

# From the Managing Editor

Welcome to the second issue of the *Australian Journal of Labour Economics* (AJLE) for 2023. The year has been a busy one for the editorial team given that we have not just had to carry out the usual roles involved in supporting the AJLE, but also organising, refereeing and collating papers for the 32nd *Australia Labour Market Research* (ALMR) Workshop and the annual meeting of the Australian Society of Labour Economists (ASLE). Following on from the success of previous year's event, the 32nd ALMR Workshop was held at Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA), in Canberra on 4-5 December 2023 with excellent support from JSA staff. The Workshop was supported by Jobs and Skills Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. The purpose of the Workshop is to disseminate high quality research in labour economics and labour relations and to promote informed public debate about current labour market issues. This year's Workshop certainly met this objective.

Participants and discussants included senior academic economists and labour economists in the public and private sectors. Early career researchers, including PhD students close to completing, were particularly encouraged to submit papers and made up a healthy proportion of participants. Any theoretical, applied or policy related papers on any aspect of the labour market were welcome and the Workshop contained a good mix of papers of interest to researchers and practitioners in labour market issues and policy. Papers related to a number of labour market areas including the following themes:

- 1) Employment, education, training and skills shortages
- 2) Labour markets and demographic changes
- 3) New ways work is organised
- 4) Gender equity
- 5) Contemporary labour market issues
- 6) Applied labour econometrics
- 7) Work, welfare and the disadvantaged

A full list of authors and abstracts of papers delivered can be found at <https://bcec.edu.au/events/32nd-australian-labour-market-research-workshop-2023/>. If you would like to read any of the papers, please contact the authors directly.

As well as submitted papers the Workshop also included an invited address by Emeritus Professor Peter Dawkins AO. Peter has made an enormous contribution to labour economics and policy development in Australia and we were privileged that he accepted our invitation to address the Workshop. The first article in this issue is based upon Peter Dawkins' invited address to the ALMR Workshop, in which he was asked to draw on his forty years of experience of working in Australia as a researcher, teacher, research institute director, public policy advisor, senior public servant, university vice-

chancellor, and, most recently, leading the establishment of Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) as its Interim Director and Acting Commissioner.

The paper highlights some key significant changes in the labour market and educational context over recent years that give rise to some important modern policy issues incorporating the following three questions. How can we better match labour supply with labour demand? Is our tertiary education system providing the skills we need? Are our migration settings supporting the enhancement of labour market outcomes?

The paper proposes that policy-relevant research is critical to helping answer such questions. It is maintained that Australia is in a strong position to take advantage of such research, given the increasing quantity and quality of data bases that can be used for this research, and the number and quality of well-trained analysts to interrogate the data. And, in the author's view there are good signs in the current policy environment that such analysis will be an important input into the decision making process about the above questions.

Finally, the paper concludes with the view that the JSA will play a key role in developing a national jobs and skills strategy drawing on its own research work together with engagement with key stakeholders and the research community.

The second paper in this issue is by Ruth Steinbring, Francisco Perales, Janeen Baxter and Dr Jack Lam, of the University of Queensland on the 'Characteristics of male-breadwinner, female-breadwinner and equal-earner households in Australia: The role of couple-level human capital'.

The paper reflects on the observed phenomenon that as women's participation in the labour market increases, so does the number of women who out-earn their male partner. However, despite this, male-breadwinning persists and Australian households remain highly gendered in terms of the division of labour. Women continue to undertake the bulk of unpaid labour and care and most men out-earn their female partner. It has been argued that there is value, both economic and social, in changing these patterns such that men and women share equally in paid and unpaid work, ensuring that women have equal access to quality education and representation in leadership and decision making. Given change over recent decades in men's and women's labour market investments the paper seeks to examine how today's couples negotiate household earnings arrangements.

Using a human capital theory framework, the paper examines associations between household characteristics and couples' relative earnings. Drawing on longitudinal data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey spanning the 2000 to 2019 period, couple-level human capital characteristics of female-breadwinner, male-breadwinner and equal-earner households, are compared. The analysis reveals an increase in the share of equal-earner households over the first two decades of the 2000s, coinciding with a decline in male-breadwinner households.

The authors find that women in female-breadwinner households have greater levels of human capital than their partner and women in other household types; men with a long-term health condition are more likely to be in female-breadwinner households; and female-breadwinner households have the lowest overall earnings of all household types.

The results offer broad support to the directions taken by the Australian Government's 2023 White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities, indicating that policies that enable women to invest in their human capital may reduce the disproportionate number of male-breadwinner households.

The third paper in this issue is 'The contented Australian female worker: Paradox lost, paradox found' by Mike Dockery of Curtin University. The paper examines the phenomenon of the 'paradox of the contented female worker', identified in the UK, whereby women report higher job satisfaction than their male counterparts, despite generally holding inferior jobs. It has been argued that this was due to women having lower expectations than men, and that the phenomenon would disappear as women's positions in the labour market improved. This prediction appears to be supported by later evidence, again in the UK.

The paper seeks to examine whether this phenomenon is observable in Australia, using data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey to investigate how the differential in women's job satisfaction, relative to that of men, evolved in Australia between 2001 and 2022. Dockery's modelling suggests that there was a substantial job satisfaction premium for women in 2001 but this gradually diminished over the first decade of this century. Unlike in the UK, however, the job satisfaction premium re-emerged and remained relatively constant from around 2013. The paper then controls for the effects of variables, rather than differences in the mean characteristics of male and female workers or of their job. This decomposition suggests changes in preferences relating to working hours, and the effects of educational attainment on job satisfaction, have particularly shaped the evolution of differences in job satisfaction by gender.

Despite a convergence in the raw means of men's and women's job satisfaction assessments in recent years, the paradox of the contented female worker appears to be alive and well in the Australian labour market. No doubt, this paper will stimulate further research on this topic.

I think you will agree that all the articles in this issue will be of interest to anyone researching or practising labour economics. I would like to thank authors, the anonymous referees and co-editors for their contributions to the AJLE. Once again special thanks go to the AJLE's editorial assistant, Sandie Rawnsley, for doing an excellent job in making this issue possible.

**Phil Lewis**  
Managing Editor