Family relationships are the foundation of the nation. The decision to establish the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse (AFRC), within the Australian Institute of Family Studies, reflects the Australian Government’s commitment to supporting and strengthening family relationships.

The Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has funded the Clearinghouse for two years. The Clearinghouse aims to enhance family relationships across the lifespan by offering a centralised resource and information point for providers of family relationship and support services, policy makers and members of the research and broader communities.

Key messages from the Australian and International research evidence base on family and relationships will be translated into valuable information for services funded by the Family Relationship Services Program and other interested audiences. Consistent with the Institute’s charter, the material disseminated by the Clearinghouse will aim to increase an overall understanding of factors influencing families, family relationships and wellbeing.

Dissemination will be via electronic means through the AFRC website in the form of quarterly newsletters, Family Relationships Quarterly, and six brief papers and two in-depth issues papers each year. Family Relationships Quarterly will carry a variety of content including articles on topics of interest and importance to target audiences; explorations of the changes and developments in family related policy; reviews of the research literature; family related demographic trends and other statistics of interest; reviews of programs and websites; notices of upcoming conferences and events and abstracts from recent conferences. The website will also provide easy access to resources such as bibliographies, links to the websites of other organisations, online publications and conference papers.

Practitioners, service providers and other interested parties can join the AFRC by simply completing the website form. As a member of AFRC, subscribers will receive alerts for new publications and information and invitations to join a moderated e-discussion list, e-relating.

I am delighted that Elly Robinson has joined the Institute to lead the AFRC team. Elly brings a wealth of relevant knowledge and experience in the translation of research and theory for practitioners, students and the general public. An external reference group comprising experts in family and relationships research, policy and practice supports and assists the functions of the AFRC. Both the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Australian Government Attorney-General’s Department are represented on the reference group.

I congratulate all who have been involved in the establishment of AFRC. This represents a groundbreaking initiative that promises to be of great benefit to Australian families and their relationships.

**Professor Alan Hayes**

**Director**

**September 2006**
The Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse (AFRC) is an information and advisory unit funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The Clearinghouse aims to enhance family relationships across the lifespan by offering a resource for providers of family relationship and support services, policy makers, and members of the research and broader communities. The Clearinghouse collects, synthesises and disseminates information on family relationships and facilitates networking and information exchange.

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W e would like to take this opportunity to introduce the team behind the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse.

Elly Robinson is Manager of the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse and Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Elly has experience in the development and production of learning materials and resources for practitioners, service providers, students and the broader community. She has previously worked at Jesuit Social Services as the Co-ordinator of the Education and Professional Services Unit, and as a Senior Project Officer in the Education and Training Unit, Centre for Adolescent Health. Elly also played a key role in the Depression and Changing Families scoping study, conducted by the Australian National University. This project examined the relationship between the family law system and mental health issues.

Ruth Weston is a General Manager (Research) at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, overseeing many of the Institute’s current research projects. Ruth is a psychologist who joined the Institute in 1982, after a teaching and research career that included positions at the University of Melbourne and State College of Victoria (Burwood). Her work has examined family transitions and wellbeing at both the macro- and micro-levels, including young people leaving home, couple and family formation, relationship trajectories, and divorce – including the emotional and financial consequences of marriage breakdown. She is a member of the Project Management Team for the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, funded by the Australian Government through the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services.

Robyn Parker is Senior Research Officer at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. She completed a Master of Science (Psychology) degree at Monash University in 2004 in the area of adult attachment and marital adjustment. Prior to her appointment at the Institute in 1998, Robyn lectured in research design and statistics, personality and social psychology at Monash University, and is a member of the International Society for the Study of Personal Relationships, and the Marriage and Relationship Educators Association of Australia. Robyn’s research activities concentrate on marital and cohabiting relationships, with a special focus on prevention of relationship difficulties and breakdown.

Ren Adams is Project Officer with the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse and Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
Australian Institute of Family Studies since 2004. During this time, Ren has worked on a number of projects, initially in the field of child protection for the National Child Protection Clearinghouse and more recently with the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia. Having completed a Bachelor of Commerce in 1994, Ren has worked in the publishing field for many years and has solid communications skills to complement his knowledge of research and practice in the social sciences.

Carole Jean is the Librarian for the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse. She has been with the Institute since 1990 and has considerable experience in collection development and literature searching. Carole has worked with other specialist clearinghouses and research centres at the Institute, such as the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault and the National Child Protection Clearinghouse.

Helen Arch is responsible for Web Development and Management and has extensive web experience with the Victorian Government. In addition to the AFRC, she works with the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault and the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia.

The Clearinghouse also draws upon the expertise of other researchers at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

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The goal of e-relating is to provide a venue for discussion of research, policy and practice that contributes to the enhancement of family relationships in Australia.

E-relating is designed to promote the exchange of information and ideas and encourage debate between professionals who provide services, develop policy and conduct research on family relationships through life. It is not a forum for the discussion of current clients.

Appropriate topics for discussion include:
- all areas of family relationship research;
- requests for research, policy or practice information;
- developments and changes to relevant policy and practice;
- best practice in the nurturing of positive family relationships and dealing with disruption to family relationships;
- education and training issues;
- notices about relevant upcoming conferences, workshops, events; and
- pointers to new publications, online papers, resources/links, web sites.

Subscribers to the list can include: those working within the Family Relationship Services Program (FRSP); family law professionals; family law practitioners; general practitioners; other health and welfare service providers; people working in the family law system; those working in education and training or in policy and service planning; researchers and the general public.

If you are new to the list, please introduce yourself, as we would like to know about you and your interests.

E-relating is moderated. When you send a message to the list, it goes to the moderator who has the option to accept or discard it, or request you to post a revised message that conforms to the policy outlined on the AFRC website [http://www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/erelate.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/erelate.html).

To join e-relating send the following e-mail:
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Many Australians will be affected by the current wave of family law reform, which includes changes to the family law system and the introduction of new and expanded prevention, early intervention and post-separation support services for individuals, couples and families. As part of its strategy to inform and educate the public about these reforms and services, the Australian Government has prepared a series of 11 Fact Sheets. In the first of these, “Our children come first”, the reforms are outlined and explained. In this paper, which adopts the title of the first Fact Sheet, Associate Professor Lawrie Moloney of La Trobe University reflects on the reforms and the key issues leading to their initiation and implementation.

Since the opening of the Family Court of Australia in late 1975, applications for “principal relief” (divorce) have been solely on the grounds of separation for a year or more. The hope attached to this single and seemingly simple criterion was that separation and divorce would become a more civilised process than the procedures that had existed under the essentially fault-oriented legislation that preceded it.

It quickly became apparent, however, that a general tendency to also de-link fault from decisions about the “ancillary matters” of money and children brought unexpected challenges. Criticism of the new legislation came from a number of quarters. The “best interests of the child” criterion underpinning decision making in parenting disputes was thought by many to be too vague. In addition, a considerable number of feminist scholars and commentators were unhappy with the principles that informed property distribution, spousal support and child support after separation. Some were especially concerned that the concept of “no fault” divorce had become confused with a notion that past behaviour should have little or no impact on the outcome of parenting disputes. Alongside such concerns was a growing realisation, informed by social science research, of the extent to which family-related violence and child abuse had been hitherto underestimated in Australian society.

Although the Family Court had, from the outset, supported a Court Counselling Service that could conduct confidential conferences aimed at resolving parenting disputes, and although Registrars and Deputy Registrars were empowered to conduct conferences aimed at resolving property issues, Court litigation lists grew quickly. The reasons for this are complex. They include the fact that, having been launched in the period of political and administrative stalemate that followed the double dissolution of Parliament in November 1975, the Family Court began with high expectations that its modest staffing profile could not hope to match. Key judicial and other appointments were seriously delayed. Organisationally, therefore, the Family Court began life very much on the “back foot”.

Of greater significance in the long term, however, was the fact that attached to its “no fault” divorce legislation, the Court inherited a dispute resolution philosophy and a set of dispute resolution procedures that were fundamentally adult-focused and adversarial. Adversarial processes encourage ambit claims and strong criticism, even denigration, of former partners as a step towards arriving at an outcome in parenting disputes. Over the years, numerous legislative reforms sought to modify the impact of these processes and to increase the profile of “alternative” dispute resolution services both

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1 The Fact Sheets (A new family law system. Putting the focus on kids) are available by calling 1800 050 321 or visit http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/FactSheets.htm
inside the Court and in the community. The impact of these reforms has been somewhat limited. Indeed most commentators suggest that perhaps the most significant attempt to address the systemic and practice problems, the 1995 Family Law Reform Act, resulted in changes that were at best cosmetic.

Continuing disquiet, not only with respect to costs and delays, but also increasingly with respect to the outcomes of parenting disputes, prompted the formation of a family law “Pathways” task force. The task force strove to articulate how former partners and parents might negotiate the system in ways that were more formally managed and structured. But criticisms continued, with many MPs, for example, noting that family law processes and decisions consistently topped the list of their constituents’ complaints. It was in this context that in June 2003, the Prime Minister announced in the House of Representatives the referral of an inquiry to the House Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs to look in to both family law matters and the Child Support Agency.

In the Foreword to Every Picture Tells a Story, the final Report of the Committee charged with conducting the Inquiry, the Chair, Kay Hull, noted that as part of their deliberations, she and her colleagues had been provided with the opportunity to meet with some children of separated parents. “They told us their stories”, she wrote, “and as a result the real meaning of this inquiry was clearly understood.” On the cover of the Report, the Committee reproduced a picture drawn by eight year-old “Jack”. In depicting a boy split down the middle, the picture beautifully illustrated the impact of the conflict experienced by some children after parental separation.

Drawing on research evidence that pointed to the many negative impacts of ongoing parental conflict on the behaviour and mental health of children, Every Picture Tells a Story shifted the focus of dispute resolution processes back to child-related interests. Crucially, it recommended that the predominantly adversarial methods of resolving post-separation disputes be abandoned. It suggested that these processes be replaced with a non-adversarial tribunal that would include social science professionals among its decision makers.

Government responded strongly to the spirit of the report by supporting reforms at both the community level and inside the Family Court.

At the community level, Government’s response was to commit itself to an Australia-wide funding of services that would be available to individuals, couples and children, as soon as a problem or a need was identified. The new family law reforms are to be seen as a package of services that include Early Intervention Services such as relationship and pre-marriage education and counselling, specialised preventative services that address men’s issues and the problem of family violence, and a range of dispute resolution options for both “intact” and separating families.

Central to the community-based reforms are 65 Family Relationship Centres to be rolled out over a three-year period. The Centres are to be a source of information at all stages of the relationship cycle\(^1\). This includes people starting relationships, people wanting to strengthen existing relationships, those with relationship difficulties and those affected when families separate. The Centres will offer individual and joint sessions to help separating families make workable arrangements for their children without having to go to court. Generally speaking, three hours of joint dispute resolution time will be offered free of charge. Dispute resolution processes will be formally child focused. Some will be child inclusive.\(^2\)

The overarching emphasis of the reforms is on an integrated response to client needs. Workers within the Family Relationship Centres and Early Intervention Services will be expected to consider what direct service they can offer but will also be required to make active facilitated referrals to other relevant services. Although all this comes under the heading of family law reform, the desire of Government is to effect a fundamental change of thinking about family problems. The desire is to shift from a discourse focused primarily on law and legal rights, to one concerned with the preservation of and negotiations about relationships. Thus underpinning the changes to the Family Law Act are the following principles:\(^3\)

- children have a right to know both parents and to be protected from harm;
- parenting is a responsibility that should be shared, providing this does not put children at risk of harm; and
- parents and children benefit when parenting arrangements after separation are resolved outside the court system.

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1. The Role of the Family Relationship Centres is described in Fact Sheet Number 5.
2. These terms are more fully described on the Children in Focus website – http://www.childreninfocus.org
3. Taken from Fact Sheet Number 2
In tendering for the running of Family Relationship Centres, organisations and consortiums have been required to demonstrate in detail how they plan to make their services user-friendly and accessible. The buildings are required to be at ground floor level in locations that are likely to attract “drop in” clients as well as clients who are referred or who make appointments in a more formal manner. An advertising campaign, which will be sustained over a lengthy period, aims to encourage people to “Think Family Relationship Centres” rather than legal processes when family separation and other family related problems arise.

The first 15 Family Relationship Centres opened their doors on 3 July 2006. The full roll out of 65 will have been established throughout Australia by 2008. Initially, separating couples will be encouraged to use the Centres. In future years, the law will require separating parents to first try dispute resolution (either at Family Relationship Centres or with an accredited dispute resolution practitioner) before taking a dispute to court. There will be exceptions to this requirement, the most common being where violence or child abuse is occurring or has occurred.

The reforms are designed to ensure that as far as possible, individuals do not “fall through the cracks”. To this end, the programs provided by the Family Relationship Centres and the Early Intervention Services will be buttressed by a Telephone Relationship Advice Line and by Family Relationships Online\(^4\). The point of entry to the advice line is to be via information officers. They, in turn, will be supported by parenting advisers and legal advisers to whom they will refer callers when appropriate. Built into the model are strong links with the Child Support Agency and Centrelink.

Overall, this is an ambitious set of reforms for which the Government has allocated approximately $400m over three years.\(^5\) There are significant challenges ahead, including the training of sufficient high quality dispute resolution staff and the integration of relationship-oriented services with legal processes.

Every Picture Tells a Story’s recommendation that a Families Tribunal be established has not been taken up. Instead, the reforms have, in effect, built on the Family Court’s own Children’s Cases Program which began approximately two years ago\(^6\). The Children’s Cases Program, details of which can be found on the Family Court’s website, represents a radical departure from adversarial procedures. It places the judge firmly at the centre of proceedings by permitting him or her to control the flow of evidence in a manner that retains a firm focus on the welfare of each child in dispute. This is, to date, a less publicised but nonetheless highly significant aspect of the reform package. Early evaluation findings suggest that parents experience this form of decision-making as generally respectful of themselves and their families. The hope here is that when other forms of intervention fail or are deemed inappropriate, the decision-making process will help make for good judgements as well as assist litigants to focus on the needs of their children. For the children’s sake, and for the sake of the parents themselves, the less adversarial processes are also aimed at improving or at least not diminishing those positive aspects of the former relationship that might remain.

At this stage, it is difficult to gauge how many Australians appreciate the extent of the family law reforms that commenced in July 2006. The reforms have the potential to change radically, and for the better, the way difficulties and disputes around relationships and relationship breakdowns are responded to. They have the potential to short-circuit much of the wasted and often destructive time previously spent in attempting to resolve parenting disputes and to put the concept of ongoing parental responsibility firmly back on the agenda.

\(^4\) Family Relationships Online is located online at http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/


\(^6\) See article by Diane Gibson in this edition.

Associate Professor Lawrie Moloney is Head of the Department of Counselling and Psychological Health in the School of Public Health at La Trobe University, Victoria. Lawrie is currently working on a part-time basis on several projects, including the Allegations of Family Violence Project at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
A newly developed model for working with families when there are disputes over arrangements for children following family separation is intended to reshape services currently provided by the Family Court’s child dispute service. The model is called the Child Responsive Model.

The Australian Government has announced its intention to reshape the Australian family law system by providing additional funding for community support services for separating families. Family Relationship Centres are being established across Australia and (from 1 July 2007) families will be obliged to attempt to resolve disputes in the community prior to filing an application in the courts.

It is expected that the nature of disputes likely to be determined by family courts will become more complex with the filtering effect of the Family Relationship Centres, additional funding for existing family relationships services in the community, and the requirement to attempt to resolve disputes prior to filing an application in the Family Law Registry. In response to this, family courts will need to refocus child dispute services in order to be more responsive to the complex needs of families requiring a determination of their disputes.

To this end, a new approach to child disputes will need to be implemented to avoid the duplication of services available in the community and to better assist families and courts determining complex matters.

Prior to the legislative changes that came into effect on 1 July 2006, the Family Court of Australia’s child dispute services fell into two categories: the resolution phase, where privileged mediation was provided to assist parents reach their own agreements regarding arrangements for children; and the determination phase, where non-privileged family assessments were conducted and a Family Report was provided to the Court. Different mediators were required to work with the family in these two different phases.

To ensure a logical progression of services for families from the community sector to family courts, the new child responsive model is non-privileged to avoid duplication of privileged services available in the community. The model includes expert assessment and opinion provided to families, legal practitioners and the Courts in a way that is not available in community models.

In the new approach, one family consultant will be allocated to each case and will work with the family until the matter is settled or adjudicated. This will provide the family with continuity and consistency of approach and will provide the family consultant with an opportunity to develop a professional relationship with the family. This new approach also aims to provide a more holistic and thorough assessment of the family over time when a Family Report is required for trial.

Children will have greater involvement in the new approach. Where appropriate, children will be interviewed early in the process, prior to the trial. The current court processes only involve children late in proceedings when a Family Report is being prepared. The new process aims to ensure that parents become aware of the impact of their conflict on their children as soon as possible in the proceedings. This approach will provide support for children and an opportunity for them to talk about their experience and put forward their views, while assisting parents to refocus on the needs of their children. This early intervention with children will integrate effectively with the less adversarial trial approach being implemented in the Family Court of Australia.

Screening, assessment, inclusion of children’s views, expert opinion, and a Preliminary Report will be features of different stages of the child responsive model and will provide the family with various opportunities for settlement in response to these different interventions. There will be more “feedback loops” to the family, their legal representatives and the child’s independent lawyer, thereby maximising opportunities to reality test the positions taken in the dispute.

In an integrated approach to dispute resolution, families would be referred to community services when alternative dispute resolution opportunities are identified or where parallel support services can assist the family.

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1 Anything said in privileged mediation is not generally given as evidence in Court.
It is anticipated that the Preliminary Report that will be provided at the time of the feedback meeting with the family and legal representatives will be useful for negotiating settlements. It is well known that Family Reports provided prior to trial often promote settlements and a Preliminary Report earlier in the proceedings could provide similar settlement opportunities.

The Preliminary Report could assist family courts to determine matters that do not require the more costly and time consuming preparation of a full Family Report. When cases proceed to trial and a full Family Report is required, the family consultant who has worked with the family will prepare the Family Report. This is expected to enhance the family's confidence that the family consultant has had adequate opportunity to assess the family dynamics, issues and the best interests of the child over time.

The new model has a post-determination stage, which is intended to assist families and children to understand and implement orders following a determination. At this time, appropriate referrals could also be made to community services. The new model is proposed as a more intensive and responsive approach to disputes involving children and will target the more difficult and complex cases that will flow from the community sector. It is intended to maximise opportunities for assessment and settlement without duplicating privileged services available in the community.

The challenge for the new approach will be to synthesise dispute resolution with assessment in a clear and transparent model that provides feedback to parents and their legal representatives prior to trial, and provides the same preliminary expert views to the judge on the first day of the less adversarial trial program when no agreement can be reached prior to trial.

The new model also aims to provide opportunities for families to be referred back to community services after an application has been filed. These referrals may be for further privileged dispute resolution, for education and group programs, or for individual support or other counselling. Where families are accessing both court services and community services, procedures will need to be developed to ensure that referrals are facilitated in an easy way for the family and that some communication is possible between all service providers to support case management and ensure that referrals are appropriate.

The new child responsive model includes the following key features:

- services will be integrated with the core business of the Court;
- all interventions will be non-privileged;
- children will be included early in the process;
- one family consultant will work with the family until the case is resolved or determined;
- feedback loops to parents, significant others and legal representatives will provide settlement opportunities;
- prior to trial a Preliminary Report will be provided as part of the feedback process to families and legal representatives;
- the Preliminary Report will be available to the judge on the first day of the less adversarial trial program;
- the family consultant will provide expert advice from a social science perspective to the Court on day one of the trial;
- the family consultant will assist the Court to identify relevant issues;
- the same family consultant will provide a further Family Report if required;
- a post-determination interview will assist the family to implement the orders and arrange appropriate referrals to community services; and
- all stages of the model will be integrated with community services.

The Child Responsive Model is currently being evaluated and we look forward to the findings of the evaluation later in the year.

Further information about the Child Responsive Model is available from:

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Policy and Practice Advisor to the Director Child Dispute Services
Family Court of Australia
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Email: pam.hemphill@familycourt.gov.au

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**Dianne Gibson** is Director, Child Dispute Services, Family Court of Australia.
The longitudinal data collected from the British National Study of Health and Development (NSHD) provided the authors of this report with a unique opportunity to examine the strength and direction of any causal links between women’s social roles and their health status. Past research has provided consistent evidence that women in multiple roles (including those of mother, employee and spouse) are generally healthier than those with fewer roles (Arber, 1991; Bartly, 1992; Fokkema, 2002; Janzen, 2003; Lahelma, 2002 in McMunn, 2006). However, most studies have failed to clearly identify the causal direction of this relationship. Enacting multiple roles could result in improved health outcomes for women, or women with good health may be more likely than those with poor health to occupy multiple roles. Several studies have identified the positive impact that social roles have in providing a sense of identity (McCall, 1966; Stryker, 1982 in McMunn, Bartly, Hardy, & Kuh, 2006), a factor that has been linked to positive mental health outcomes (Thoits, 1991 in McMunn, Bartly, Hardy, & Kuh 2006). Alternatively, those with health problems have been found to have lower employment rates and are less likely to have had children (Bradbury, Norris, & Abello, 2001; Vickers, 2001; Fokkema, 2002 in McMunn, Bartly, Hardy, & Kuh, 2006; Magee 2004; Alexander 2005).

The NSHD is a survey of British men and women, born in 1946 and followed throughout life. The survey contains measures of health and social role participation, collected at several points in time when respondents were aged between 15 and 54.

The measures of social roles used in the analyses were constructed from survey items relating to women’s work, marital status and parental status. The women were classified into six groups: women in multiple roles, childless women, homemakers, lone mothers, remarried mothers and intermittent employed married mothers. ‘Women in multiple roles’ were mothers who married once, were still married at age 53 and had strong ties to the labour market. ‘Childless women’ did not have children and had strong ties to the labour market. A little over half were married. ‘Homemakers’ were married mothers who were full-time homemakers at three or four of the four ages when data was collected. Most of the ‘lone mothers’ were divorced or separated and two-thirds had relatively strong ties to the labour market. ‘Remarried mothers’ were lone mothers who remarried by the age of 53, about two-thirds of whom had relatively strong ties to the labour market. ‘Intermittent employed married mothers’ had the same family roles as those in the multiple roles group, but were only employed during two of the four ages when data was collected.

McMunn, Bartly, Hardy, & Kuh (2006) used a series of logistic regression models to test the relationships between social roles and obesity at age 53 and self-reported health at age 54. The first model included the social role history variables and the health measures at age 53–54, as well as a neuroticism measure, which was introduced to control for the potential impact of neuroticism on the results. These models were used to identify whether or not there was a relationship between social role participation and health.

The second model included additional variables used to measure prior health. By examining any changes to the results obtained when prior health was added to the model, the direction of the relationship between social role participation and health could be identified. If a clear relationship between social role participation and health was evident in the first model but was weaker or not apparent in the second model, the hypothesis that those with better health tend to hold multiple roles would be supported.

1 Self-reported health was collected at ages 26 and 54, number of major (e.g. admittance to a psychiatric hospital) and minor mental health episodes were recorded between the ages of 15 and 32 and Body Mass Index (BMI) measures (indication of weight status from underweight to obese) based on body weight and height (weight (kilograms)/height (metres)) were collected at ages 15, 26, 36, 43 and 53. Employment status, marital status and parental status were collected at ages 26, 36, 43 and 53.

2 Neuroticism has been found to be associated with marital quality, divorce and perceptions of poor health (Kinnunen & Rulkkinen, 2003; Tucker; Kressin, Spiro et al., 1996; Goodwin & Engstrom, 2002 in McMunn, Bartly, Hardy, & Kuh, 2006).
The third model included the prior health measure as well as an additional variable measuring childhood social class. This step was carried out in order to rule out the possibility that childhood social class has an influence on the relationship between social role participation and health.

The results showed that long-term ‘home-makers’ were most likely to report poor health, followed by ‘lone mothers’ and ‘childless women’. Those in the ‘multiple roles’ group were least likely to report poor health. Including early self-reported health and mental health measures in the model made little difference to the relationship between social roles and self-reported health. Childhood social class had no impact on the relationship. These findings suggest that the relationship between self-reported health and social roles is not explained by health selection into employment or parenthood.

Women with stronger ties to the labour market were less likely to be obese at age 53 than those with weaker labour market ties. Those who occupied multiple roles were the group least likely to be obese and homemakers were the most likely to be obese. Women’s weight at age 26 did not explain the relatively high obesity rate of homemakers at age 53. Childhood social class had no effect on the relationship between social role participation and health.

Overall these results suggest that participating in multiple roles does have a positive effect on health. However, there may be other factors not included in the study that may have influenced the relationship between women’s social roles and their health. For example, income has been found to be associated with all three of the social roles used in the analysis and with health. Therefore the differences in health outcomes reported across the different social groups (particularly the marked difference between those in multiple roles and those who were ‘homemakers’), may be at least somewhat due to differences in household income. To test for this, household income could be added as a control measure in the regression analysis in the way that McMunn, Bartly, Hardy, & Kuh included childhood social class and neuroticism in their analyses. Other useful control measures may include self-esteem, sense of mastery, and level of education reached.

It would also be useful to determine whether all of the roles included in the analysis contribute to the positive effect that having ‘multiple roles’ has on health or whether some have greater impacts on health than others. As noted above, those in ‘multiple roles’ were least likely to report poor health or to be obese and those who were long-term homemakers were most likely to report poor health or to be obese. Women in both these groups were in long-lasting marriages and had children, but only those in the multiple roles group had strong labour market attachment. Therefore, it may be participating in paid employment rather than participating in multiple roles that has a positive effect on health.

However, ‘lone mothers’ and ‘childless women’ reported poorer health than those in ‘multiple roles’, even though the majority of women in all three groups had strong labour market ties. This suggests that being married and having children may have positive effects on health above and beyond the effect of employment.

A hierarchical regression could be carried out in order to identify which of the social roles have most impact on health. Other social roles not currently included in the analysis, such as community/social group participation, could be also be added. The results of this analysis could then be used to identify other meaningful ways to construct the social roles groupings.

Finally, the definition of ‘married’ included in the study needs to be clearly defined and, perhaps, reviewed. There is no indication as to whether ‘married’ includes those who are cohabiting or just those who are legally married. Therefore we don’t know if the social role being discussed is that of ‘spouse’ or ‘partner’. This differentiation is important to make, as past research suggests that, due to selection effects, those who were cohabiting had poorer mental health outcomes than those who were legally married (de Vaus, 2004). Therefore the exclusion or inclusion of cohabiting women in the analysis, either in their own category or with the married women, could have a considerable impact on the results.

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3 Childhood social class, measured at age 11 using father’s occupation, has been found to influence both adult work roles and adult health (Bynner, Joshi, & Tatsas, 2000; Hardy, Wadsworth, & Kuh, 2000 in McMunn, Bartly, Hardy, & Kuh, 2006).
4 Marriage has been found to be positively associated with wages for both men and women (Breusch & Gray 2004) and divorce has been found to have a negative impact on women’s financial wellbeing (Weston, 1993, Smyth & Weston 2000, NATSEM 2005). Having children has been found to have a negative impact on women’s life-time earnings (Chapman, Dunlop, Gray, Liu, & Mitchell, 2001). Those with higher household incomes have been found to experience better health outcomes than those with lower incomes. Possible explanations for this include access to better nutrition and healthcare for those with higher incomes (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2004).
5 Social participation has been found to be strongly associated with positive health outcomes (Kawachi & Berkman 2001; McLeod, Prior, & Meade, 2004).
6 Though the impact is not likely to be great for McMunn, Bartly, Hardy, & Kuh’s study due to the likelihood of low numbers of cohabiting women in the cohort being studied.
References


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Trends in couple formation

RUTH WESTON AND LIXIA QU

The monitoring of family and other social trends is a key means of understanding the state of the nation and directions that family life and society may be heading. This work suggests areas in which new or revised policies may well be needed, including those relating to service delivery. However, analysis of trends is by no means a guarantee against future surprises. For instance, past major trends that were anticipated by few if any demographers include the World War II baby boom, the extent of the subsequent “baby bust”, and the rise in cohabitation over the last few decades (see Cherlin, 2004; McDonald & Kippen, 1999).

In this article, trends in couple formation are outlined. These include both marriage and de facto relationships (here called “cohabitation”), and overall partnering rates (where marriages and cohabitations are combined).

Age-specific first marriage rates

Figures 1a and 1b depict the rates of first marriage for men (Figure 1a) and women (Figure 1b) in different age groups for 1921, 1970 and 2001. Here, first marriage rates refer to the number of people of a given age and gender who marry for the first time per 1,000 never married people of the same age and gender.

Figure 1a. Age-specific first marriage rates, men, 1921, 1970, 2001
First-time marriage rates for men and women in all age groups are lower for 2001 than in 1921 and 1970.

Across the three years, rates of marriage varied considerably among men who were 20–34 years.
- In 1921, men were most likely to marry for the first time when aged 25–29 years (136 per 1,000 never married men of this age).
- The second most common age to marry was 30–34 years (110 per 1,000 never married men of this age).
- First-time marriage rates for men in their early twenties and late thirties were similar (close to 70 per 1,000 never married men).
- By 1970, the first marriage rate for men in their early twenties had increased dramatically and was almost as high as the rate for men in their late twenties (172 and 182 [per 1,000] respectively).
- Nevertheless, the overall extent of rise in first marriage rates for men under 30 years was not as great as the fall that occurred more recently.
- By 2001, first-time marriage rates for men under the age of 35 had plummeted and rates were similar for men in their late twenties and early thirties (67 and 63 respectively).

The changing patterns of women’s first marriage rates across age are even more striking than those for men.
- In 1921, women were most likely to marry when in their early or late twenties, with first-time marriage being slightly more common among the older of these two groups – those aged 25–29 (139 vs 128 per 1,000 never married women of the same ages).
- Similar to the patterns for men, by 1970, the first marriage rate rose sharply for women aged under age 30, especially for women aged 20–24. Women were most likely to marry when in their early twenties (290 per 1,000 never married women), followed by their late twenties (188).
- However, by 2001, women were less likely to marry when in their early twenties than when in their early thirties (42 vs 65).
- The most common ages for women to marry in 2001 were 25–29 years (83) followed by 30–34 years (75).

Thus, marrying before the age of 25 is now fairly uncommon for both men and women.
- Indeed, the average (median) age of first-time bridegrooms and brides has increased substantially (bridegrooms: from 23.4 years in 1970 to 29.4 years in 2004; brides: from 21.1 years in 1970 to 27.5 in 2004) (ABS, 2001; ABS, 2005).
- Furthermore, the timing of marriage is now more diverse than in the earlier periods, as reflected in the relative “flat” distribution of age-related marriage rates for 2001.
Remarriage rates

Rates of remarriage increased immediately following the introduction of the Family Law Act 1975, but have declined more or less progressively thereafter.¹

Men

- In 1966, 131 in every 1,000 divorced men remarried.
- In 1976 (when the Family Law Act 1975 came into operation), remarriages occurred for 185 in every 1,000 divorced men but by 1993, only 68 in every 1,000 divorced men had remarried.
- In 2001, only 46 in every 1,000 divorced men remarried.

Women

- In 1966, 110 in every 1,000 divorced women remarried.
- In 1976, remarriages occurred for 141 in every 1,000 divorced women but by 1993, only 52 in every 1,000 divorced women had remarried.
- In 2001, only 34 in 1,000 divorced women remarried.

In all years, men have been more likely to remarry than women.

Cohabitation

While there has been a decline in marriage rates overall, most couples are married but the proportion of couples who are cohabiting rather than married has increased progressively (from 6 per cent in 1986 to 12 per cent in 2001). Therefore, the usefulness of marriage rates as an indicator of relationship rates is weakening year by year. Figure 2 depicts the proportions of couples in different age groups who were either cohabiting or married in 2001 (de Vaus, 2004).

Figure 2. Men and women living with a partner: Proportions married or cohabiting by age, 2001

Source: Unpublished tables from the 2001 Census.

Figure 2 shows that marriage rates are a poor indicator of partnership rates amongst those under the age of 25 years. Although most men and women under 25 years old did not have partners, those who had partners were far more likely to be cohabiting than married:

• Of those under 20 years old, 82 per cent were cohabiting and 18 per cent were married.
• Of those in their early twenties, 61 per cent were cohabiting; 39 per cent were married.
• Marriage is more common than cohabitation for older age groups, with the dominance of marriage increasing with advancing age.
• The overall rate of partnering at any single time, however, depends not only on couple formation, but also on the stability of couple relationships be they marriages or cohabitations.
• It is also worth noting that, increasingly, couples who marry live together before their marriage. For example, pre-marital cohabitation applied to 76 per cent of marriages occurring in 2004 and to only 16 per cent of marriages that took place in 1975.

Conclusions

The above trends indicated that, while most people get married at some stage in their life, marriage rates have fallen in recent decades and are now lower than some 80 years ago. There is also greater variation in the timing of first marriages today than in the past, while the average age of first marriage is now higher than it was throughout the twentieth century. Finally, rates of cohabitation have now overtaken marriage rates among those under the age of 25 years.

While partnership formation may be affected indirectly by policies aimed at improving employment prospects, is there any direct role that governments might play in helping individuals find partners? Interestingly, the Singapore Government has introduced various programs to help single people find life-long partners. The effectiveness of this policy is yet to be established.

References and data sources


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Pathways into marriage: Life course patterns and the domestic division of labour

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The data used for this research come from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, which is funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) and conducted by the Melbourne Institute for Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne. The research findings are the product of the researchers and the views expressed should not be attributed to FaCSIA or the Melbourne Institute.

Abstract

This paper uses three waves of data from the HILDA surveys to examine changes in the domestic division of labour over the lifecourse. Earlier research by Baxter (2005) has suggested that the pathway taken to establish a marital relationship affects the level of gender equality within marriage. Specifically couples that cohabit prior to marriage were found to adopt more equal divisions of labour than those who married without a prior period of cohabitation. This paper extends this research by using longitudinal data that enables examination of the effect of differing pathways into marriage on domestic labour patterns over the lifecourse. Hours per week devoted to household labour are analysed using a linear mixed model that contains a random term to account for correlation among responses for individuals over time. A lagged variable that combines marital status with household composition is included in the model to investigate the effect of a change in status on household labour. The results show that women spend far longer on housework than men at all stages of the lifecourse and experience much greater variation in housework hours as they transition through different marital states. There is also evidence that time spent in a cohabiting relationship prior to marriage leads to fewer hours on housework after marriage, but only for women. The paper concludes that differing pathways into marriage lead to different outcomes for women after marriage.

The employment dynamics of women with not-employed partners

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Abstract

Labour force data shows that the employment rate of women who have not-employed partners is lower than partnered women with employed partners. Research to date has not been able to explain this fully. This paper uses
HILDA data to explore the characteristics of families according to the employment status of the husband, and relates that to the employment patterns of the wives. To help to understand why the employment rates might be lower in families with not-employed husbands, the paper analyses the not-employed women’s labour force data to examine whether they prefer to work, why they are not working, and their employment history. The analysis finds that the likelihood of the wife working depends to some extent on why the husband is not working, but also finds that many women with not-employed husbands have low levels of education, lack recent work experience and have health barriers to their own employment. Of particular value is the ability to look at the dynamics of employment in families with a not-employed husband: to see how much change there is in the employment of both partners between the waves of the survey. The data show that in some of these families – particularly those where the husband is not working because of an illness or disability – there is very little transition into employment, while there is more change in families with an unemployed husband.

The views in this paper of those of the author and not necessarily those of the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Income and separation

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Abstract

What factors are associated with marital separation? In particular, is there a ‘social class gradient’ for separation? This paper addresses these questions using data from two large Australian longitudinal data sets. The main focus is on the association between income support status/family income and the probability of separation. We find that income support recipients are more than twice as likely to separate as non-recipients of income support. De facto couples are more likely to separate than legally married couples, though separation rates within the de facto married population have more variation with income than among legally married couples. The relationship between separation and demographic and health characteristics are also explored. We find that couples where the husband has depressive symptoms are more likely to separate. The paper concludes by discussing the potential explanations for the association between income and separation.

Mental health and labour force status in Australia

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Abstract

In Australia it is estimated that mental illness accounts for around 13 per cent of the total years of healthy life lost to disease yet only five per cent of the annual health budget is allocated to services for the mentally ill (Butterworth 2003; Andrews, Hall Teeson, & Henderson, 1999). There is growing concern regarding the effect of employment, including stress, low-quality work and difficulties in balancing work and family life, and of the effect of unemployment on mental health. This paper uses a summary measure of individuals’ mental health to examine the links between mental health and labour market experiences. The measure is based on the summary score typically derived from the SF-36 instrument included in the first 3 waves of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics Australia survey (HILDA), but is adjusted to correct for seemingly undesirable properties of that measure. Simple analysis of labour force transitions over the first three waves of HILDA suggests that entering or remaining in unemployment does not have the deleterious impact upon mental health that might have been expected, while the effect of moving from unemployment to employment is marginal. Greater changes in mental health are associated with movements into and out of the labour force altogether. The estimation of multivariate panel models does find evidence of unemployment contributing to lower mental health for those persons who are participating in the labour force. However, larger differences in mental health are identified among those in employment conditional upon characteristics of their work or attitudes towards their jobs, as is found between those in and out of work.
Family law: is it laws or families that need reforming?


What is the problem with the current family law system and will the major changes set to take place in 2006 make a difference? This article considers the social causes of the current low rates of paternal child contact. It discusses the gendered division of labour and child care, working parents, father child relationships, whether joint custody arrangements are possible in most families, and the potential of the new Family Relationship Centres.

Family Relationship Centres: Implications for separating families.


As part of the package of family law system reforms, the federal government plans to open 65 Family Relationship Centres. These centres will provide a range of services, including pre-marital, marital and post-separation advice, information and referrals. One of the key aims of the centres will be to help the client to ‘consider whether the relationship can be kept together’. In this article the author shares her concerns about the new changes to the family law system, because of the consequences of these reforms on women and children affected by family violence.

Family Relationship Centres: Information paper.


This document summarises operational arrangements for Family Relationship Centres and is provided for public information. The Australian Government’s package of family law reforms providing $397 million over four years includes the establishment of 65 Family Relationship Centres and a national advice line. These will provide support and assistance to people in all stages of relationships, whether they are thinking about getting married, seeking parenting advice or need help in the difficult times around separation.

Family relationship centres: Why we don't need them.


This document summarises operational arrangements for Family Relationship Centres and is provided for public information. The Australian Government’s package of family law reforms providing $397 million over four years includes the establishment of 65 Family Relationship Centres and a national advice line. These will provide support and assistance to people in all stages of relationships, whether they are thinking about getting married, seeking parenting advice or need help in the difficult times around separation.


The Family Relationship Services Program (FRSP) was reviewed in October 2003. A performance framework discussion paper was subsequently circulated and a revised version is presented in this paper. This paper outlines the purpose and key elements of the performance framework, which cover research questions, target groups, principles, outcomes, outputs, processes and inputs. Progress made in relation to other elements, which will be further developed over the next year, is also outlined.


The FRSP Strategic Plan was developed following extensive stakeholder consultations, including the FRSP Challenges and Changes Forum in 2005, and the FRSP program review conducted in 2003–04.

The Strategic Plan 2005–2008 provides a framework for the FRSP to meet the challenges ahead in delivering accessible and responsive, high quality and integrated services.

Family Relationship Centres

Child-sensitive practices in high-conflict parenting disputes: A 30-year road to serious reform.


This address to the 2005 International Forum on Family Law attempts to capture the essence of two important initiatives – the creation of Family Relationship Centres and the development of non-adversarial litigation processes. The particular focus is on why these initiatives are so important for children and the post-separation environment of their parents.

Literature highlights

The Family Relationship Services Program (FRSP) and some of its key program components are the focus for this list of references selected from the Australian Family & Society Abstracts database. Future editions of Family Relationships Quarterly will provide references to the research, policy and practice literature on more specific topics relevant to those involved in the FRSP.

Literature highlights provides a summary of a selection of resources from the Institute library. Where available, links to resources are provided. Other resources are available via the inter-library system – please contact your local library for details.
Analysis/ia70/ia70.pdf

As part of a major overhaul of the Family Law Act, the federal government plans to spend $200 million establishing a network of 65 Family Relationship Centres across the country. While saying that the Government’s proposal to require separating couples to prepare parenting plans before proceeding to the Court, and encouraging couples to use dispute resolution services, are sound, the author argues that the centres will not work, are not needed by 95 percent of separating couples, and waste taxpayers’ money by duplicating an existing system run by the voluntary sector.


The role of the new Family Relationship Centres is to provide information for families, to help families use other services and to provide help for separating families. This paper describes the centres’ guidelines on: client service delivery; staffing, training and competency; facilities; national network; community engagement; guidelines for engagement with other organisations and individuals; outreach programs; and performance. It discusses the involvement of children; client diversity; services to Indigenous clients; legal advice and representation; fees policy; decline of service; safety; screening and assessment; premises; co-location with other services; information technology and telecommunications; badging; the Family Relationship Advice Line; Family Law Online; the Family Relationship Centre website; cooperative and collaborative service delivery; brokering; referral of clients; collaborative arrangements; guidelines on information provided at the centre by or about external services; outreach to regional and rural communities; Indigenous outreach; service charter and complaints; reporting requirements; performance policy; and evaluation.

Children’s Contact Services


The aim of the Children’s Contact Services Study was to explore the role of children’s contact services in Australia and the expectations of different parties regarding the use of contact services. It was conducted in Queensland and Victoria by researchers from the Socio-Legal Research Centre at Griffith University in Brisbane, the Law School at The University of Melbourne and the Australian Institute of Family Studies in Melbourne. The study systematically explored the usages and perceived roles of Children’s Contact Services from the perspectives of the clients and service providers, referrers and other key stakeholders. This final report on the study covers: the background and aim of the study; design, sampling and procedures; client characteristics and reasons for referral; the central role and important functions of the children’s contact services; the referral process; factors that facilitate and impede the functioning of contact services; service provision in the best interests of the child; children’s experiences of supervised contact and changeovers; moving on; future service development; discussion and conclusions.


On behalf of the Commonwealth government, Ernst & Young carried out a training needs analysis for children’s contact services (CCS) funded under the Family Relationship Services Program (FRSP). This report presents the findings of the review, which focused on the development of a high level overview of the training requirements of the children’s contact services sector as a whole. The review employed a questionnaire and follow up discussions to identify the role of a CCS and the skill and knowledge requirements of staff in supporting this role.

Contact Orders Program


Our Children’s Health and Safety Needs is the first of a set of instruments developed in a collaborative research project between Anglicare (WA) and Edith Cowan University with funding from the Australian Government Attorney-General’s Department under the aegis of the Contact Orders Program. The aim of the project is to develop an instrument (template) that will help mediators, counsellors and legal advisors to assist separating parents to develop parenting plans that address children’s health and safety issues. Part of a larger set of instruments that are being developed for use with parents, Our Children’s Health and Safety Needs will build a comprehensive plan for the ongoing joint parenting of children following separation and divorce.

Family mediation

Interviews that the Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre had undertaken with women who had experienced domestic violence are the basis of this article. The interviews discussed the women's experiences of using mediation services to attempt to resolve disputes with abusive former partners. The tips provided in this article are based on these interviews.

**Family relationships education**


Federal government policies affecting relationship education are discussed here. The paper looks at the new Family Relationship Centres, the difficulties of convincing the public about the benefits of relationship education in an era of diverse relationships, and strategies to improve public awareness about relationship education programs.

**Men and family relationships**


The benefits of a community development perspective on program direction for working with men and their family relationships are considered, using the example of the men and family relationships program at Bethany Community Support in Geelong. The paper outlines the principles of community development. It discusses empowerment and advocacy in the context of the men's program at Bethany, current men's programs at Bethany, evaluation of practice, and recommendations for establishing new men and family relationship programs.


This article reviews the development of men and family relationship services in Australia from a practice perspective. Significant milestones in increasing the range and diversity of services for men have been achieved since 1998, when the first national Men and Family Relationships Conference was held in Canberra. Eight principles for successful practice in working with men are identified, along with the challenges faced by the sector.

**Primary dispute resolution**


The practice of collaborative law, a dispute resolution process where all parties agree not to go to court and where, if the process fails, the clients must restart litigation with new lawyers, is discussed. The article looks at the origins of collaborative law, the current system of litigation, how collaborative law differs from mediation, what cases are suitable for collaboration, how collaborative law fits in with government initiatives in relation to the family law system, and the National Centre of Collaborative Law. The article includes a case study.

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**The Family Relationship Services Program**

Provided by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA).

The Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) and the Australian Government Attorney-General’s Department jointly fund over 100 organisations under the Family Relationship Services Program (FRSP) to provide family relationships services through approximately 350 outlets across Australia.

The FRSP aims to:

- enable children, young people and adults in all their diversity to develop and sustain safe, supportive and nurturing family relationships; and
- minimise the emotional, social and economic costs associated with disruption to family relationships.

FaCSIA has funded the establishment of the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse (AFRC) in response to requests from the FRSP sector in order to:

- support community organisations and other professionals assist families by providing easy access to current knowledge, the latest research, data and models of best practice;
- assist in the achievement of the FRSP’s strategic priorities; and
- inform on the implementation of the Australian Government’s new family law system.
Conferences

The following list of forthcoming conferences is taken from the Conferences and Events page on the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse website. For the latest entries visit http://www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/conferences.html

12th National Family Law Conference
22–26 October 2006
Perth, WA

The theme for the conference is “Surfing the seas of family law – major reform or a little light house keeping?”, with particular focus on the challenges facing us all when charting the increasingly uncertain waters of family law. There will be a diverse range of national and international speakers who will address major contemporary issues in law and social science, relevant to the developing issues in family law practice within Australia.
Further information: http://www.familylawsection.org.au

68th National NCFR Conference
– Unanswered Questions in Marriage and Family Science
8–11 November 2006
Minneapolis, Minnesota

The 2006 National Council on Family Relations Conference aims to discern what we still need to understand about family relationships that could enhance the lives of families. The conference will provide a forum for dissemination of the latest research on families and family relationships and for the practical application of family literature and consideration of ‘best practices’.
Further information: http://ncfr.org/conference_info

Parent Child 2006: Happy Families?
13–14 November 2006
London, UK

This conference from the National Family and Parenting Institute (UK) will focus on supporting parents, improving relationships, and strengthening families – what works, what we know, what we need to know. It will look at the broad range of services that support happy healthy relationships in families, and showcase a range of research, policy and practice issues relevant to improving the emotional well being of families, parents and children, in the UK and across the world.
Further information: http://www.nfpi.org/pc2006

International Conference on the Family Group Conference
27–29 November 2006
Wellington, New Zealand

The New Zealand Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, invites you to submit abstracts for inclusion in concurrent sessions at the International Conference on the ‘Family Group Conference’.

International Family Law Conference of the 21st Century: Legal Development and Way Forward
17–18 January 2007
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

This conference aims to identify and investigate the changes and challenges that are shaping a new dimension in family relations. Thinkers, scholars, researchers and experts from around the globe are invited to either participate or contribute a presentation on various issues on legal development of family relationship in the 21st Century based on the law applicable in their respective countries with no restriction to geographical boundaries, religion or race. Some of the areas the conference will explore include: legal issues pertaining to marriage; maintenance or financial support during marriage and after divorce; violence during marriage; dissolution of marriage and divorce proceedings; custody and guardianship; adoption; and child protection.
Further information: Conference website – http://www.iiu.edu.my/laws/conference

For a full list of conferences, seminars and events visit the Conferences page on the AIFS website at http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/conf/confmenu.html