Welcome to our fourth edition of *Family Relationships Quarterly*. This edition marks the completion of the first year of the operation of the AFRC. Our readers’ and stakeholders’ feedback has helped us develop the Clearinghouse, and we are now at a stage where we can begin to capitalise on the great work done so far. We have a stakeholders’ meeting in Melbourne in April that we hope to replicate in other capital cities this year, which will provide us with further information on how we are progressing. A survey of subscribers to AFRC-alert, sent out in April, will also assist us in further determining the needs of stakeholders.

These strategies are an important way in which service providers and practitioners can feed into the Clearinghouse. One of the main purposes of the AFRC is to increase access to information and resources that will help inform the work of our stakeholders. The feedback we gain is incredibly helpful to us in knowing if we are a useful tool, or areas in which we need to expand. Feedback is always welcome at afrc@aifs.gov.au.

This newsletter contains a variety of valuable contributions from researchers and practitioners, including:

- The preliminary results of a program evaluation of RELATE with Couple CARE. Griffith University staff are collaborating with Relationships Australia (QLD) to evaluate the program, and comments on the collaboration experience are included.
- A Program Spotlight on Family Life’s Creating Capable Communities Program in the southern suburbs of Melbourne.
- Sydney psychologist Lyn Worsley writes about the “Resilience Doughnut”, a tool that helps practitioners to consider which areas of a person’s life would benefit from consideration, challenge or change to increase resilience.

Other articles in this edition of *Family Relationships Quarterly* include an article review by Robyn Parker on gender and marital satisfaction early in marriage. Our family statistics and trends section focuses on results from the latest Relationships Indicators Survey by Relationships Australia, and literature highlights focus on acquired brain injury, parental alienation syndrome and post-separation relocation.

We hope you enjoy this edition of *Family Relationships Quarterly* and look forward to your feedback.

**Elly Robinson**
Manager
Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse
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 and a point of contact for providers of family relationship and support services, policymakers 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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Can couples learn ways to strengthen their relationship from the comfort of their own home? In this paper we provide a preliminary report on a university-practitioner collaboration to evaluate RELATE with COUPLE CARE. Fifty-five recently married couples completed RELATE, a web-based assessment that identifies strengths and challenges in a couple’s relationship, and had a telephone call with a relationship educator to discuss the findings of their assessment and develop specific relationship enhancement goals. Half of these couples were selected at random to also complete the Couple CARE program. Couple CARE is a six-unit skill-based relationship education program that couples can complete at home. Preliminary results show that the vast majority of couples complete RELATE with Couple CARE, and greatly value the ideas and skills gained.

Why is it that the vast majority of adults say they want to live in a stable loving relationship with a partner, yet do little to learn the knowledge and skills necessary to realise that aspiration? Governments, social policy analysts, and helping professionals are recognising that promoting positive couple relationships is of profound social and public health significance, and that relationship education can assist in achieving this aim (Markman & Halford, 2005). Population surveys suggest most people attach great importance to being in a positive stable relationship with a partner, and state they would like access to effective relationship education (Johnson et al., 2002). However, the vast majority of couples never attend any form of relationship education (Markman & Halford, 2005). The current paper is a preliminary report of an ongoing collaboration between Griffith University, Brigham Young University (BYU), and Relationships Australia (Queensland) to make evidence-based relationship education affordable and available in couples’ homes.

Barriers to attending relationship education

Despite the potential high demand for relationship education, most couples do not attend any form of relationship education. The vast majority of research and implementation of relationship education has focused on providing premarriage education (Halford, Markman, Stanley, & Gline, 2003). Despite the combined efforts of a wide diversity of providers of premarriage education, only a modest proportion (about 25–30%) of marrying couples attend (Halford, O’Donnell, Lizzio, & Wilson, 2006; Stanley et al., 2006). Moreover, even lower proportions of cohabiting couples attend any form of relationship education, and cohabiting couples are making up an increasing proportion of all couple households (Halford, Markman, & Stanley, in press).

The barriers to couples attending relationship education are many and varied. Many couples report that they see attending face-to-face education sessions as inconvenient, often requiring them to set aside a weekend or a series of six or eight evenings to complete a program (Simons, Harris, & Willis, 1994). Another commonly reported barrier to relationship education attendance is that couples see their relationship as private, and feel that speaking in one of the widely offered relationship education groups would be intrusive (Simons et al., 1994). Many adults prefer to access psychological education through flexible delivery programs that can be undertaken at times and places that suit participants (Christensen & Jacobson, 1994). Thus, some couples might prefer the convenience and privacy offered by flexible delivery relationship education accessible at home.

Offering more education to those who need it most

In current practice, relationship education is typically offered universally to all couples, with the implicit assumption that all couples will benefit. However, in Australia 50% or more of couples who marry remain together for the rest of their lives, and the vast majority of these couples report being satisfied with their relationship at least most of the time (Halford, in press). Offering intensive programs to all couples is potentially expensive, and may make little difference to relationship outcomes for many couples, as they would have stable, mutually satisfying relationships without any education.
A wide range of variables predicts the trajectory of relationship satisfaction and stability (Holman, 2001). For example, poor communication and low partner mutual support predicts deteriorating relationship satisfaction, particularly when couples confront high rates of negative life stresses (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). Some researchers have claimed high degrees of accuracy in predicting future relationship satisfaction or separation (e.g., Gottman, 1994), but careful analysis of the research evidence suggests we can predict with only modest levels of accuracy (Halford, in press; Heyman & Slep, 2001). Realistically, we are unlikely ever to be highly accurate in our prediction of the future of couple relationships because negative life events and stress predict deteriorating relationship satisfaction (Bradbury & Karney, 2004), and we usually cannot know what the future holds for couples.

Despite the limitations in the accuracy of our prediction of risk for relationship problems, we still can identify couples that are at relatively high risk of future relationship deterioration. Given that a substantial proportion of couples will sustain high relationship satisfaction without relationship education, it would seem useful to target couples at high risk of problems in order to maximise the potential benefits of relationship education. One way to achieve this is to offer stepped relationship education in which couples’ level of risk for future relationship problems is assessed and then those with higher risk are offered an intensive relationship education.

The RELATE with Couple CARE Program

Since 2004 Kim Halford and Keithia Wilson at Griffith University in Brisbane have been collaborating with Jeffery Larson, Dean Busby, and Thomas Holman of Brigham Young University in the United States of America to develop a stepped, flexible delivery relationship education program. In 2006, we extended that collaboration to include staff of Relationships Australia (Queensland) to evaluate the new RELATE with Couple CARE program.

RELATE with Couple CARE is a stepped flexible delivery program that integrates two existing programs, RELATE and Couple CARE. RELATE was developed at Brigham Young University and involves each partner in a couple completing a one-hour internet-based relationship assessment (Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001). RELATE assesses current personal and family-of-origin characteristics, and areas of current relationship functioning that predict relationship satisfaction and stability (Holman, 2001). From their RELATE assessment, couples are provided with a computer-generated profile of their relationship strengths and challenges. A one-hour telephone coaching session is used to discuss relationship strengths and challenges and to assist couples to formulate specific relationship enhancement goals.

Couple CARE is a DVD-based relationship knowledge and skills training program. The program employs adult learning principles in which partners assess strengths and weaknesses in their behaviour, and identify and implement relationship enhancement goals (Halford, Moore, et al., 2006). There are six units in Couple CARE. For each unit couples watch a section of DVD, complete exercises in a guidebook, and are provided with telephone-based coaching to help them achieve their self-selected relationship goals.

The integrated RELATE with Couple CARE program involves couples doing RELATE, receiving the report, having a telephone discussion with an educator to identify current relationship strengths and challenges, and developing relationship enhancement goals. The couple then undertakes the Couple CARE program to learn the extra knowledge and skills needed to realise their relationship goals.

Eventually, we plan that after the RELATE assessment, couples identified as at low risk for future problems (i.e. couples with many relationship strengths and few challenges) would receive one telephone coaching session focused on developing a few relationship enhancement goals. Couples assessed as high risk would complete the full RELATE with Couple CARE program. Using a stepped approach, the RELATE with Couple CARE relationship education program is intended to reduce couple costs, and maximise cost effectiveness and couple outcomes by only providing as much relationship education as couples need.

The current research

In 2006, we began an evaluation of the RELATE with Couple CARE program. The Queensland Registrar of Marriages wrote to all couples married in particular weeks in Queensland inviting them to participate in a trial of couple relationship education. The first 60 couples to respond were offered the program free of charge and were randomly assigned to receive either RELATE alone or RELATE with Couple CARE. Eleven relationship educators, six from Relationships Australia (Queensland) and five from Griffith University were trained in the delivery of the RELATE with Couple CARE program, and began offering the program. The team at Brigham Young University managed the RELATE web site and provided the computer generated reports.

The diverse team of researchers and educators worked together to adapt to the flexible-delivery format of the program, which involved telephone-based consultations. Fortnightly supervision and group meetings proved to be a useful forum in which academic researchers and practitioners could learn from each other. The educators from...
Relationships Australia commented on the benefits and challenges of using a structured evaluation of couples’ progress, relative to the unstructured interview-based assessments they usually used. Educators found the summary page provided in the RELATE profile, which identifies specific couple relationship strengths and challenges, of great value in reflecting on the couple’s learning needs. The educators also commented on the structured, time-limited coaching process used in Couple CARE as useful in promoting couple self-directed learning.

Through the current project the researchers in the team gained a better understanding of the realities for educators in delivering programs. Together our team of researchers and practitioners discussed why so few researcher-developed programs are widely adopted in the relationship education field in Australia. We identified common barriers to adoption being the lack of training and ongoing supervision to allow educators to become confident in delivering structured programs.

At the time of writing most couples have completed the RELATE with Couple CARE program. Preliminary results show high retention and consumer satisfaction with both RELATE alone, and RELATE with Couple CARE. After completing the program, couples were asked what changes had occurred in their relationship. Examples of the changes described were as follows, with most focusing upon improved communication.

- **We are much more comfortable expressing our feelings and concerns with each other. We communicate much better and we are much more positive about our relationship.**
  - **50-year-old male, RELATE with Couple CARE**

- **We learned how to deal with relationship problems more effectively. Our confidence, self-awareness, assertion, and communication have really improved.**
  - **23-year-old female, RELATE with Couple CARE**

- **I have been more conscious of how I communicate with my partner, I think before I speak and take time to reflect.**
  - **39-year-old male, RELATE**

These preliminary findings provide support for the viability of a flexibly-delivered and stepped relationship education program. The RELATE with Couple CARE program evaluation has also underscored for us the value of academic and practitioner partnerships in developing relationship education. In 2008 we plan to conduct a large randomised controlled trial of RELATE with Couple CARE using 600 newly married couples recruited with the assistance of the Queensland Registrar of Marriages. From this larger study we hope to determine whether both RELATE and Couple CARE are effective in helping couples sustain relationship satisfaction over the early years of a committed relationship. We also want to test the proposition that couples at high risk of future relationship problems are particularly in need of the RELATE with Couple CARE program to sustain relationship satisfaction.

References


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W. Kim Halford, Bronwyn Watson and Keithia Wilson are from the Psychological Health Research Centre, Griffith University, Queensland. Tony Verner is from Relationships Australia, Queensland. Jeffery Larson, Dean Busby and Thomas Holman are from Brigham Young University, Utah, United States of America.

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### Contributing to Family Relationships Quarterly

The *Family Relationships Quarterly* newsletter aims to provide a lively forum for ideas, argument and comment on family relationships. The newsletter includes literature highlights, research updates, upcoming conference and event listings and information about training opportunities. Articles include reviews of policy developments, program spotlights, summaries of research, and practitioner updates. These range from short reviews of books, conferences, workshops and projects to more substantial articles on significant issues relevant to family relationships.

Service providers, researchers and those interested in family relationships in Australia are encouraged to contribute to the newsletter. We welcome readers’ letters, comments and feedback on issues discussed in AFRC publications.

The average length of contributions is 1,000–1,500 words, but may be as short as 300–500 words. If you would like to submit a longer article, or if you are unsure about the appropriateness of a piece, contact the Manager of the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse prior to submission.

Acceptance of all material is subject to a review process. Consideration will be given to whether articles are relevant, clearly written, and accessible. Consideration will also be given to the following criteria: timeliness of article; significance of the topic; factual accuracy; clear presentation and logical organisation of material; conclusions substantiated by convincing analytical argument; argument supported by references; quality and balance of the argument or information presented; and balance and relevance of any policy implications drawn.

Please email contributions in a Microsoft Word document to afrc@aifs.gov.au, or post to the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse, Level 20, 485 La Trobe Street, Melbourne, Victoria, 3000 (Electronic provision of material is preferred where possible). For further information contact Elly Robinson, Manager of the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse, phone (03) 9214 7888, fax (03) 9214 7839, email: elly.robinson@aifs.gov.au

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Dr Jenny Higgins (National Child Protection Clearinghouse) and Robyn Parker (AFRC) visited Family Life Chief Executive Officer Jo Cavanagh and members of her team, Judy Latta (Community Relations Manager) and Alison Normanton (Family Services Coordinator) to talk about the agency and the services they provide. This article presents a summary of their conversation.

About Family Life

Family Life was established in 1970 to provide services to families primarily in the southern suburbs of Melbourne. The agency’s catchment area includes around 1,200 low-income households that may be under stress and at risk of family breakdown. It is a community owned and managed Family and Youth Service agency directing its services towards individuals in the context of their family and the community, and to families within the context of the community.

The agency takes a whole-of-community approach and its work is grounded in the core values of respect, empowerment, inclusion, and community. Rather than working from a program model per se, the agency seeks to build a culture and philosophy of support. The architect of one of their core programs, the Creating Capable Communities© (CCC) Program, turned to Indigenous understandings of culture and kinship relationships because, with a diverse range of cultures represented in the community, “we needed to do things differently”. Programs are offered to the broader community as well as to those with specific needs, drawing on the connections and compassion of members of the wider community and a pool of 250 volunteers. Residents and volunteers work closely with the 50 agency staff to ensure programs and services are offered that are achievable as well as desirable, and are responsive to the changing needs of the individuals and families they serve.

Creating Capable Communities

The Creating Capable Communities (CCC) Program embodies the vision and values of the Family Life agency—to use a holistic and integrated approach to building the resourcefulness and capacities of the residents to create a safe, healthy and supportive community. The CCC Program was designed as a consequence of a number of tragic deaths on one of the housing estates in the area in 1998. Family Life workers were involved in the ensuing debriefing of children in the locale and through this work they learned that few of the families with which they came into contact knew of the agency and their services, and that the children’s environment was perceived as unsafe and threatening. A process of consultation followed in which Family Life staff learned from residents and volunteers already working in the neighbourhood the sorts of things they needed to help them to not only cope with crises but to improve their own and their children’s wellbeing in more proactive ways.

Working with the parents, the Family Life team initially developed the Creating Capable Kids Program, a strengths-based parenting program. Over time, the accumulated learning and experiences of the Family Life staff and the volunteers and residents involved in the services and programs provided by Family Life grew into the Creating Capable Communities Program. CCC received funding from the Commonwealth Government in 2001 for an initial three years and then—supported by many submissions from residents—secured subsequent funding for another two years. While targeted programs are developed within the CCC framework to address the needs of specific members of the community, and other programs are aimed at the community in general, all programs arise in response to needs identified by residents who then work with the Family Life staff and volunteers to enact a suitable and effective response. The participation of local organisations such as the Rotary Club, library, local businesses, and members of the local police force in these activities helps to foster positive relationships across all levels of the community.

Building on the success of the CCC program in engaging residents in community programs and activities, Family Life has recently developed a Creating Capable Leaders program through which residents are trained to become volunteers and leaders in their neighbourhood. Some residents have enrolled in TAFE courses, and programs such as YouthWorx and PeopleWorx assist residents in securing training and employment. A Breakfast Club, a Sing & Grow program, the After School program, and Community BBQ days all contribute to fostering a sense of connectedness among adults and children in the neighbourhood. The Men’s Outreach Program focuses on supporting, celebrating, and engaging men in their role as fathers through less traditional methods, such as arranging sporting events for dads and their children.
One of the more targeted programs, Community Bubs, is a research-based, intensive program of support for vulnerable families, aiming to keep children in the care of their families and prevent the need for child protection involvement. The 12-month program works on developing parenting skills as well as building relationships between the family and their neighbours and community so that the family becomes more self-sufficient and less reliant on the service providers. An evaluation of the Community Bubs program by Monash University has found it to be highly successful in terms of families meeting their goals and objectives. (Check the Family Life website www.familylife.com.au for details regarding the release of the Monash University evaluation report.)

The success of the CCC program is reflected in a number of ways. The CCC framework functions such that residents are gradually trained to take on more of the responsibility for running activities and programs, while Family Life staff move towards a more facilitative role, becoming a resource for residents to call on as needed. Residents now feel sufficiently empowered to contact staff of the local Council and the Office of Housing directly, rather than having a Family Life staff member make the call. They have taken over the running of some of the programs, including the After School and Breakfast Clubs, and the Coffee and Chat Group. As problems arise, the residents work together to find ways to resolve them and call on Family Life staff for assistance only when they are needed. The CCC program has created a pathway for residents, facilitating their progression from being a client of the agency to a participant in the program(s), through volunteer, student and, ultimately, employee. As their neighbourhood network expands, residents are more likely to turn to each other for help in a crisis. In 2005, for the first time in 15 years, there were no police callouts to one of the housing estates over a two-month period. Involvement in community activities by members of different cultures is increasing, with some members becoming advocates for their culture.

Final word

The guiding principle underlying Family Life activities is one of sustainable change. As Family Life Chief Executive Officer, Jo Cavanagh says, “It's not just about going in and fixing people. It's about a theory of change, a legacy of sustainability, and self-sufficiency at the end of that...because people can do things for themselves, and let us know when we’re needed.”

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Resilience is a key concept in the delivery of human services, and yet practical tools to “measure” resilience are lacking. Sydney psychologist Lyn Worsley discusses the development of a practitioner tool for assessing resilience.

After being given a brief by a group of family lawyers to outline the significance of fathers in the wellbeing of children, I set out on a different path. I wanted to show the lawyers how many factors in a child’s life contributed to their growth and had done for many generations, including fathers, mothers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers, friends and the local community. To say one is more important than the other is naïve, and to say a person can do without any one factor is limited.

I began by researching articles on resilience, with studies such as the Australian Resilience Project (Fuller, McGraw, & Goodyear, 1998), the International Resilience Project (Grotberg, 1995) and the Australian Temperament Project (2000) significantly contributing to my research. My husband, a high school principal, and I attended a number of youth and children’s camps in both our professional and personal capacities. I photographed and studied the young people’s connections, watching for what worked in the children and young people’s lives. We talked over the possibilities for the young people we had worked with and tried to apply the research practically. A circular tool emerged, which we nicknamed “The Resilience Doughnut”.

Past research has focused on risk factors in the lives of young people who have become involved in health risk behaviours. This research has been helpful, yet often difficult to apply in a therapeutic setting. More recent research on resilience, popularly defined as “...the happy knack of being able to bungy jump through the pitfalls of life” (Fuller, 1998, p. 75), focuses on the factors within a person that sets them apart and indicates resilience. Responses in fields such as psychology have been about enhancing resilience factors by helping to challenge thought patterns and working with personality traits.

While this notion is popular with professionals working individually with young people, it is not always useful for parents trying to raise their child effectively or lawyers trying to advocate the best interest for the child in a separation battle. Nor does it help the average teacher or school principal who wants to see their students cope with pressures inside and outside of school.

### The Resilience Doughnut

The Resilience Doughnut (see page 10) can be applied practically by anyone working with an individual. The model outlines seven factors that can interact to help an individual increase his or her resilience. These factors are external to the individual and are therefore able to be considered, changed or challenged in a practice setting.

The Resilience Doughnut is a diagram in the shape of a doughnut, which represents the external factors that build resilience in a person and protect them from stress or adversity. The doughnut has two parts:

1. **The hole in the middle** represents the person as he or she builds the tools and resources they need to face the world. These tools are in the form of how they view themselves (who I am), the degree of confidence they have in their own abilities (what I can do) and the abilities of those who support them (who I have).

2. **The doughnut** is divided into seven sections, each section representing an external factor that interacts with the person in order to build the tools and resources they have in the middle. Brief descriptions of the seven factors are:
   - **The parent factor:** characteristics of strong and effective parenting.
   - **The skill factor:** evidence of self-efficacy.
   - **The family factor:** where family identity and connectedness is evident.
   - **The education factor:** experience of connections and relationships during the learning process.
   - **The peer group factor:** where social and moral development is enhanced through interactions with peers.
   - **The community factor:** where the morals and values of the local community are transferred and the young person is supported.
   - **The money factor:** where the young person develops the ability to give as well as take from society through employment and purposeful spending.
These factors form a ring around the person in the middle, and become protective against the inevitable stress and adversities that a person faces in their lifetime. This is what forms the doughnut shape. The arrows represent the stresses in the external environment that impact on the doughnut.

In my book *The Resilience Doughnut*, I provide a simple scoring method to enable individuals to score the strength of each factor. These scores are then used to assess the three main areas that the individual gains messages from that build or enhance his or her resilience. Once the details of the doughnut are established, the creativity can begin. It is the interaction of at least these three external protective factors on the person that will inevitably strengthen and shape the doughnut. Interaction can be through organising events, or situations, which blend the factors, thereby strengthening the factors even further.

Teachers, students, parents, caring professionals or individuals who want to become more resilient in the face of adversity would all find the Resilience Doughnut relevant, simple to use and helpful. Furthermore it is useful for assessing one’s own resilience and provides a tool for change. The doughnut is fun and creative, and has been considered useful by parents, teachers, family lawyers, youth workers, community workers, caseworkers, and individuals themselves. At the very least, the process of working with the doughnut has the potential to leave a sense of hope and optimism.

Because the doughnut is simple and effective to use, new ways of building resilience in children and adolescents can be discovered and applied in many different contexts. This timely model will attempt to start the creative process by showing the simple ways the doughnut can be applied.

**References**


*Lyn Worsley* is a registered psychologist and Director of Alpha Counselling Services, Sydney. *The Resilience Doughnut* is published by Wild and Woolley; Sydney, Australia and can be purchased online through www.lynworsley.com.au
Gender and marital satisfaction early in marriage


A large number of studies provide evidence supporting Bernard’s (1982) oft-quoted comment regarding “his and her” marriages. Men and women typically experience relationship events differently, and there is some evidence to suggest these differences can be manifest in their physiological responses (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001), the way they seek out and evaluate potential mates (Schmitt, 2002), in personality characteristics and ways of behaving in relationships (Cross & Madson, 1997; Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae 2001; Eagly, 1987).

The accumulation of findings related to these differences has led to views of women as “relationship experts” or “barometers” of the relationship (Floyd & Markman, 1983). However, Kurdek (2005) points out that much of the research in marital relationships examines differences between men and women in different marriages and suggests that, as such, the findings cannot be applied to men and women in the same marriage. It is well established that men and women married to each other tend to be similar in many respects, thus the differences between them might logically be expected to be smaller than those of spouses from different marriages. This is supported by a meta-analysis of marriage and relationship studies in which both spouses from the same couple provided data, which concluded that gender differences in marriage may have been overstated (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Kurdek’s analysis of data gathered from married couples also casts doubt on the existence of “his” and “hers” marriages.

The problem with separately analysing responses on the same measures from spouses in the same marriage is that it assumes that their responses are independent of each other when they may, in fact, be correlated (Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000). That is, a husband's score on a particular variable early in the marriage may predict, to a greater or lesser degree, his own marital satisfaction later in the relationship (intra-spousal links) as well as that of his wife (cross-spousal links). If the link is stronger for men compared to women, it might suggest that the processes contributing to marital outcomes are different for husbands compared to wives. In recent years sophisticated statistical techniques have become available to allow researchers to analyse these effects using data provided by couples from the same marital relationship. Kurdek used such a technique to examine data from a sample of married couples over a period of four years.

What was measured?

Drawing on a social ecological model (Huston, 2000) Kurdek collected the following information each year for four years via a mailout survey from both husbands and wives:

- proneness to psychological distress;
- appraisals of the marriage as assessed by love, liking, trust, and motives for being married (higher scores indicate more positive appraisals of the marriage);
- Men and women typically experience relationship events differently, and there is some evidence to suggest these differences can be manifest in their physiological responses.

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1 Floyd & Markman are citing Barry (1970), noting that their findings are consistent with those of previous researchers and support the notion that women “may act as a ‘barometer’ of a distressed marital system” (p. 456).

2 Refer to the theory of assortative mating (Buss, 1984).
- appraisals of spousal interactions as assessed by how often spouses agreed on a range of important issues, their expression of affection/sexual interest, and shared activities (higher scores reflect more positive spousal interaction);
- satisfaction with social support (higher scores representing more satisfaction with social support); and
- marital satisfaction.

Additional information was obtained about several socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

**Findings**

Relative to husbands, wife’s appraisals of the marriage and spousal interaction and their marital satisfaction showed stronger declines over time than their husband’s, however the declines for each were sufficiently similar that they contradict the view that mens’ and womens’ experiences of marriage are substantially different.

Individual spouses who reported high levels of psychological distress tended to be less satisfied with the marriage across the four years. Positive evaluations of the marriage and spousal interactions, and satisfaction with social support were associated with higher marital satisfaction across the period. The strength of the links were similar for both men and women.

Spouses of husbands and wives who reported higher psychological distress early in the marriage were likely to be less satisfied with the marriage at later times. Husbands whose wives reported more positive initial evaluations of the marriage and spousal interactions, and satisfaction with social support were more satisfied with the marriage over the four-year period. Again, the strength of the links were similar for husbands and wives.

Since data were available for couples that divorced at some point during the four years of the study, Kurdek was able to examine differences between intact and divorced couples. Compared to intact couples, spouses whose marriages ended in divorce reported higher levels of psychological distress across time. They were also less happy with the marriage and their interactions with their spouse. The declines in the positivity of their appraisals of the marriage and interactions with their spouse, and in their marital satisfaction were stronger for couples that divorced. The link between divorcing and declines in marriage-specific appraisals showed a gender difference, being stronger for wives compared to husbands. Again, although significant, the strength of the links were small. Thus, little evidence for wives as “relationship experts” or “barometers" was found.

Kurdek’s findings are consistent with prior longitudinal studies (Huston et al., 2001; Karney & Bradbury, 1997). In most cases the relationships between spouses’ psychological distress, favourable appraisals of the marriage and of spousal interactions, and satisfaction with social support and the outcome of the marriage were no stronger for wives than for husbands. Kurdek concludes that the differences between spouses who ultimately divorced and those whose marriages remained intact were no more pronounced for husbands than for wives.

Kurdek points out a number of limitations to this study. These include lack of representativeness of the sample, non-random loss of respondents over the course of the study, and common measurement issues such as the choice of measures, the aspects of relationships selected for inclusion, and the self-report format of the measures used—most of which can be adequately defended.

However, it is also possible that, since the data were collected in the late 1980s/early 1990s, the marital processes being examined in this study may no longer operate in the same ways as they did at that time. The attitudes and values regarding marriage and marital roles that contribute to spousal interactions, appraisals of the marriage, or marital satisfaction may function somewhat differently 15 years on. Furthermore, despite the established link between demographic variables and marital satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), respondents’ education, income and other personal characteristics were not included in the analyses.

**Conclusion**

This study suggests that the long-held view that there are substantial differences between men’s and women’s experience of any marriage and that wives’ experiences are more reflective of the quality of the marriage requires review. Kurdek’s analyses suggest that, although there are some differences between men and women with respect to the aspects of marriage examined in this study, marital stability is not as dependent on wives’ experiences as
has previously been thought. As couple-level statistical techniques become more widely used, it is possible that our current understanding of marital processes will require further adjustment.

References


Robyn Parker is a Senior Research Officer with the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse.
Relationships Australia is a national provider of relationship services. A range of relationship support services is available in over 100 locations across the country. Since 1994, Relationships Australia has periodically conducted a brief telephone survey of Australian adults. In August 2006, 1,200 interviews of randomly selected respondents were completed. Topics covered included current relationships, reasons for marrying and divorcing, balancing work and family life, attitudes toward seeking help for relationship problems, and the impact of technology on relationships. The following is a brief summary of some of the key findings of the survey.

The complete report is available at: www.relationships.com.au

Current relationships

Seventy per cent of respondents indicated that they were in a couple relationship (n = 840); of these, 41 per cent were in a marriage and 20 per cent in a cohabiting relationship.

Respondents with spouses or partners were most likely to identify friendship and companionship as the best part of their relationship (38%). Interestingly, this was also the response on which men and women differed markedly. While 42 per cent of women nominated this characteristic, only 30 per cent of men did so. Other aspects of their relationship identified as important by respondents were:

- “We love each other” (17% overall);
- “Support/be there for each other” (13% overall);
- “Communication/talking/discussing issues” (12% overall);
- “Trust/confidence” (11% overall); and
- “Compatibility” (10% overall).

Factors that detract from respondents’ relationships tended to be predominantly those that could be seen as hindering or interfering in couples’ friendship and companionship (the most commonly cited good thing about their relationship).

- lack of understanding (23%);
- differing values (22%);
- lack of communication (21%);
- working full time (21%);
- having different goals and expectations (20%);
- housework (19%); and
- lack of financial security (18%).

Only one of these, compatibility, was nominated more frequently by men (15%) compared to women (8%).

Factors that detract from respondents’ relationships tended to be predominantly those that could be seen as hindering or interfering in couples’ friendship and companionship (the most commonly cited good thing about their relationship). Lack of time together was most often endorsed (36%), followed by several issues affirmed by between one quarter and one fifth of the partnered respondents in the sample:
In terms of whether respondents felt their relationship was under threat, however, only ten per cent of the partnered respondents indicated a degree of concern about the future (being somewhat, quite or very worried) of their relationship. Most were either not very worried (22%) or not at all worried (68%).

In general the proportion of the sample endorsing many of these negative factors changed little over the period 2001 to 2006. However, as issues impacting negatively on relationships, lack of communication dropped from 29 per cent in 2001 to 21 per cent in 2006, and the inability to resolve conflict declined from 19 per cent to 10 per cent over the same period.

**Reasons for marrying and not marrying**

Respondents were asked their views on why people marry. Of the seven reasons provided, the most commonly endorsed were:

- to signify a lifelong commitment (68%);
- to make a public commitment to each other (63%); and
- to provide security for children (62%).

Marriage was seen by just under half of the sample as a way of obtaining legal status or financial security (48%), and as an outcome of religious beliefs (44%). Family pressure (38%) or a desire for a special occasion (32%) were slightly less frequently endorsed. Some age differences were found. More younger people (aged less than 29 years: 77%; 30–39 years: 76%) viewed signifying commitment as a reason to marry compared to those aged 40 years or more (40–49 years: 65%; 50–59: 63%; 60+ years: 63%).

Respondents aged in their 20s and 30s (66% and 69% respectively) were comparatively more likely to indicate that marrying was making a public commitment than those aged in their 40s and 50s (58% and 57% respectively), and those in their 30s and their 50s differed most with respect to marrying because of religious beliefs (51% vs. 36% respectively).

Seventy per cent of respondents aged in their 30s endorsed security for children as a reason to marry compared to around 60 per cent in all other age groups. This age group was also more likely to view family pressure as a reason people marry nowadays (50%), particularly in comparison to respondents aged 60 or more (29%). Those aged in their 30s and 50s differed most in their views of the desire for a special occasion (41% vs. 25% respectively).

Gender differences with respect to reasons to marry were generally quite small. The largest difference occurred for religious beliefs, where 47 per cent of women compared to 38 per cent of men viewed it as a reason to marry.

Notably, the top three reasons to marry in this survey were also the most commonly endorsed reasons by respondents in the 1998 Relationships Indicators Survey.

Respondents were also asked about the reasons someone would not get married nowadays. A previous bad experience was the most commonly endorsed reason for not marrying (72%), followed by avoiding commitment (67%), a view that marriage is not needed to demonstrate a strong commitment (63%), and fear of making a mistake (61%). Similarly, the fear of divorce (59%) and the desire for a single lifestyle (57%) were also endorsed by more than half of the sample. Less common reasons were that marriage would interfere with work and career (41%), the desire for multiple relationships (35%), and the desire to travel (35%).

Robyn Parker is a Senior Research Officer with the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse.
Recent publications

**Tailoring parenting to fit the child**, by Diana Smart. *(AFRC Briefing No. 4, 2007).*

Children are often seen as the product of their environment and their parents’ child rearing skills. While they are undoubtedly greatly influenced by their family environment, they come into the world with very different personalities and characteristics. Parents often notice that strategies which work with one child may not work as well with another. Bringing up children is a “two-way street” to which parents and children both contribute. This paper provides an overview of evidence about the importance of synchrony between parenting methods and child characteristics, and outlines ways in which parenting can be attuned to “fit” the child.


**Dropping off the edge: The distribution of disadvantage in Australia.** A report by Professor Tony Vinson, University of Sydney, for Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia.

In *Dropping off the edge*, Professor Tony Vinson identifies areas of disadvantage in Australia, the factors that contribute to that disadvantage, and the locations in which it is especially severe. The report calls for more Commonwealth-led initiatives to reduce disadvantage and for the evaluation of policies aimed at reducing disadvantage to occur over extended periods. Suggestions for policy development in a range of domains that offer the potential to overcome disadvantage are offered.

The report is available from: [www.australiandisadvantage.org.au](http://www.australiandisadvantage.org.au)

**It's about time: Women, men, work and family.** A report by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

*It's about time* was launched on 7 March by the President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), John von Doussa. The paper builds on previous HREOC work that focused on paid maternity leave and the Pregnancy and Work Inquiry, examining the wider context of families’ efforts to manage paid work and family commitments. *It's about time* draws on consultations, focus groups and submissions to the Sex Discrimination Commission to develop a set of recommendations aimed at acknowledging how family and carer responsibilities vary across the lifespan and identifying how families can be supported in their efforts to balance paid work and caring responsibilities.


Other clearinghouse publications

**Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse (ADFVC)**

[www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au)

The ADFVC is funded by the Australian Government to collect and disseminate information, research and resources about domestic and family violence that can inform practice, policy and research within the Australian context. It provides ready access to current, relevant information via a range of publications, a website containing a range of resources and links, and information and library services.

ADFVC have just released the summer issue of their quarterly newsletter ([www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/Publications.htm#Newsletters](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/Publications.htm#Newsletters)) and an issues paper entitled: *Family Law Act reform: The potential for screening and risk assessment for family violence* ([www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/Publications.htm#Issues%20Papers](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/Publications.htm#Issues%20Papers)).

**Forthcoming ADFVC publications**

*Domestic and family violence studies, surveys and statistics: Pointers to policy and practice.*

*Domestic violence and child protection: Challenging directions for practice.*

*Relations between domestic violence and seasonality, calendar events and football matches.*

**Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA)**


ACSSA aims to improve access to current information and resources in order to assist those committed to working against sexual assault. ACSSA will help to support and develop strategies that aim to prevent, respond to, and ultimately reduce the incidence of this crime.
Recent ACSSA publications


ACSSA Wrap, No. 3, December 2006. Young people who sexually abuse: Key issues. This paper is about young people who have committed acts of sexual abuse. It is written for those who might come across this issue in their day-to-day work and would like to know what the current research and practice says about understanding and responding to this group of young people.

Issues Paper, No. 6, December 2006. Services for victim/survivors of sexual assault: Identifying needs, interventions and provision of services in Australia. This paper summarises the international and national literature that exists on sexual assault services. It focuses on the needs of victim/survivors, existing interventions, and provides information about services that currently provide these interventions.

National Child Protection Clearinghouse (NCPC)

www.aifs.gov.au/ncpc

The NCPC is funded by the Australian Government’s Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs as part of the government’s response to the problem of child abuse. The National Child Protection Clearinghouse, which has operated from the Australian Institute of Family Studies since 1995, collects, produces and distributes information and resources, conducts research, and offers specialist advice on the latest developments in child abuse prevention, child protection and associated violence.

Recent NCPC publications

Child Abuse Prevention Newsletter, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2007. Articles include: The National Child Protection Clearinghouse is being evaluated!; Program profile: Take Two; Conference highlights; National Child Protection Week; Program profile: Family Life’s Creating Capable Communities program; Young people’s perspectives of child abuse; Book review: The truth is longer than a lie; Literature highlights; Conferences and events.

Child Abuse Prevention Issues, No. 24, Autumn 2006. The effectiveness of parent education and home visiting child maltreatment prevention programs. The paper begins with an overview of the different types of prevention programs (for example, primary/universal, secondary and tertiary interventions) and the ways in which programs can be evaluated. Three different modes of evaluation are described: process, impact and outcome evaluations. The benefits and limitations of adopting certain methodological approaches are outlined. Particular attention is given to two widely used prevention programs: parent education and home visiting programs. Parent education and home visiting program evaluations are critiqued in order to determine whether these programs are effective in preventing child maltreatment and the degree of evidence that exists to support these claims. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of the present findings and their applicability to practice.

Other clearinghouses

Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA)


The Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA) is funded by the Australian Government to support the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS). CAFCA provides information and advice to policy makers, researchers and practitioners in the fields of early childhood and community development. The Clearinghouse has an emphasis on young families, early learning and care, support for families and parents, child friendly communities and family and children’s services working effectively. CAFCA also has a role in the National Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) together with the Social Policy Research Centre are the National Evaluators of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS). The Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia, located within AIFS, has a central role in facilitating communication between the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the SFCS National Evaluation Consortium, Local Evaluators and Project Holders of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004–2009.

Support provided by the Clearinghouse to the SFCS National Evaluation includes:

- E-value—an e-discussion forum for local evaluators and SFCS projects holders.
- Early childhood evaluation resources—key local and international resources, evaluation instruments and questionnaires, question and answers, presentations and conferences.
- Stronger Families in Australia (SFIA)—a national study over three years providing comprehensive information about children’s lives, their development, family life and the communities they live in. The SFIA study forms the
core of the outcomes component of the evaluation of the Communities for Children stream of the strategy and is currently in its second wave of data collection.

- Promising Practice Profiles—a database to help identify and share knowledge of ‘what works’ in early childhood and early intervention, and community development.
- Publications—including the National Evaluation Framework & the Evaluators’ National Newsletter.

New services keep focus on children

As part of the implementation of changes to the family law system, eight new Parenting Orders Programs and nine new Children’s Contact Services will be established this year.

Parenting Orders Programs enable separating parents experiencing high levels of conflict to make parenting arrangements that focus on the best outcomes for their children. Children’s Contact Services provide a mechanism for the safe transfer of children from one parent to another, and supervised visits where necessary.

For more information about the changes to the family law system and the new services available to support the changes go to www.familyrelationships.gov.au or call the Family Relationship Advice Line on 1800 050 321.

Other publications of interest

**Prevention and Early Intervention Literature Review. NSW Department of Community Services**

The Early Intervention Program in the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) aims to deliver effective services to families and children. To facilitate decisions regarding the selection of programs likely to be most beneficial for a particular target group, staff from the NSW DoCS conducted a review of the evidence for the effectiveness of relevant prevention and early intervention programs and strategies. The review draws on quality studies employing experimental designs, systematic reviews and meta-analyses. The key conclusions to be drawn from research on a range of programs are presented, as are the identifying features of effective prevention and early intervention programs, and areas for future research.

The major conclusions from the literature review were published in Developing Practice, No. 12: Autumn 2005. The full literature review can be found on the DoCS website: www.community.nsw.gov.au/documents/EIP_literature_review.pdf

**Other relevant links**

- Association of Child Welfare Agencies: www.acwa.asn.au
- NSW Department of Community Services: www.community.nsw.gov.au
- NSW Centre for Parenting & Research: www.parenting.nsw.gov.au

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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.
**Literature highlights**

**ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY**


This paper examines the challenges faced by people with coexisting acquired brain injury (ABI) and mental illness. It examines the range of current services for people with an ABI and mental illness, particularly mental health services in Victoria; specialist mental health services; services for people with coexisting ABI and mental illness; and national and international comparisons of ABI and mental health services in Australia, United States and the United Kingdom. The paper explores the service needs of people with ABI and mental illness, assessment and identification of mental health needs, treatment and targeted interventions, access to appropriate mental health care, and case coordination. The paper then considers options for future service development, focusing on the following factors: clarifying roles, responsibilities and service pathways; strengthening ABI expertise in mental health services; building the behaviour management skills of workers and carers; supporting carers of people with an ABI; and developing a knowledge base.


This document explains the protocol for specialist mental health services and other Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) funded service providers working with people with an acquired brain injury (ABI). The protocol outlines: the characteristics and service needs of people with an ABI and mental health problems; factors that would indicate the need for referral to specialist mental health services, and appropriate ways of requesting assistance from these services; current roles and responsibilities of specialist mental health services and other relevant DHS services in relation to people with co-morbid ABI and mental illness; and service descriptions and contact details for specialist mental health, specialist ABI and other services that may be of assistance to people with co-morbid ABI and mental illness. It includes information on urgent referrals to mental health services, what to expect from specialist mental health services, and making a referral to specialist ABI or disability services.


In response to widely recognised dilemmas associated with rehabilitation and disability service provision in remote and rural areas of Australia, a community-based, participatory approach to service development was adapted for a disability service project in central Queensland. The service framework, known as Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR), fosters the involvement of community members in disability service provision. Although this framework has been described previously, few guidelines exist regarding appropriate implementation of such an approach. Consequently, the implementation strategy known as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) was adopted. Participatory Rural Appraisal has been reported to foster the participation and decision-making of community members in community projects. The present article describes the application of this implementation strategy to disability service provision in a relatively under-resourced rural shire. The rationale, framework and process of the pilot are described. A subsequent publication will document the service component, detail evaluation findings and describe the long-term outcomes of this research. (Journal abstract)

This report provides prevalence estimates of five main disability groups in Australia—intellectual, psychiatric, sensory/speech, acquired brain injury and physical/diverse. The groups are defined and explained in terms of Australian and international definitions of disability, and of available Australian data. Also reviewed are recent trends (1981 to 1998) in the prevalence of disability and chronic conditions, and changes in population patterns of disability prevalence are analysed.


In a discussion of the incidence of acquired brain injury (ABI) in Australia, this paper identifies the symptoms of different types of brain injuries and the implications these have for rehabilitation, arguing that it is valuable for carers to have an appreciation of some of the mechanisms that may operate during healing and recovery. Two broad theories as to how social and cognitive rehabilitation processes should be implemented are examined and the carer’s role discussed. Stages of rehabilitation are outlined and the carer’s response to the coma phase is explored. Other issues addressed include: the role of primary and supplementary carers; empowering families; developing strategies and frameworks; support for carers of persons with severe and multiple disabilities; and support for carers of persons with ABI who experience severe emotional and psycho-social difficulties, who have severe executive function impairment, or who have mild or minor head injury.


Research indicates that people with an acquired brain injury (ABI) are at an increased risk of developing mental illness. The Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre’s Brain Disorders Program provides medium to long term neuropsychiatric rehabilitation for people with an ABI and mental illness in an interdisciplinary setting. The authors outline the program and present a case study that includes discussion of the subject’s background details, assessment, and admission to the centre’s inpatient unit.


The Multiple and Complex Needs Initiative aims to help adults with a mental illness, intellectual impairment, acquired brain injury or substance dependency who are at risk of harm. This article explains the role of the Care Plan Coordinator and the development of links between service providers.


Addressing the question of community responsiveness to people with acquired brain injury, the author describes the frustration and ongoing disadvantages faced by this group of people within the community, usually in terms of employment, education and social relationships. She believes that people with acquired brain injuries are often overlooked in discussions of discrimination against people with disabilities. She argues for a greater understanding of the difficulties for these people and for greater efforts towards their social inclusion.


Some children are unable to make day-to-day decisions for themselves as a result of an intellectual disability, a mental illness or acquired brain damage. This booklet provides legal information for parents of such children. It covers: why planning is important; powers of attorney; guardianship and administration; the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal; wills; estate planning; options for leaving assets to children; what happens to social security payments; controlling what happens to assets after the child dies; leaving assets in trust; challenging a trustee’s decisions; keeping social security entitlements; what to think about when selling the family home; flexibility for future needs; administering an estate; executors and administrators; Centrelink entitlements; locating legal advice and assistance; and further resources.
Parental alienation syndrome


Parental alienation syndrome (PAS) is defined in this paper as a disturbance in the child who, in the context of divorce, becomes preoccupied with deprecation and criticism of one parent which is either unjustified or exaggerated. It arises from a combination of parental influence and the child’s active contributions to the campaign of denigration. The incidence of PAS is explored and the social context of alienation, parental alienation and its manifestations, and children and alienation are discussed. Suggested responses are considered, highlighting the need for interventions to emphasise and be guided by the restoration of contact as the primary objective.


Despite a landmark High Court judgement in the area of child sexual abuse allegations (M and M, 1988), a major concern in such cases seems to be the fear that mothers use false accusations against fathers as ‘weapons’ in custody and contact cases. This paper seeks to examine the validity of such views as they apply to Western Australia. In particular, it examines the belief that false accusations are rampant; the questionable nature of ‘parental alienation syndrome’; the belief that young children’s accounts of abuse lack credibility; and the ignoring of the effect of abuse itself on the nature of a child’s testimony. The paper argues that the principle of ‘protection of the child’s best interests’ should not necessarily be equated with the child having access with a parent previously accused of having abused the child. (Journal abstract)


Parental alienation syndrome is sometimes invoked in family law proceedings to explain false allegations made by one parent against another; usually the mother is said to be alienating the children from the father, and the allegations usually refer to the sexual abuse of a child. The author reviews the syndrome as defined by Gardner, and its utility or otherwise in legal proceedings. She also reviews the issue of false allegations of sexual abuse, which have been shown by various studies to be uncommon, and the credibility of children making disclosures.


After discussing the influence in family courts of parent alienation syndrome (PAS) and related ideas, the author examines the outcomes of reframing court processes in the light of these ideas. She claims that no apparent improvements either in the quality of expert witness testimony or in the welfare of children have resulted from these efforts. She also believes that the 1995 reform of the Family Law Act has encouraged the use of the PAS diagnosis, engendering an increase in adversarial cases and a neglect of issues of child development and attachment. The Act’s protection of the child’s right to contact has resulted in the transfer of the right from child to parent, outweighing the Act’s increased recognition of the effects of violence upon children. The author argues for longer and broader outcome studies to assess the effects on the child and the protective parent of forced contact and change of residence.


At its simplest, the parental alienation syndrome paradigm claims that allegations of child abuse are invented and that children’s statements and manifestations of fear are the outcome of parental coaching. This paper argues that conditions are created for the de facto operating presumption of the parental alienation syndrome paradigm in the courts because the Family Court of Australia lacks the funding to investigate allegations of child abuse by a parent. The author suggests that because the private adversarial system of family law commonly fails to substantiate allegations of child abuse, safety for children in family law proceedings who are subject to abuse depends on access to a national professional investigative service to inform the Court. She
calls for a redefinition of a child’s best interests in the *Family Law Act* to give safety the highest value.


The author suggests a connection between the popularisation of parental alienation syndrome (PAS) and the apparent requirement of adversarial processes to deliver a knockout blow. In an attempt to investigate this, research was conducted into the way in which PAS allegations have played out in the Brisbane registry of the Family Court over a 5 year period. During this research, family law professionals were surveyed and all unreported judgments between 1 January 1995 and 15 March 2001 were examined for evidence of PAS. Following analysis of the survey data and the unreported judgments, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a small sample of legal practitioners and counsellors. A complex picture emerges from the judgments. This picture differs somewhat from the expectations of those surveyed and interviewed and those of the author and supports the likelihood of gender differences with respect to the purposes of PAS allegations and the rhetorical contexts in which they occur. (Journal abstract)

**Post-separation relocation**

**Can we go or must we stay? Being able to relocate with the children.** (2002). Watts, G. *Law Society Journal*, 40(10), 66–69.

Referring to significant relocation cases subsequent to the commencement of the amendments to the *Family Law Act* in 1996, in particular to the September 2002 decision in *U v U* (HCA 36), the author examines the legal situation in Australia and compares it with law in the United Kingdom. He explains that the current law in Australia is that the court looks at the available proposals and chooses which proposal is in the best interests of the child. He reviews proposal options, considers whether the law could be improved, and concludes that there is no clear answer to the question posed in the title of the article, stating that because the Australian law gives no clue as to what the result will ultimately be, litigation flourishes and new proposals are manufactured.


The child relocation case of ZN and YH and The Child Representative was heard in the Family Court in 2002. This article discusses the case and examines the legal principles regarding parental responsibilities for the welfare and development of their children, and the best interests of the child principle. It considers how the court can work out the best interests of the child, the types of parenting orders the court can make, and the effects of the 2006 family law reforms.


This article examines the changing laws and social assumptions of joint legal custody in western society since the 1980s. It begins by noting that while marriage may be dissoluble, parenthood is not, and laws in Australia, America and European nations are changing and tested by the new ongoing relations between parents after they divorce. The article discusses the change in child custody allocation, the reconceptualisation of the post separation family and the promotion of shared parenting. These laws are highlighted by relocation issues and parental disputes.


The relocation of a separated parent could have a significant impact on any residence and contact arrangements that have been put in place. This article summarises a discussion paper on relocation that has been issued by the Family Law Council. The discussion paper considers how relocation should be defined, and outlines the current law on relocation and the proposed reforms to family law contained in the *Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility)* Bill 2005. It discusses the complex range of issues at stake in a relocation, and invites submissions from interested individuals and organisations on whether and how the law on relocation in Australia should be reformed.


The author provides information about the relocation case of *U v U* (2002) HCA 36; the basis for the appeal lodged by the mother; the reasoning behind the affirmation by the Full Court of the decision by the trial judge preventing her from relocating her daughter to India; and dissenting judgments.
This report brings together the findings of a public consultation in response to a discussion paper and offers advice on the Attorney-General’s terms of reference. Currently there are no specific provisions in the Family Law Act 1975 relating to relocation nor is the term ‘relocation’ defined. In addition to recommending changes to the Family Law Act, the report makes recommendations regarding: the impact of relocation on children; the impact of relocation on parents; and the impact of relocation on other people; and also reviews current law in Australia and in other jurisdictions.


This paper traces the history of leading authorities relating to relocation issues, particularly those which have been delivered since the introduction of the Family Law Reform Act 1995 in the context of the most recent Full Court and High Court decisions.


After parents separate, the parent with whom the child lives, the ‘residence parent’, may wish to relocate. This article considers the application of the paramountcy principle to this situation. It argues that case law suggests that the High Court favours a narrow interpretation of the paramountcy principle and takes a narrow view of relocation, while the Family Court favours a wide interpretation of this principle and takes a broad view of relocation. It is suggested that the recent relocation decisions of the Family Court and Federal Magistrates’ Court reveal that, notwithstanding that each case is judged on its own merits, a wide interpretation of the paramountcy principle translates into a tendency to permit the relocation of the residence parent and the children. (Journal abstract)


The relocation of children is a growing concern in Australia. This article looks at the law on relocation, with a focus on international relocation. It discusses the difference between case law in England and in Australia, considers reasons why parents may choose to move, and argues the need for international conformity and guidelines in this area.


The author critiques the way in which the High Court has approached cases involving family law relocation: those in which a dispute arises from a parent’s wish to move and which thereby impact on parenting regimes. She discusses High Court relocation cases AIF v AMS (1999) and U and U (2002), and identifies fundamental issues that she believes the majority of the High Court failed to address.


The author examines how the Family Court decides what is in the best interests of the child in cases of relocation—when parents wishing to relocate with children after marital separation means that regular and frequent contact with the non-custodial parent is prevented. He suggests we should start with the notion of community and proposes that ‘Separation can explode a child’s sense of his or her community. Not only is the day to day relationship with each parent threatened, but all that is familiar, secure and solid is threatened, too. To remove a child from that community, if it is a healthy one, is undesirable and harmful to the child’s wellbeing. It should only be done if absolutely necessary and with great care.’ Rather than focusing on their own needs the question parents should consider is ‘What are the best possible arrangements we can make for our children bearing in mind the community in which they currently live?’


This article examines the question of how the judiciary sorts through the sometimes ambiguous guidelines in the Family Law Act concerning cases of relocation, and makes the ‘right’ decision for the child or children concerned. In U v U the High Court made it clear that various outcomes in respect of relocation may be considered by the court.
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 www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/conferences.html

27–28 June 2007
Melbourne, Vic.

The 2007 Family Alcohol & Drug Network (FADNET) National Conference aims to progress family inclusive practices within drug treatment services. This year’s conference will focus on interventions and partnerships that act to improve the health of all family members affected by substance use.

Further information: www.odyssey.org.au/fadnet

Centre for Research on Families and Relationships 2nd International Conference—Extended and Extending Families
27–29 June 2007
Edinburgh, Scotland

Families take many different forms, and these are reflected in changing expectations of family life. This conference provides an opportunity to explore changing expectations of personal life through a consideration of the ways in which families are extending and extended, across generations, households, lifecourse and relationships.

Further information: www.crfr.ac.uk/events/intconf2007/conf2007index.html

Unpacking the Suitcase: Maintaining the Well Being of Newly Arrived Young People
12–13 July 2007
Melbourne, Vic.

The South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre—Dandenong is delivering a statewide conference which will explore the importance of well being and the impact it has on refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) young people’s settlement.


Family Therapy Conference: Strategies, Secrets and Safety
5–7 September 2007
Hobart, Tasmania

Tasmania’s Family Therapy Association is hosting the 2007 Family Therapy Conference. The conference will explore: Strategies: planned and unplanned; Secrets: of children, clients and therapists; Safety: working with safety in mind; Starting with the Basics: a stream for newer therapists and presenters.


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

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