



Australia's Silent Crisis In Male Employment

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Australia is experiencing a mass exodus of working-age men from the labour force, according to a landmark report released today by the Institute of Public Affairs.

The report *The Disappearing Australian Working Man* by Institute of Public Affairs Research Fellow Gideon Rozner, argues that the official unemployment rate has become a misleading measure of joblessness, as it only measures those without work as a percentage of the labour force – that is, people who are actively seeking work.

“A more reliable figure is the work-to-population ratio, which measures employment as a percentage of the overall population, not just the labour force,” said IPA Research Fellow Gideon Rozner.

“**More than one in five** working-age males are out of work, with a work-to-population ratio of just 79 per cent among men between 20 and 54, according the most recently-available census data. This is a sharp drop from a rate of over 96 per cent in the 1950s.”



“The disconnect between the cyclical (and relatively low) rate of unemployment and the continual decline in the overall male work rates can be explained by an increase in the not-in-labour-force (NILF) rate: Men who are neither working, nor looking for work. This figure has been rising steadily since the ABS started measuring it in the late 1970’s.”

“While sluggish economic performance does tend to accelerate growth in the NILF rate, alarmingly, there has never been a commensurate decrease when times are good. Statistically, **once Australian men leave the labour force, they are unlikely to come back.**”

This is a problem unique to men, workforce participation rates among women have increased during the same period.

The report examines the causes of this male flight from work, but does not find strong links to economic or social changes.

“There is little evidence that falling male work rates are caused by changes in the labour market, nor societal changes, such as increased enrolments in tertiary education or males taking on a greater share of unpaid domestic and childcare responsibilities.”

Instead, it appears that falling male work rates appear to be driven by welfare entitlements, which have enabled men to subsist outside the work force.

“Alarmingly, the growth in joblessness has a strong correlation with the expansion of welfare entitlements during the same period, particularly the disability support pension.”

“The growth in Australia’s welfare state has subsidised the male flight from work.”

“Soaring joblessness rates have serious consequences. Not only do the long-term unemployed suffer from lower incomes and poorer living standards, but many studies have indicated that joblessness affects mental and even physical health.”

“Worst of all, the problem risks becoming an intergenerational one. Children without working parents are more likely to be jobless themselves as adults.”

“We must reform our welfare system and industrial relations laws to get more of these men back into the labour market, or risk creating a permanent and entrenched underclass.”

“Too many Australians are being deprived of the dignity of work,” said Mr Rozner.

Watch the IPA’s latest video on [Men Without Work](#).

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