

**SPECIAL EDITION:
THE STATE OF FLEX**



**MAPPING THE STATE OF FLEX
IN THE AUSTRALIAN WORKFORCE**

Report embargoed until 7 October 2021.

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About Diversity Council Australia

Diversity Council Australia (DCA) is the only independent, not-for-profit workplace diversity advisor to business in Australia. We offer a unique knowledge bank of research, practice and expertise across diversity dimensions developed over 30 years of operation. In partnership with our members, our mission is to: lead debate on diversity in the public arena; develop and promote the latest diversity research, thinking and practice; and deliver innovative diversity practice resources and services to enable our members to drive business improvement. DCA works in partnership with members to generate groundbreaking high impact diversity research that drives business improvement through providing evidence-based guidance on how to fully leverage the benefits of a diverse talent pool.

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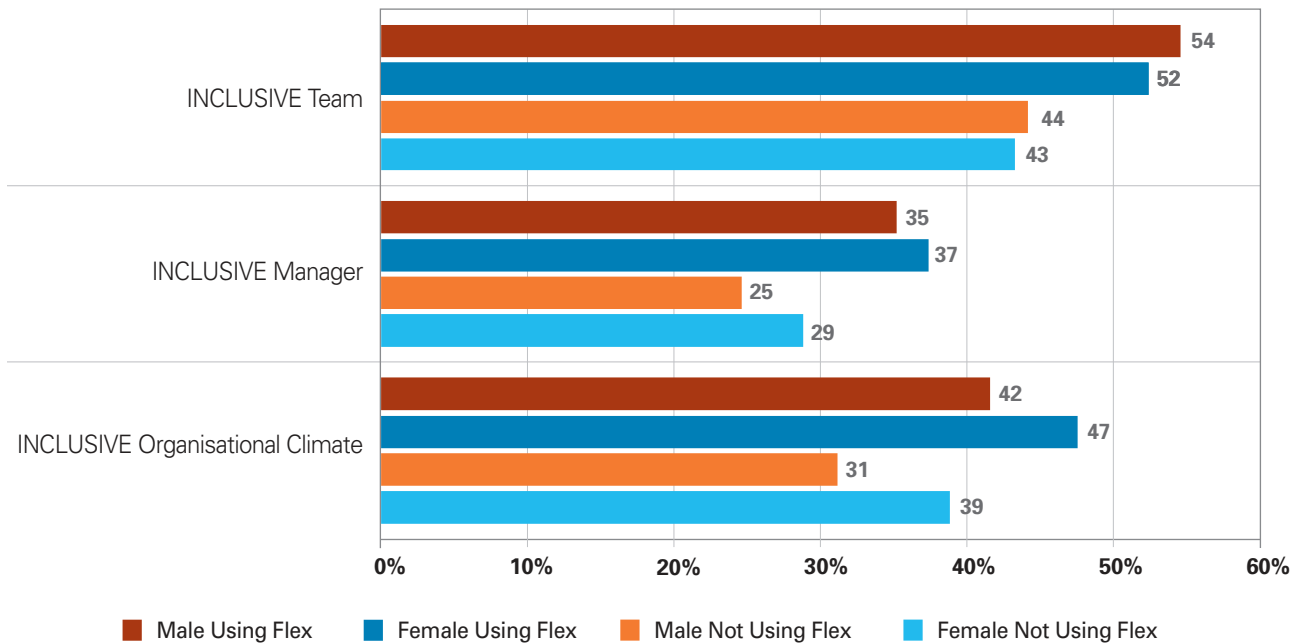


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Flex is linked to higher *Inclusion@Work* – for both men and women

Both female and maleⁱ workers using flex are significantly more likely to report being in inclusive teams, have inclusive managers, and work in inclusive organisational climates compared to female and male workers not using any flex options.



In particular, workers using flex options are significantly more likely than those not using flex to strongly agree they are:



In teams with respect: 34% of male workers accessing flex and 35% of female workers accessing flex strongly agree in their team people treat each other with respect, regardless of background, compared to 27% of male workers not accessing flex and 28% of female workers not accessing flex.



Valued: 32% of male workers accessing flex and 33% of female workers accessing flex strongly agree they are treated as a valued and respected team member, compared to 27% of male workers not accessing flex and 25% of female workers not accessing flex.



In teams that valued differences: 28% of male workers accessing flex and 27% of female workers accessing flex strongly agree their team value the differences others bring to the workplace, compared to 20% of male workers not accessing flex and 20% of female workers not accessing flex.

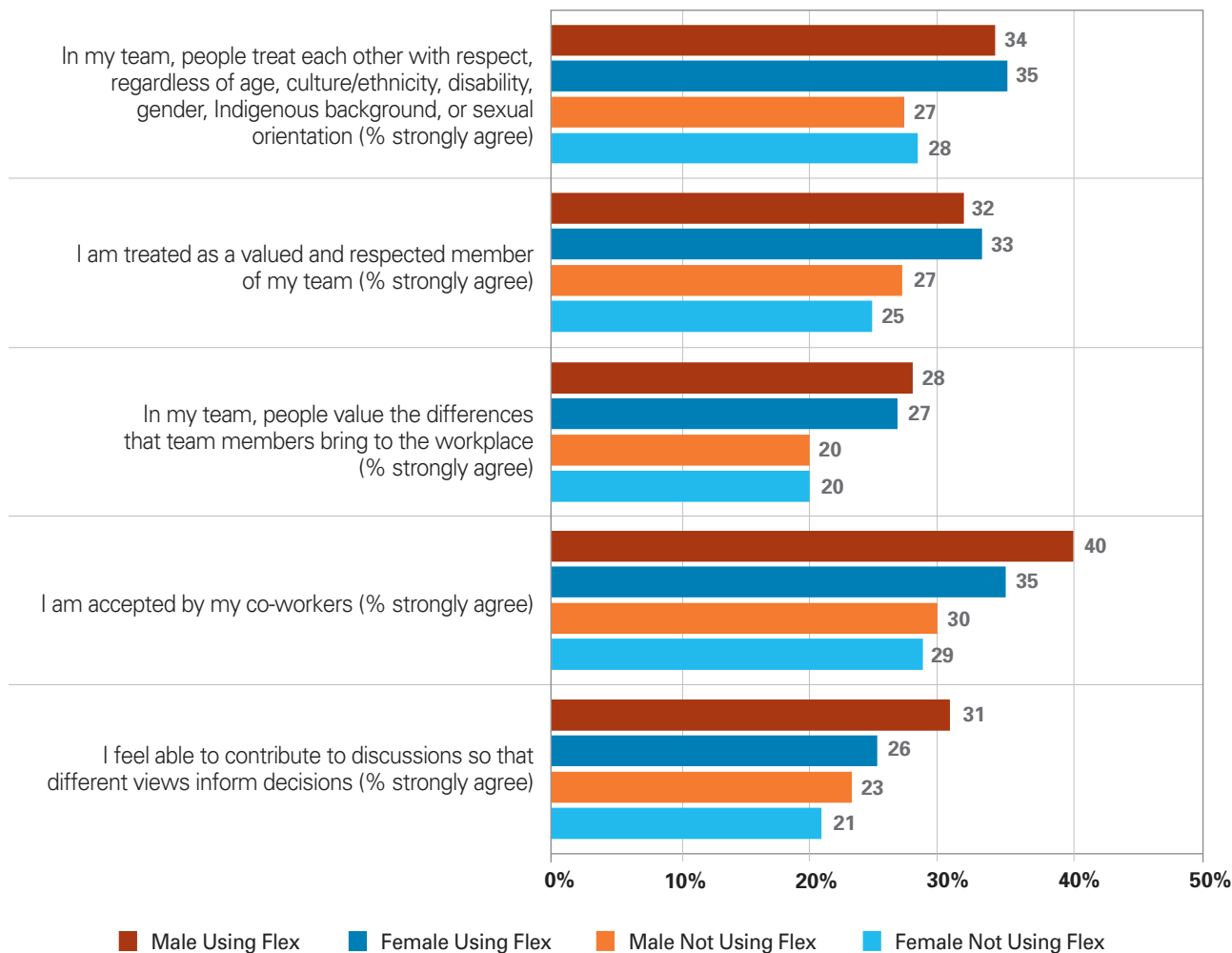


Accepted: 40% of male workers accessing flex and 35% of female workers accessing flex strongly agree they are accepted by their co-workers, compared to 30% of male workers not accessing flex and 29% of female workers not accessing flex.



Able to contribute: 31% of male workers accessing flex and 26% of female workers accessing flex strongly agree they feel able to contribute to discussions so different views informed decisions, compared to 23% of male workers not accessing flex and 21% of female workers not accessing flex.

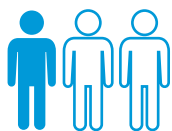
i. This report presents a comparison between respondents identifying as male or female as the number of non-binary/gender fluid respondents (0.4%) in our sample was not large enough to meet statistical analysis requirements.



But male flex workers experience more discrimination and harassment at work

While flex drives inclusion, some flex workers are less likely to be feeling the benefits of inclusion relative to others. In particular, our results show a stigma of males using flex optionsⁱⁱ prevails in 2021.

Small differences exist between female workers using flex and those not. However, male workers using flex report significantly more experience with discrimination and/or harassment at work compared to male workers not using flex options, as well as compared to female workers using flex and those not.

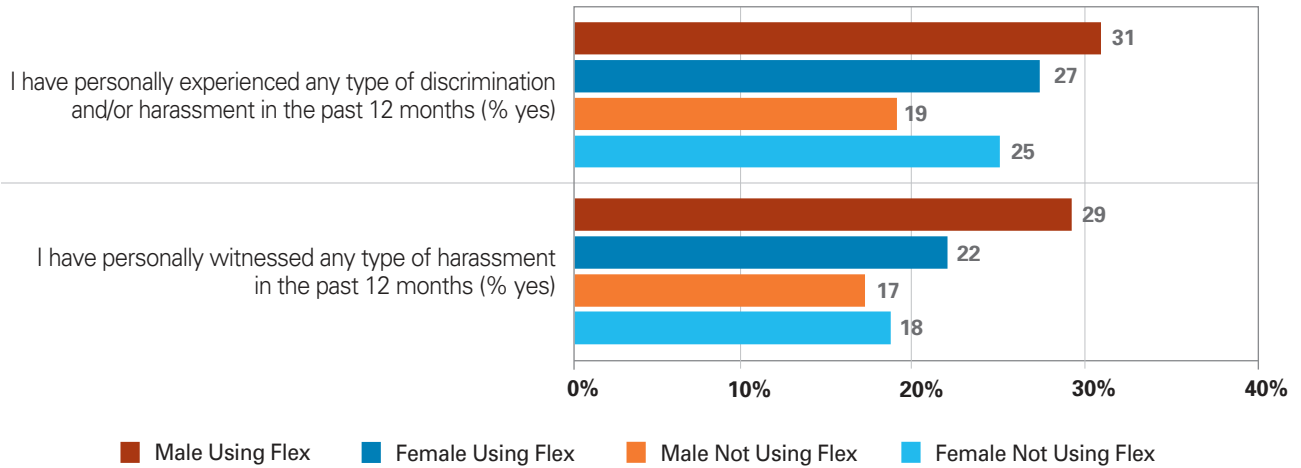


Almost one in three (31%) male workers accessing flex report experiencing any form of discrimination and/or harassment in the last 12 months, compared to 19% of males not accessing flex options.



Male workers accessing flex are also significantly more likely to report witnessing harassment at work in the last 12 months (29% male workers with flex, compared to 17% of male workers without flex, 22% of female workers with flex, and 18% of female workers without flex).

ii. H. Chung, 'Gender, Flexibility Stigma and the Perceived Negative Consequences of Flexible Working in the UK', *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 151, 2020, 521–545.



Type of flex matters

While women and men report similar use of flex options in where you work, women report more use of flex in the form of reduced hours (38% compared to 22% for men), as well as higher use of flex in when they work and predictability in when they work.



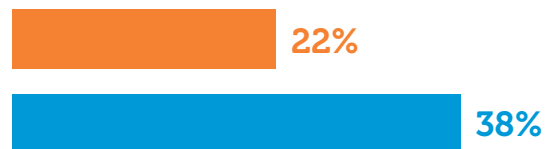
WHEN you work:

Compressed working week, flexible work hours/shifts/start/breaks/finish times, time-in-lieu, and shift swapping.



REDUCED hours:

Using part-time work, job share, purchased leave, leave at half-pay, leave in half-day increments, school term only work and part year annualised hours.



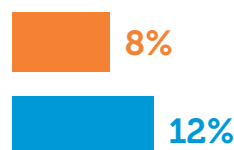
WHERE you work:

Telecommuting/working from home.



PREDICTABILITY in when you work:

Predictable time off, advance notice of regular work schedules or guaranteed shifts/days for those on casual/rostered/shift work.



Male Flex Female Flex



Different types of flex accessed by males and females influences experiences of discrimination



Gendered stigma on men accessing different types of flex is driving discrimination



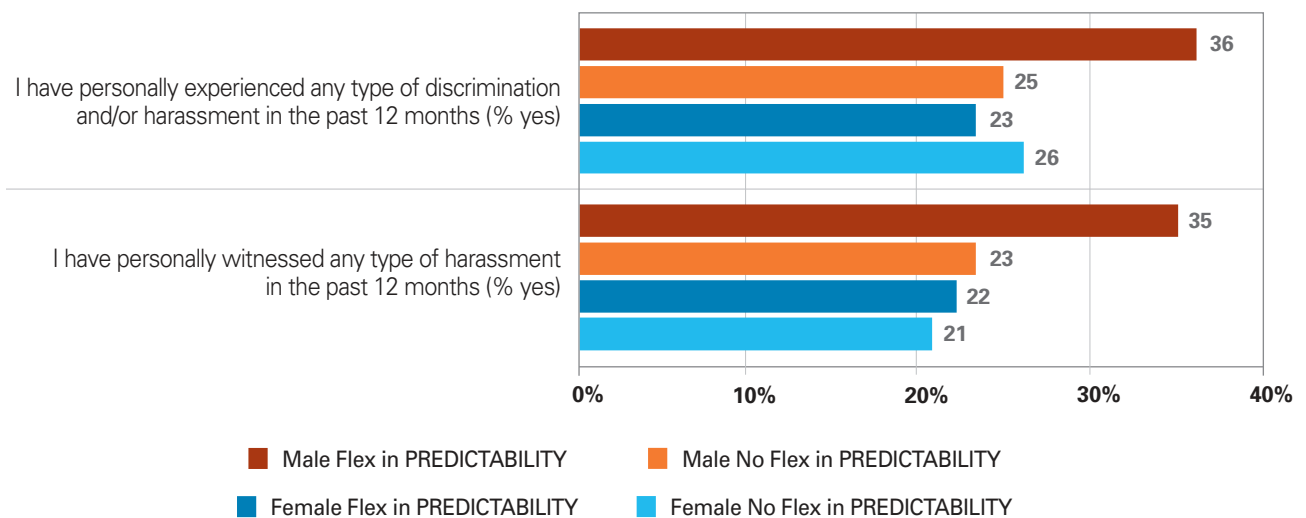
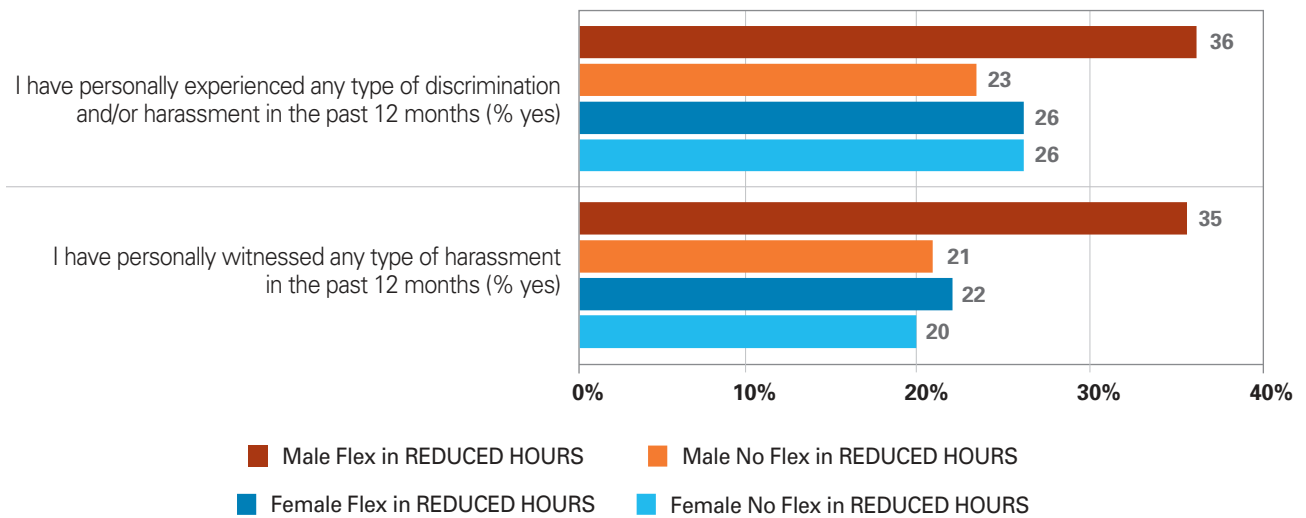
One in three men who accessed flex in the form of reduced hours reported discrimination

Differences in the type of flex accessed by males and females influences experience of discrimination and harassment at work.

No notable differences emerged for women’s experience with discrimination and/or harassment based on any type of flex used, or between men based on use of flex in the form of when or where they worked.

However, one in three (35%) men who access flex in the form of reduced hours, or predictability (35%) report experience with discrimination and/or harassment, significantly more compared to men not accessing these types of flex (23%), or women accessing the same or no flex (both 26%). Men accessing these forms of flex also report significantly more experience in witnessing harassment at work.

Given these forms of flex are disproportionately used more by women, in particular flex in the form of reduced hours, it seems that a gendered stigma on men accessing them is driving this discrimination and harassment.



The more you care, the more you face exclusion

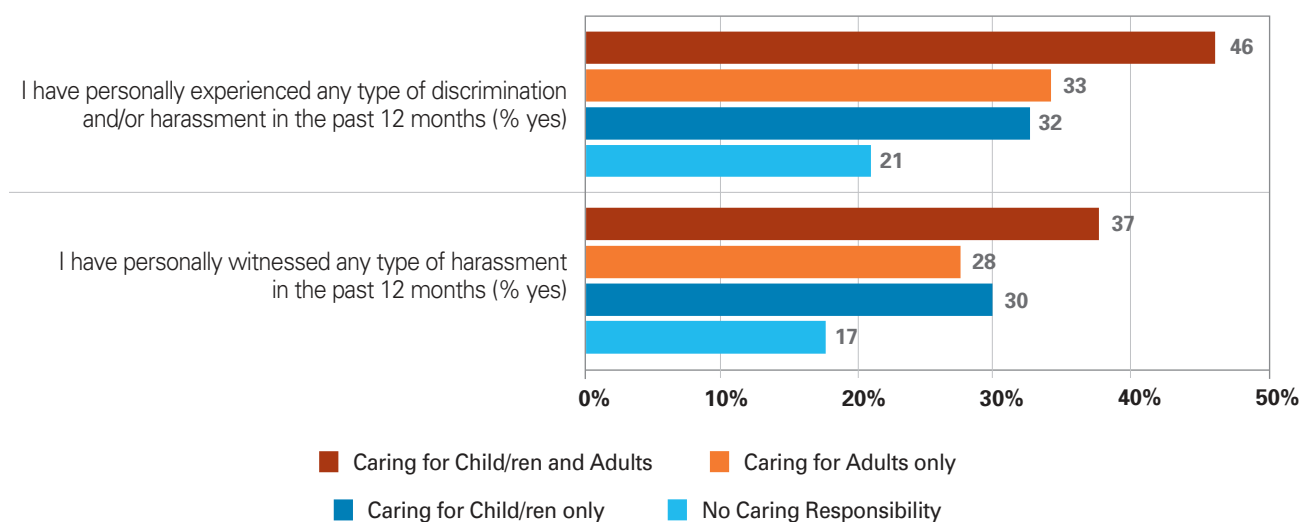
Workers caring for a child/children only (32%), and those caring for an adult/adults only (33%) are significantly more likely to experience discrimination and/or harassment at work compared to those with no caring responsibilities (21%).



However, those with caring responsibilities for both a child/children and an adult/adults experience significantly more exclusion at work, with close to half (46%) reporting personal experience of discrimination and/or harassment at work in the last 12 months.



A similar trend is also evident for experience in witnessing harassment, with those caring for both a child/children *and* an adult/adults being twice as likely to report witnessing harassment compared to those with no caring responsibilities (37% caring for both compared to 17% with no caring responsibilities).



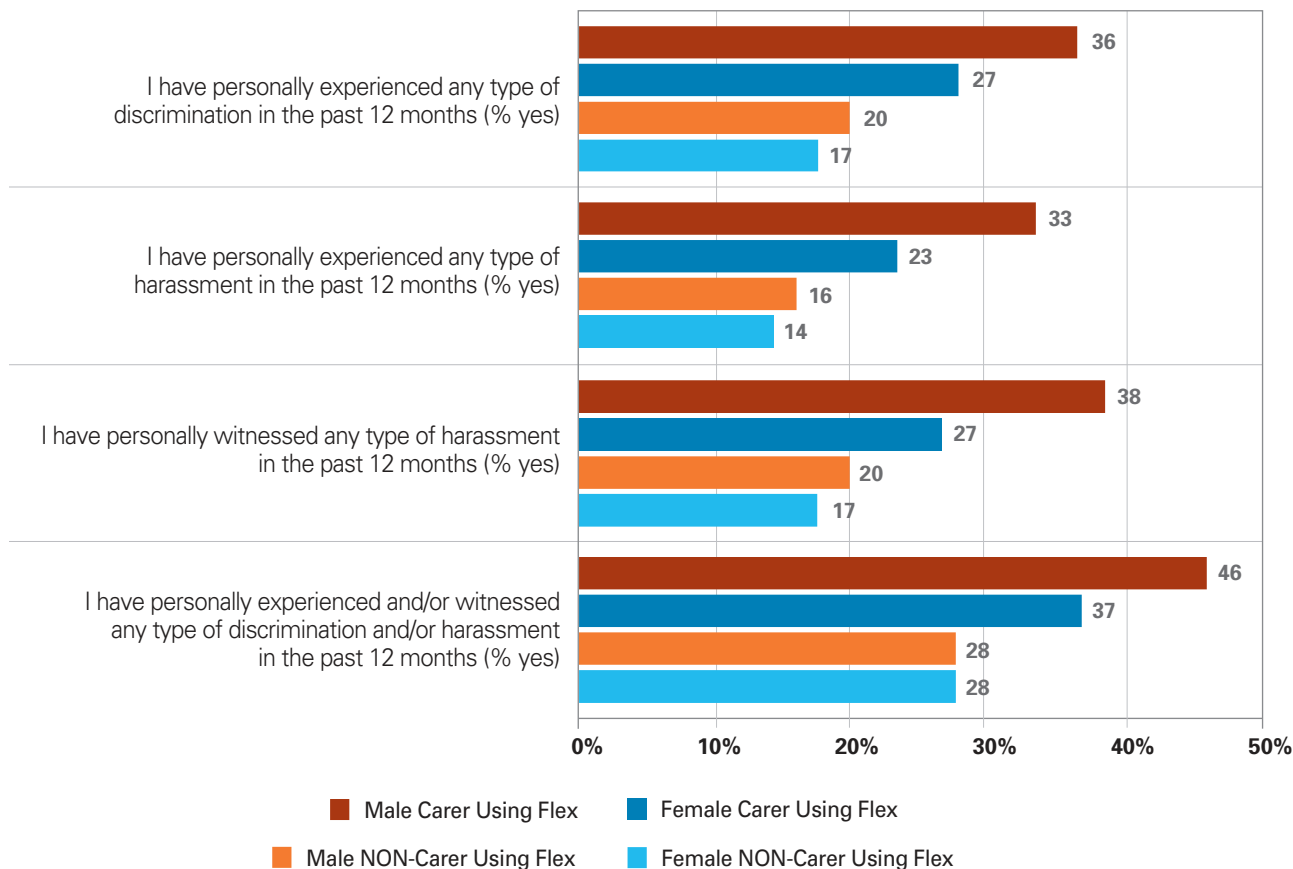
We need to address the stigma around care, gender, and flex

A deeper dive into the results from a gender, flex, and carers lens shows the detrimental impact of the intersectionality between gender and carers status.

Female workers with caring responsibilities accessing flex report significantly higher experience with witnessing and/or experiencing discrimination and/or harassment compared to female workers accessing flex without any caring responsibilities (37% female workers accessing flex with caring responsibilities compared to 28% without).

However, male carers accessing flex report the highest levels of exclusion compared to other flex workers. At 48%, almost one in two male carers accessing flex witnessed and/or experienced discrimination and/or harassment in the last 12 months, compared to 28% of male workers accessing flex without caring responsibilities.

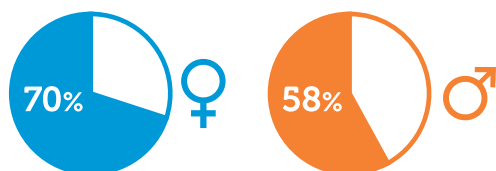
With equality in access to flex a key piece in addressing the gender pay gap, more work needs to be done to address the stigma surrounding males accessing flex, especially for those with caring responsibilities.



Stigma on flex impacts the gender flex gap

Parity between male and female uptake of flexible work options is recognised as an important piece in gender equity and reducing the gender pay gap.ⁱⁱⁱ

With the onset of COVID-19 lockdowns, it was hoped that increases in working from home and flexibility in working times would decrease the gender flex gap. While the flex gap between men and women reduced from 16% in 2019 to 12% in 2021, this did not come because of an increase in uptake of flex by men, but because of a decrease in flex by women instead.



Despite a decrease in flex accessed, females still report more use of flex options than men – 70% of female workers accessed flex in the last 12 months compared to 58% of male workers. Clearly, there is more work to be done to reduce the gender flex gap.

iii. Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), 'Flexible Work', WGEA. Available at: www.wgea.gov.au/flexible-work

Flex and carers – What you can do:

1. Challenge assumptions about flexible workers

Use **DCA's Myth Busting Flexibility**^{iv} guide to challenge myths about the 'ideal worker' as someone with few personal responsibilities who can be on-site all day every day and are always available to meet business need. In fact, research shows that managers with care-giving responsibilities are rated by their staff as better managers and have more satisfied staff than managers with no responsibilities.^v

2. Develop policies that encourage men and women to share the care in your organisation

DCA's *Let's Share the Care at Home and Work*^{vi} report sets out how women's disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, lack of workplace flexibility and time out of the workforce are key contributors to the gender pay gap.

Workplaces can help address these gender inequalities by ensuring that flexible work is available to anyone for any reason, and introducing 'shared care' parental leave so all parents have equal paid leave and can access this flexibly.

3. Recognise different types of caring

There are over 2.65 million carers in Australia, almost 11% of the population^{vii}, who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, terminal illness, an alcohol or other drug issue or who are frail aged.

Workplaces that recognise and make adjustments for carers can experience significant benefits including staff retention, improved productivity and job satisfaction of employees, which in turn reduces recruitment and training costs.

4. Measure and understand your workplace flex metrics

Include questions about flexibility in your inclusion or pulse surveys to measure and track how much flex is accessed in your organisation, what type of flex is accessed, who is using it (e.g., is it just parents/carers of children? Is it mostly females? etc.), drop off points where there is less uptake (e.g., certain managerial positions, business units), and if your employees accessing flex are as satisfied, secure and included as those not accessing flex.

5. Use DCA's Future-Flex Guides Mainstream Flexibility through Team Design

This report shows that flexibility is good for inclusion. But it has to be done properly. DCA's experience is that a critical stumbling block for organisations trying to mainstream flexibility is that managers and employees struggle to redesign work and jobs in ways that are sustainable and improve performance and wellbeing.

DCA's **Future-Flex guidelines**^{viii} were developed for employers across all sectors of the economy, to help organisations and emphasise the need to move away from ad hoc arrangements for individuals and towards involving their teams to redesign work.

iv. Diversity Council Australia, *Myth Busting Flexibility: Using Evidence to Debunk Common Myths and Assumptions*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2018.

v. DCA, *Working for the Future*, Diversity Council Australia, 2010.

vi. DCA, *Let's Share the Care at Home and Work: A Call to Action to Reduce the Gender Pay Gap*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2019.

vii. Carers Australia, Who is a carer?, online resource, accessed at: <https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/about-carers/who-is-a-carer/>

viii. Diversity Council Australia (Russell, G. and O'Leary, J.) *Future-Flex: Mainstreaming Flexibility by Team Design*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2017.

Appendix – Flex Usage in 2019 and 2021

Type of flex	% Use in 2019	% Use in 2021	Difference between years
ACCESSED ANY FLEX	65%	61%	- 4.0%
Telecommuting/working from home	7.9%	15%	+7%
Flexible work hours/shifts/start, breaks, finish times	20.4%	25.2%	+5%
Advance notice of regular work schedules (For those on casual/rostered/shift work)	4.1%	4.3%	0%
Guaranteed shifts or guaranteed days (For those on casual/rostered/shift work)	3.1%	3.5%	0%
Purchased leave	2.9%	2.9%	0%
Leave at half pay	2.0%	2.0%	0%
Job share	1.6%	1.1%	-1%
Shift swapping	10.2%	9.7%	-1%
Other	1.4%	0.7%	-1%
Compressed working week	1.9%	1.1%	-1%
Leave in half-day increments	2.2%	1.3%	-1%
Part-year work/annualised hours	1.9%	0.4%	-2%
School term-time work only	3.1%	1.2%	-2%
Predictable time off	8.3%	6.2%	-2%
Time-in-lieu	11.8%	9.3%	-3%
Part-time work	32.3%	22.8%	-10%



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