.5 | 21.4 | 43.1 | 12.6 | 5.5 | 100.0 |
| Housing tenure:** | | | | | | |
| Home owner | 13.1 | 21.7 | 50.4 | 10.0 | 4.9 | 100.0 |
| Home buyer | 11.3 | 15.5 | 58.4 | 7.8 | 7.0 | 100.0 |
| Renter | 17.2 | 17.7 | 43.7 | 12.4 | 9.0 | 100.0 |
| Other | 12.1 | 21.4 | 47.1 | 12.1 | 7.4 | 100.0 |
| Usually vote for:** | | | | | | |
| Liberal | 12.1 | 20.3 | 52.5 | 8.7 | 6.4 | 100.0 |
| Labor | 15.5 | 21.0 | 48.3 | 10.9 | 4.3 | 100.0 |
| National | 9.3 | 19.6 | 53.6 | 12.4 | 5.2 | 100.0 |
| Democrat | 21.0 | 24.7 | 33.3 | 14.8 | 6.2 | 100.0 |
| Swinging voter | 12.0 | 14.8 | 57.4 | 7.5 | 8.3 | 100.0 |
| Other | 17.6 | 10.6 | 42.4 | 15.3 | 14.1 | 100.0 |

Table A6: Views on When Sole Parents Should be Expected to Return to Part-time Work, by Respondent Characteristics (Cont.)

| Respondent characteristics | As now, once the youngest child turns 16 | Once the youngest child goes to high school | Once the youngest child goes to primary school | Only when the sole parent feels ready | Other | Total |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Gross income of family:** | | | | | | |
| Less than \$400 pw | 17.4 | 21.9 | 40.3 | 14.1 | 6.3 | 100.0 |
| \$400-699 pw | 13.0 | 19.0 | 52.4 | 9.7 | 5.9 | 100.0 |
| \$700-1249 pw | 13.1 | 17.9 | 56.2 | 6.2 | 6.7 | 100.0 |
| \$1250 or more pw | 7.4 | 16.1 | 62.5 | 6.9 | 7.2 | 100.0 |
| Highest educational qualification:** | | | | | | |
| Primary/ some secondary | 16.5 | 18.8 | 48.1 | 11.2 | 5.4 | 100.0 |
| Completed secondary | 12.9 | 18.2 | 52.3 | 10.4 | 6.1 | 100.0 |
| Trade certificate | 11.4 | 16.5 | 56.3 | 8.4 | 7.4 | 100.0 |
| Bachelor/postgraduate degree | 10.9 | 22.3 | 52.6 | 7.6 | 6.6 | 100.0 |
| Other | 8.3 | 15.6 | 47.7 | 15.6 | 12.8 | 100.0 |
| Unemployed in last 3 years?: | | | | | | |
| Yes | 13.7 | 17.7 | 51.3 | 10.4 | 6.8 | 100.0 |
| No | 11.9 | 19.3 | 52.5 | 9.5 | 6.8 | 100.0 |
| Area: | | | | | | |
| Major urban | 13.9 | 18.6 | 50.8 | 10.4 | 6.3 | 100.0 |
| Other urban | 12.7 | 18.8 | 53.7 | 9.9 | 4.9 | 100.0 |
| Rural and remote | 13.0 | 18.8 | 50.4 | 9.5 | 8.3 | 100.0 |
| Living arrangements:** | | | | | | |
| Live alone | 17.2 | 20.5 | 43.4 | 13.1 | 5.7 | 100.0 |
| Couple no children | 12.1 | 19.9 | 54.0 | 7.8 | 6.2 | 100.0 |
| Couple with children | 12.6 | 15.8 | 55.1 | 9.3 | 7.2 | 100.0 |
| Sole parent | 15.9 | 17.7 | 45.1 | 15.0 | 6.2 | 100.0 |
| Other including living with parent/s | 13.4 | 22.1 | 46.8 | 10.4 | 7.2 | 100.0 |

Unweighted n = 2133 to 2350

** Pearson's chi square test significant at the one per cent level

Table A7: Views on When Sole Parents Should be Expected to Return to Full-time Work, by Respondent Characteristics

Question: *Currently, sole parents can receive the pension without being expected to seek paid work until their youngest child turns 16. When do you think it is appropriate for a sole parent to be expected to undertake full-time work?*

| Respondent characteristics | As now, once the youngest child turns 16 | Once the youngest child goes to high school | Once the youngest child goes to primary school | Only when the sole parent feels ready | Other | Total |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| | Per Cent | | | | | |
| All: | 33.3 | 28.2 | 17.0 | 15.7 | 5.8 | |
| Sex:** | | | | | | |
| Male | 34.2 | 29.8 | 16.6 | 12.8 | 6.6 | 100.0 |
| Female | 32.1 | 26.8 | 17.5 | 18.4 | 5.2 | 100.0 |
| Age: | | | | | | |
| 18-39 | 30.3 | 28.4 | 16.6 | 17.8 | 6.9 | 100.0 |
| 40-64 | 32.9 | 29.0 | 16.8 | 13.5 | 5.9 | 100.0 |
| 65 and over | 39.0 | 26.2 | 14.2 | 16.7 | 3.9 | 100.0 |
| Labour force status:** | | | | | | |
| Self-employed | 30.5 | 28.2 | 21.4 | 13.7 | 6.1 | 100.0 |
| Employed | 30.0 | 30.2 | 19.1 | 14.3 | 6.4 | 100.0 |
| Unemployed | 31.2 | 32.0 | 8.8 | 21.6 | 6.4 | 100.0 |
| Not in labour force | 37.8 | 25.8 | 14.7 | 16.8 | 4.8 | 100.0 |
| Housing tenure: | | | | | | |
| Home owner | 35.2 | 27.5 | 16.7 | 14.6 | 5.8 | 100.0 |
| Home buyer | 32.7 | 28.7 | 18.0 | 14.1 | 6.5 | 100.0 |
| Renter | 32.7 | 26.2 | 16.3 | 19.8 | 5.1 | 100.0 |
| Other | 27.2 | 35.8 | 14.6 | 16.9 | 5.5 | 100.0 |
| Usually vote for:** | | | | | | |
| Liberal | 33.1 | 29.7 | 18.7 | 14.0 | 4.5 | 100.0 |
| Labor | 35.2 | 27.8 | 16.3 | 16.2 | 4.5 | 100.0 |
| National | 41.1 | 21.1 | 18.9 | 15.8 | 3.2 | 100.0 |
| Democrat | 35.4 | 21.5 | 6.3 | 29.1 | 7.6 | 100.0 |
| Swinging voter | 31.4 | 31.0 | 16.0 | 13.4 | 8.1 | 100.0 |
| Other | 19.0 | 23.8 | 23.8 | 25.0 | 8.3 | 100.0 |

Table A7: Views on When Sole Parents Should be Expected to Return to Full-time Work, by Respondent Characteristics (Cont.)

| Respondent characteristics | As now, once the youngest child turns 16 | Once the youngest child goes to high school | Once the youngest child goes to primary school | Only when the sole parent feels ready | Other | Total |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Gross income of family:** | | | | | | |
| Less than \$400 pw | 34.7 | 26.4 | 15.2 | 19.2 | 4.6 | 100.0 |
| \$400-699 pw | 30.9 | 29.2 | 16.7 | 16.5 | 6.7 | 100.0 |
| \$700-1249 pw | 32.4 | 29.5 | 19.1 | 14.3 | 4.6 | 100.0 |
| \$1250 or more pw | 35.4 | 30.1 | 16.6 | 10.3 | 7.6 | 100.0 |
| Highest educational qualification:** | | | | | | |
| Primary/ some secondary | 35.7 | 26.4 | 17.6 | 16.3 | 4.0 | 100.0 |
| Completed secondary | 29.6 | 31.4 | 17.5 | 16.4 | 5.1 | 100.0 |
| Trade certificate | 27.5 | 29.2 | 18.9 | 16.7 | 7.6 | 100.0 |
| Bachelor/postgraduate degree | 37.7 | 28.7 | 14.7 | 11.8 | 7.1 | 100.0 |
| Other | 33.9 | 24.8 | 12.8 | 18.3 | 10.1 | 100.0 |
| Unemployed in last 3 years?: | | | | | | |
| Yes | 32.8 | 27.4 | 16.2 | 17.6 | 6.0 | 100.0 |
| No | 32.5 | 29.0 | 18.3 | 14.1 | 6.0 | 100.0 |
| Area: | | | | | | |
| Major urban | 32.6 | 28.2 | 17.4 | 15.8 | 6.1 | 100.0 |
| Other urban | 30.8 | 31.4 | 14.8 | 17.5 | 5.5 | 100.0 |
| Rural and remote | 36.1 | 25.5 | 17.9 | 14.8 | 5.6 | 100.0 |
| Living arrangements: | | | | | | |
| Live alone | 31.9 | 27.2 | 17.4 | 18.8 | 4.7 | 100.0 |
| Couple no children | 34.2 | 29.6 | 18.7 | 12.7 | 4.8 | 100.0 |
| Couple with children | 34.4 | 26.8 | 15.9 | 15.8 | 7.0 | 100.0 |
| Sole parent | 30.7 | 33.3 | 10.5 | 21.9 | 3.5 | 100.0 |
| Other including living with parent/s | 29.3 | 29.8 | 17.8 | 16.3 | 6.8 | 100.0 |

Unweighted n = 2129 to 2347

** Pearson's chi square test significant at the one per cent level

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