Welcome

Welcome to the eighth edition of the AFFRC newsletter, Family Relationships Quarterly.

In this edition, Professor Richard Chisholm and Dr Jennifer McIntosh summarise an upcoming journal article on the difficulties faced by the family law system in judging what is best for children in shared care arrangements. The reported research findings suggest that a significant number of children emerge from Family Court proceedings with arrangements that can place them under psychological strain and/or compromise their attachment security. The article is a reminder that shared care arrangements need to proceed according to children's needs, not parental rights.

This edition's "Family Statistics and Trends" article looks at men's and women's attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation, following a further decline in the proportion of registered marriages in the 2006 Census of Population and Housing. The summary notes that the endorsement of marriage as an institution still appears to be widespread, although cohabitation is also widely approved. Age and gender differences in responses are noted.

Other articles include a “Program Spotlight” on the Partnership program in Western Australia, which includes marriage preparation and enrichment programs, and a conference report on the Sixth Australian and New Zealand Youth Health Conference. A review of the Raising Children DVD is included, along with a book review of "Remember Me": Commemorating the Tenth Anniversary of the Bringing Them Home Report. “Literature Highlights” focus on articles relating to later-life divorce and living alone.

The AFFRC offers many ways to share information with fellow service providers, practitioners and policy makers, as well as other professionals. Contributions of articles and reviews are always welcome for the newsletter—see our author guidelines on page 23 for details. In addition, Family Relationships Practice Profiles are aimed at increasing an understanding of family and relationship issues and responses to these issues. Profiles may relate to programs and/or practices conducted throughout Australia that would be of interest to other service providers or practitioners. Suggestions and comments are always welcome at afrc@aifs.gov.au, which helps to maintain communication between the family and relationships services sector and the AFFRC.

We hope that you enjoy this edition of Family Relationships Quarterly.
The Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse (AFRC) is an information and advisory unit funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, 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, 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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AFRC publications

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Family Relationships Quarterly

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The shared physical care of children following separation has long been a complex issue, and is again in the spotlight following the passing of the Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006. Of course, in general, children benefit from having both parents involved in their lives; but the problem for those involved in family law is to help the parties work out what is best for the children in each particular case. Unfortunately, the circumstances of families that come into the family law system can be unusual and troubling, and working out what is best in particular cases often poses difficulties and challenges. Statements about what is generally good for children are not always a sufficient basis for giving advice and making decisions in these cases. We need to look carefully at the specific facts of each case.

Doing that is essentially the subject of our article, soon to be published in the Australian Journal of Family Studies.1

New research findings

There are three components to the article. First, there are some concerning findings by Dr McIntosh about the circumstances in which shared care arrangements are sometimes being made, whether by agreement or by court order. The findings are contained in two separate studies. Interested readers can check the details of the studies and the findings from the article, as only an indication is provided here.

The studies draw attention to some things that need to be considered when dealing with parenting arrangements. For example, one might think that shared care arrangements are only put into place when the parents are able to work harmoniously, or at least civilly, and are able to protect the children from exposure to hostility, sharp words, denigration, and the like. But the findings cast doubt on this comfortable assumption.

In one study involving over 300 children, 27% were in shared care arrangements. In these cases, the fathers reported consistently higher frequencies of minor conflict, serious verbal conflict and major conflict with their former wives throughout that year; and the mothers were more likely than mothers in other sorts of arrangements to feel that their former partner did not believe they were good parents. In the second study, in 73% of the shared care cases resolved at court, at least one parent reported “almost never” co-operating with the other. And in 39% of shared care cases, a parent reported “never” being able to protect their children from their conflict.

Such findings are concerning, because they suggest that a significant proportion of these children emerged from Family Court proceedings with substantially shared care arrangements that occurred in an atmosphere that placed psychological strain on the child. Dr McIntosh’s research suggests that children are particularly at risk when certain factors are present, such as parents having low levels of maturity and insight; poor emotional availability of parents to the child; ongoing, high levels of inter-parental conflict; ongoing significant psychological acrimony between parents; and one or both parents seeing the child as being at risk when in the care of the other.

A review of the psychology of shared care for young children

The second component is a review of the literature on the psychology of shared care for young children. We describe the “core finding” as follows:

The healthy emotional development of children depends upon their early experience of a continuous, emotionally available care-giving relationship, through which they are able to form an organised attachment, and to develop their human capacities for thought and relationships. (McIntosh & Chisholm, forthcoming)

While such a statement might be widely accepted, we urge that its ramifications for care arrangements be carefully considered. For example, attachment security is not transferred by the child from one parent to another when they move between their care—a child who has a secure attachment to one parent will not necessarily have an equally good attachment to the second parent. If increasing the child’s time with the second parent means reducing the child’s time with the first, the change can, in some circumstances, compromise the security of attachment with the first parent, with all of its attendant developmental ramifications.

We do not argue for or against shared care, only against shared care arrangements or any other arrangements that proceed from notions of parents’ rights, or that disregard the needs of the particular children in each case (considered in the light of what we know from research). That research does not lead to black-and-white answers or one-size-fits-all solutions, but we think that it does help parents and their advisers, and where necessary the courts, to make informed judgments about what is likely to benefit children.

A consideration of the legal framework

But what about the law? Didn’t the amendments to the Family Law Act in 2006 have a lot to say about shared parenting?

The third component of the article is an examination of the Family Law Act as it is now. We set out what it says and what it doesn’t say. We argue that while the provisions clearly encourage the involvement of both parents following separation, that is always subject to what is in the best interests of the child, whose best interests remain, under the Act, the “paramount consideration”.

In our view there is nothing in the legislation that is intended to prevent people from concentrating on the best interests of each child, and drawing on the lessons from research in making parenting arrangements. Indeed there are indications that the legislation encourages that approach.

In considering what parenting arrangements are likely to be best for the children, it is not enough to mediate or adjudicate shared arrangements with conflicted parents without considering the structural and relational equipment necessary to support and safeguard children, so that they indeed benefit from the ongoing care of each parent. We conclude by asking professionals to ask themselves:

Will a shared living arrangement in this parental context lead to an experience for the child of being richly shared, or deeply divided?

Professor Richard Chisholm was formerly a judge of the Family Court of Australia and is currently an Honorary Professor at the University of Sydney and a Visiting Fellow at the ANU College of Law. Dr Jennifer McIntosh is a clinical child psychologist and research consultant. She is the director of Family Transitions, a clinic devoted to children and parents experiencing family separation or trauma, and to supporting professionals who work with them.

AFRC-alert is an email list for news and updates from the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse. You will receive messages with announcements of relevant news, publications, resources, conferences and other important information concerning family relationships.

Of all the milestones in life, couple formation is among the most momentous. Its repercussions, whether positive or negative, can be enormous. It is typically the key pre-requisite for parenthood, and can also result in step-parenthood. The relationship may also break down—a situation that is likely to engender considerable turmoil, stemming not only from the breakdown process itself, but also from the stressful negotiations, pathways and reactions of others that this process typically generates.

Over the past few decades, couple formation patterns have changed dramatically in Australia and other Western countries. Although most people get married at some stage, marriage rates have declined, and those who enter marriage do so later in life, often having lived together before they marry. As indicated in the “Family Statistics and Trends” article in a previous issue of the *Family Relationships Quarterly* (Weston & Qu, 2007), the proportion of all Australian couples who are living together outside marriage—here called “cohabiting”—increased from 6% in 1986 to 15% in 2006 (i.e. 20 years later). Cohabitation rates among partnered men and women increased across all age groups during this period. Given the delays in getting married these days, it is not surprising that most people under the age of 25 who are living with a partner are cohabiting.

Conversely, ABS censuses of the population indicate that marriage rates have been falling progressively over the past 35 years. The proportion of the Australian population aged 15 years or over who were in a registered marriage at the time of the Census fell from 65% in 1971 to 58% in 1986, and to just under 50% in 2006. Indeed, there are only two national Census periods in which less than half the population aged 15 years or over was married—the first one ever taken by the Commonwealth of Australia (in 1911) and the most recent one.

To what extent does the decline in marriage rates over the past few decades reflect changing attitudes to marriage and cohabitation? Are we seeing a high proportion of young adults in particular rejecting the institution of marriage and adopting the view that cohabitation is acceptable for partners who have no intention of marrying each other? Do men and women share the same views on these matters?

This article examines the views of men and women in general and people in different age groups on whether: “Marriage is an outdated institution” and “It is alright for an unmarried couple to live together even if they have no intention of marrying”. The analysis is based on data from Wave 5 of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, conducted in 2005. Respondents aged 15 years and over were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with these statements on a scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. Other ratings between these extremes of intensity were not given labels, but the mid-point (4) would suggest that a respondent neither agreed nor disagreed—here referred to as holding mixed feelings about the issue in question.

In analysing these data, we were particularly interested in identifying the proportion of people who felt strongly about these issues, but we also wanted to simplify the results as much as possible. We therefore reduced the set of seven ratings to five classifications by combining ratings of 2 and 3 (here taken as reflecting moderate disagreement) and ratings of 5 and 6 (taken as reflecting moderate agreement).

### Attitudes towards marriage

Table 1 sets out the proportions of respondents who indicated different levels of agreement or disagreement with the statement: “Marriage is an outdated institution”. The first column of percentages shows the pattern of responses for all respondents, the second and third summarise the responses of all men and all women respectively, and the remaining set of columns present the patterns of responses provided by the different age groups (men and women combined).

1. In this article, “marriage” refers to a registered marriage.
2. These questions are not meant to imply an assumption that the decline in marriage rates has been entirely offset by the increase in cohabitation rates. In fact, overall partnership rates have declined across all age groups from at least 1986, although the pace of decline has slowed (see Birrell, Rapson, & Hourigan, 2004; Weston & Qu, 2007).
3. HILDA is funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). It is managed by a consortium that is led by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne. The other members of the consortium are the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). For a description of HILDA, see Watson & Wooden (2002).
Table 1. Attitudes towards marriage by gender and age, HILDA 2005 survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;Marriage is an outdated institution&quot;</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>15–19</th>
<th>20–29</th>
<th>30–39</th>
<th>40–49</th>
<th>50–59</th>
<th>60–69</th>
<th>70+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree somewhat</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed feelings</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree somewhat</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of observations</td>
<td>11,344</td>
<td>5,293</td>
<td>6,051</td>
<td>1,063</td>
<td>1,737</td>
<td>2,042</td>
<td>2,313</td>
<td>1,759</td>
<td>1,232</td>
<td>1,198</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Patterns of responses varied significantly according to gender and age (p < .01 for both sets of comparisons). Total percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Most men and women disagreed with this statement (68–73%), and the remainder were fairly evenly split between agreeing (14–17% of the total sample of men and women) or holding mixed feelings (13–14%). In other words, most believed that marriage is not an outdated institution—thereby suggesting widespread endorsement of marriage. Indeed, a substantial proportion of men and women strongly disagreed with the statement, which can be interpreted as strong endorsement of marriage. Patterns of responses varied significantly according to gender, with a higher proportion of women than men indicating strong disagreement with the statement (41% vs 34%). At the same time, the substantial proportion of men and women who agreed with, or held mixed feelings about, the statement that marriage is an outdated institution should not be ignored (27–32%).

Table 1 also suggests widespread endorsement of marriage across the age groups. Around two-thirds to three-quarters of respondents in each age group disagreed with the statement that marriage is an outdated institution, with 31–56% strongly disagreeing. Mixed feelings were expressed by 8–18%, while much the same proportions of respondents in each age group agreed with the statement (14–16%).

The results for the different age groups are further simplified in Figure 1, which shows the proportions of respondents who disagreed somewhat or strongly. These proportions are “stacked” so that the overall percentage of respondents in each age group who disagreed (somewhat or strongly) is also made apparent.

Figure 1. Percentage of respondents who reported strong or moderate disagreement with the statement “Marriage is an outdated institution”, HILDA 2005 survey
Given the continuing rise in cohabitation that is apparent in Australia, particularly among young people, it might be expected that the tendency to reject the notion that marriage is an outdated institution would be lowest among the youngest group and highest among the oldest group. On the other hand, young adults would be the least likely to have experienced divorce—an experience that may lead a person to become sceptical about the institution of marriage. Conversely, the two oldest groups grew up in an era when cohabitation or having a child outside wedlock were typically seen as unreservedly disgraceful behaviour and the stigma attached to marital separation or divorce was also far stronger than it is today. Although these groups would have been in their 30s and 40s when the Family Law Act 1975 was introduced, it could be anticipated that their lifetime experiences might lead them to be the most likely of all age groups to express strong endorsement of marriage as an institution.

As expected, rejection of the notion that marriage is an outdated institution was most prevalent among the respondents who were aged 70 years or over (78%), followed by those aged 60–69 years (75%). In fact, close to half or more in these groups, and no more than 40% in younger groups, strongly rejected this view. The lowest rejection rate emerged among those aged 40–49 years, although differences in trends for this group and other groups under 60 years old were not statistically significant. Indeed, the patterns of responses apparent for the four youngest groups (from teenagers to age 40–49 years) were very similar.

**Attitudes towards cohabitation**

Table 2 summarises the responses to the statement: “It is alright for an unmarried couple to live together even if they have no intention of marrying”. The results suggest that most people accept living together in the absence of any intention to marry. Specifically, 65–69% of men and women agreed with this statement, 20–21% expressed disagreement, and 10–11% indicated mixed feelings about it. The patterns of responses provided by men and women were similar, although a slightly higher proportion of men than women believed that such behaviour was unacceptable (19% vs 13%).

Table 2 also shows that views on cohabitation varied across age groups. About three-quarters of those under 50 years old expressed strong or moderate agreement with the statement (73–77%). For the older groups, the proportion agreeing with the statement declined progressively as age of the group increased—a trend that can be more easily seen in Figure 2 than Table 2. Approval of cohabitation where couples do not intend to marry was reported by 66% of respondents aged 50–59 years, 53% of those aged 60–69 years, and only 39% of those aged 70 years and over.

Table 2 also shows that the oldest respondents (aged 70 or more years) were the most likely to disapprove of such behaviour (41%), followed by those in their 60s (30%), while 14–20% of respondents in other age groups expressed disapproval. Similarly, mixed feelings were most commonly expressed by the oldest group, followed by the second oldest group (21% and 17% respectively, compared with 7–14% of younger respondents).

These results can also be examined in terms of how unanimous or divided opinions were within an age group. The oldest respondents tended to be evenly divided on the issue, with 39% accepting such living arrangements and 41% disapproving of them. All other groups were more likely to approve than disapprove of these arrangements,
although the difference was greatest for those under 50 years old (of those under 50 years old, 73–77% approved and 15–17% disapproved).

To what extent have views about cohabitation changed?

The discrepancies between age groups in attitudes to cohabitation may reflect either changes in attitudes as people mature or differences between groups that will be retained over time owing to the different lifetime experiences of those born in different decades. The first of these alternatives would suggest that, as they grow older, people become less tolerant of cohabitation (at least where there is no intention to marry). The second alternative is related to the fact that most of those under 25 years old who are partnered are likely to be cohabiting rather than married, whereas those in their 70s grew up in an era when cohabitation was rare and received strong social condemnation.

However, many people who were once opposed to cohabitation are likely to develop greater tolerance of this arrangement as it becomes increasingly common. In other words, those who grew up in an era when cohabitation received marked social disapproval (the older people) would have greater opportunity than others to experience a change in views to accommodate this new reality. To what extent have views changed about the acceptability of cohabitation where there is no intention to marry? This question is examined through reference to the Australian Family Values Survey, conducted in 1995. Following the latter analysis, the results of an even earlier study (the Family Formation Project, conducted in 1971) that throws light on Melbourne-based married women’s attitudes to cohabitation in general are also discussed.

Like the HILDA 2005 survey, the Australian Family Values Survey 1995 examined views about the acceptability of a man and woman living together without planning marriage. In reporting on the results of the latter survey, de Vaus (1997) provided the percentages of respondents aged 20 and over who disapproved of such arrangements. These results are depicted in Figure 3, along with those for the HILDA 2005 survey.

Three key differences between the trends in the two surveys concerning disapproval of cohabitation in the absence of any intention to marry are worth noting. It seems unlikely that such differences could be entirely due to variations in the methodologies of the two surveys.

Firstly, there was little difference between the two surveys in the rate of disapproval concerning this arrangement among respondents who were in their 20s (16–17% disapproved) or in their 30s (19% in 1995 and 15% in 2005 expressed disapproval). For older age groups, the rate of disapproval was higher in the 1995 survey than in the 2005 survey—a difference that was greatest for those aged in their 50s and older. Specifically, for the 1995 and 2005
surveys respectively, rates of disapproval were expressed by: 30% and 16% of those in their 40s; 38% and 21% of those in their 50s; 49% and 30% of those in their 60s; and 59% and 41% of those aged 70 years and older.

Secondly, while in the 2005 survey there was little difference in the proportions of respondents in their 20s, 30s and 40s who expressed disapproval about this arrangement, in the 1995 survey, the rate of disapproval increased sharply after age 30–39 years.

Thirdly, the difference in views across the age groups was lower for the 2005 survey than for the 1995 survey. In other words, there appeared to be greater consensus in 2005 among the different age groups than was apparent a decade earlier. This greater consensus is characterised by the lower opposition to cohabitation (in the absence of any marriage intention) among older groups in the more recent than earlier survey.

The other survey of note is Family Formation Project 1971. In this survey, married women who lived in Melbourne were asked how they would feel if they had a son of twenty who announced that he was going to cohabit with a girl (i.e., live with a girl without marrying her first). They were then asked whether they would feel more upset, less upset or react in much the same way if it were their daughter rather than son who indicated this intention. It should be noted that the sample included a substantial proportion of young adults (34% were aged under 30 years), because the median age at first marriage was historically low at the time of this survey (21 years for women and 23 years for men (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 1980)).

In reference to their son’s announcement, 68% indicated that they would be “extremely horrified”, “considerably upset” or that they would “consider they failed as a parent in his upbringing”. In addition, 52% of respondents reported that they would be more upset if their daughter reported such intentions, while 44% indicated that their reactions would not differ, and only 2% said that they would be less upset if their daughter rather than son indicated such intentions. It is worth noting that this survey focused on cohabitation per se, and did not take into account whether or not there was any intention to treat cohabitation as a trial marriage or as part of a plan involving subsequent marriage.

While the results for the 1971 survey focused on married women in Melbourne only, comparison of these results with those of the HILDA 2005 survey suggest that attitudes about cohabitation have changed markedly over the last 35 years or so, in line with the increasing trend towards cohabitation.

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4 This 1971 survey was conducted by the Australian National University (Department of Demography). Relevant information about the project is available at the Australian Social Sciences Data Archives (ASSDA) website: http://assda-nesstar.anu.edu.au/webview
Summary

This analysis has largely focused on views expressed in the HILDA 2005 survey about whether: (a) marriage is an outdated institution, and (b) it is acceptable for couples to cohabit if they have no intention of marrying. Comparisons were made of the views of men and women and of respondents of different ages. In addition, in order to assess the extent of change in attitudes about cohabitation over time, the age-related results concerning cohabitation that were apparent in the HILDA 2005 survey were compared with those that emerged in a 1995 survey. Finally, results of a 1971 survey of Melbourne-based married women concerning attitudes towards cohabitation in general were outlined.

In the 2005 survey, most men and women, and most respondents in all age groups (from teenagers to those aged 70 years and over), rejected the notion that marriage is an outdated institution. In other words, endorsement of marriage appears to be widespread. Nevertheless, most people also appeared to approve of couples living together in the absence of any intention of marrying. Only about two in ten disapproved of such an arrangement. Not surprisingly, there appeared to have been considerably less tolerance of this arrangement in 1995, and there is evidence that, in 1971, cohabitation per se was considered to be a scandalous arrangement—at least by married women who lived in Melbourne.

While men and women in the 2005 survey held similar views on marriage and cohabitation, opinions differed according to age. Older respondents were more likely than younger respondents to reject the notion that marriage was an outdated institution and to disapprove of couples cohabiting if they have no intention of marrying. Nevertheless, it appears that the greater tolerance of such an arrangement in 2005 compared with 1995 was most apparent for those aged 50 years an older. Indeed, there was little difference between the 1995 and 2005 surveys in the rates of disapproval among those who were in their 20s and 30s.

At the beginning of this article, we posed three questions: (a) To what extent does the decline in the marriage rate over the past few decades reflect changing attitudes to marriage and cohabitation? (b) Are we seeing a high proportion of young adults in particular rejecting the institution of marriage and adopting the view that cohabitation is acceptable for partners who have no intention of marrying each other? and (c) Do men and women share the same views on these matters?

Despite the decline in the marriage rate, there is widespread endorsement of marriage as an institution. Nevertheless, a substantial minority did not indicate clear endorsement of marriage. Given that in the 1950s and 1960s marriage was an almost universal experience in the life course, it seems reasonable to argue that there is some evidence of an erosion of the value attached to marriage. Secondly, most people approve of cohabitation in the absence of any intention of marrying and there is evidence that outright disapproval rates have fallen, except for those under the age of 40 years. Disapproval rates for these younger age groups were already low (less than 20%) in 1995.

The common acceptance of both marriage as an institution and of cohabitation in the absence of any intention to marry is consistent with the diversity of couple formation trends apparent today. If young people’s endorsement of marriage provides any indication of future trends in couple formation, it would appear that marriage is here to stay. However, the picture is not entirely positive. It has been argued that “marriage has evolved from a marker of conformity to a marker of prestige” and “is sometimes a capstone” (Cherlin, 2004, p. 855). Cherlin also observed that some people may not be able to achieve marriage even if they wish to do so. Consistent with this view, Birrell et al. (2004) found that in Australia men with low socioeconomic status are particularly less likely than others to be married.

References


The Partnership program is run by a small group of volunteers based at the Christian City Church in Hepburn Heights (CCCHH), Western Australia. As part of the range of services offered by CCCHH, marriage preparation courses as well as marriage mentors are available to individual couples. The goal of these courses is to help young couples build strong marriages. Many couples who graduate from the preparation courses go on to provide active support and assistance to other married couples as role models, mentors and facilitators/educators. Marriage enrichment courses are also available for married couples.

Although the program is ineligible for government funding, this is not seen by the program coordinators as a disadvantage. While there is room for growth, the program appears to function well for the community it serves. All fees are invested back into the program. To keep costs down, educators usually meet with couples in the educator’s home. Expansion of the program is somewhat constrained, since it relies on volunteer couples, usually drawn from the pool of couples who have themselves been through “Partnership” and who are usually in full-time employment. Furthermore, being independent of government funding is perceived as allowing greater flexibility in aspects of the program; for example, there is no limit on the number of sessions offered to a couple. This is seen as an advantage for educators, allowing them more time and freedom to establish a strong relationship with the couple in a relaxed environment that fosters openness between the partners.

From being based solely on PREPARE1 ten years ago, the program has evolved into a broader package that, while using PREPARE as a foundation, includes a workbook of material drawn from other relationship education resources—in particular those developed by Les and Leslie Parrott in the United States.2 Each course comprises at least four sessions, depending on the needs of the couple. After the initial inventory and feedback sessions, couples learn to develop a variety of relationship skills that work for them. There are homework activities and exercises between sessions, which are reviewed at subsequent meetings. A couple works with an individual educator, who focuses on building the couple’s confidence in themselves as well as imparting relationship skills and knowledge, and who will also refer couples to counselling if it appears to be required.

Drawing on marriage and divorce statistics, the educative approach is based on helping couples learn what they need to be in the “successful group”. After completing the course, a couple is assigned a mentor couple—a mature married couple who offer ongoing, informal support and guidance. CCCHH has also begun to conduct small-group skills-based courses for already-married couples. These are offered in a couple’s home, and can be seen as providing something along the lines of a marriage “tune up”. Currently, however, a lack of trained and experienced staff restricts the number of these courses that can be offered; the service is currently working on building this capacity.

In a more social vein, “couples nights” offer newly married couples opportunities to build strong social networks with other couples their own age and older. These evenings feature an invited speaker, who presents on a marriage-related topic, followed by discussion among the group.

Evaluation of the program is not systematic. Because the program is conducted within the CCCHH community, however, couples typically remain known to the program providers. This allows the providers to monitor the long-term outcomes for the couples and receive feedback from various sources within the community. Of the last 50 couples completing the Partnership program, only two have separated. Increasing demand for the program is also seen as a measure of its success within the community. In the early days of the program, couples perceived it to be “like doing a test”, but anecdotal evidence suggests that couples are now more open to the program and referrals are increasingly coming through word-of-mouth. The results for couples that can be observed within the community

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1 PREPARE is an inventory-based program allowing couples to explore various aspects of their relationship and learn relationship skills. For further information, go to: www.prepare-enrich.com or www.prepare-enrich.com.au
2 www.realrelationships.com
The job of parenting requires such a broad range of knowledge that new parents, often in a time of stress and change, find themselves having to source information from multiple resources and settings. A new Australian resource, the Raising Children: A Guide to Parenting from Birth to 5 DVD (the official companion to the Raising Children website1) helps to bring infant, toddler and preschooler parenting information into the one spot.

The DVD is split into a number of sections—Baby, Toddler, Child, and What about me? Although the overall DVD is five hours long, it is not necessary to watch it all, and negotiating through the sections is not at all difficult. Each segment contains a narrative about different issues at that age, comments and ideas from parents from a range of backgrounds, and the opportunity to stop the DVD at a number of points and divert to further information on issues of interest if desired. Comedian Dave Hughes plays MC and summarises the main points at the completion of each section, with simple messages reinforced.

The DVD uses a mix of celebrity parents, single parents and parents of various different backgrounds, including Indigenous Australian, culturally and linguistically diverse, and different socioeconomic statuses. There is plenty of focus on both mothers and fathers, including fathers’ roles with children and how they can support partners, especially during the infant years.

Raising Children: A Guide to Parenting from Birth to 5 delves into many issues and delivers a range of strategies for both new parents and experienced parents who need some new ideas. It deals with many sensitive issues, such as difficulties in coping with parenting, difficult child behaviour, conflict between partners, and single and young parenting, with frank stories from the parents interviewed. Plenty of support material is offered on the Raising Children website, which concentrates on the 0–8 years old age bracket.

New parents will receive the DVD in their Parent Pack, received in hospital upon the birth of their child. For others, the video can be ordered via the Raising Children website at www.raisingchildren.net.au

1 www.raisingchildren.net.au

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The Bringing Them Home report was launched on 26 May 1997 at the Australian Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne. Bringing Them Home reported on the findings of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (hereafter referred to as the “National Inquiry”), conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). The inquiry was instigated following requests from various agencies, including the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), which was the first national Indigenous organisation to make public a call for a national inquiry into the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children. Now, more than ten years on, SNAICC has released a commemorative publication to help recall the political and social environment and events that led up to the inquiry, as well as to reflect on the progress and effects of the recommendations handed down in the report.

“Remember Me” (SNAICC, 2007) is arranged as a collection of essays reflecting the history and climate surrounding the National Inquiry and the subsequent release of the Bringing Them Home report. Authors include past and present members of the SNAICC leadership team, as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors selected for their knowledge of the process and findings of the National Inquiry and the responses to the report from governments and the wider Australian population.

In the opening article, SNAICC Executive Officer, Julian Pocock, remarks: “In 1997 Bringing Them Home provided an opportunity to connect the truth of our nation to a reconciliation process that was searching for a way forward. When Bringing Them Home was silenced, so was the truth and at that point our national process of reconciliation faltered” (p. 3).

Quoting from the SNAICC Policy Paper of 2003, Seven Priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children (SNAICC, 2003), Pocock in his article repeated the need to place a priority on a National Apology to the Stolen Generations:

A National Apology, which acknowledges the harsh injustices of past child removals, and the ongoing impact of these on health, happiness, and parenting skills of current generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, is a foundation upon which the success of many other initiatives will depend. When we fail to recognise how the past lives on, we allow the injustices of the past to continue (cited in SNAICC, 2007, pp. 4–5).

This year’s apology by the Australian Government to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by the past policies of child removal has now provided that foundation.

Essays featured in “Remember Me” include those from SNAICC Chairperson, Muriel Bamblett; former SNAICC Chairperson, Brian Butler; Professor Anna Haebich, from Griffith University; and Tom Calma, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (HREOC). Also included is the speech given by the former HREOC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Professor Mick Dodson AM, at the launch of the Bringing Them Home report in May 1997.

“Remember Me” is a valuable and informative resource for Australian family relationship practitioners. The essays offer a range of opinion and historical perspective on the issues surrounding the Bringing Them Home report, both for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The electronic version of “Remember Me” can be downloaded for free on the SNAICC website at www.snaicc.asn.au/_uploads/rsfil/00022.pdf. Print copies are also available to order from SNAICC on (03) 9489 8099 or publications@snaicc.asn.au

References


Ren Adams is a Project Officer with the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
It is well known that many causes of youth mortality and morbidity are preventable. A key question of the 2007 Youth Health Conference was how research and evidence can impact upon policy and practice to address this fact. A significant international perspective contributed to the three days of the conference, with many presentations relating to work in Australia and New Zealand as well as the United Kingdom, United States of America, Jordan and the Greater Mekong sub-region. Many young people’s issues were covered, including sex and sexuality, asthma management, teenage parenting, violence, drug use, eating disorders and obesity, and mental health.

The conference opened with presentations by Andrew Becroft, Principal Youth Court Judge and David Rea, CEO, Ministry of Youth Development, NZ. Both speakers set the scene regarding the lived experience of young people in New Zealand and the challenge evident in utilising research and evidence effectively. Andrew Becroft outlined statistics for youth offending in NZ and highlighted the similarities in the personal histories of these young people to populations of young offenders in other countries. He stated that a substantial body of longitudinal research now exists that points to a very small group of males who display high rates of antisocial behaviours across time and in different situations. The question was raised as to whether current responses to this were consistent with an evidence base and good practice across international settings; for example, whether incarceration is an appropriate response to what can often be described as a case of “reckless decision-making”. Examples of best practice and policy were given, including the Christchurch Youth Drug Court, Otago Youth Wellness Trust and multi-systemic family therapy approaches. Less effective strategies that had been used before were policies of “segregation and aggregation”, where young offenders are taken “out of the community and then all put together”.

Professor Rachel Thomson, from Open University (UK), gave the first keynote speech, outlining the Inventing Adulthoods qualitative longitudinal study of young people growing up in England and Ireland between 1996–2006. One hundred young people were regularly interviewed across five sites, with the purpose of examining how a generation of young people in different circumstances “invented” different types of adulthoods. A key finding from the project was the impact of social change on youth transitions; there is no simple destination for growing up, with adolescence becoming more extended, complex, individualised and risky. Messages from this research that are valuable to policy include the inconsistencies between extended dependency and working-class values, the possibility of changes to the traditional life course sequence (i.e. education, work and family formation), and the need to be able to combine the “best of both worlds” in these areas. The importance of resources to draw on, particularly families, was also a key finding.

Several presentations concentrated on the issues associated with effective research dissemination. Simon Denny and Peter Watson, from the Adolescent Health Research Group, NZ, discussed strategies for the distribution of results of the youth health and wellbeing surveys in NZ in 2000. Outputs of the study were disseminated via contracted reports, publications (including non-peer reviewed academic literature, due to its wider dissemination than journals), presentations, education curriculum, health services and local government. Impacting on policy was considered a difficult task, due to the turnover of policy staff and the large number of policy documents produced.

Dr Sarb Johal, from the NZ Ministry of Youth Development (MYD), talked about the What Works? project, which supports the use of research and evaluation in youth development work. The project is focused on the extent to which there is evidence for the effectiveness of programs, if this knowledge is used in a systematic way, and how it is used in the workplace. Dr Johal outlined the possible repercussions of a non-systematic approach to informing practice and policy, such as the adoption of ineffective or harmful practices, and/or missed knowledge and opportunities. Unintended consequences may also occur, and Dr Johal gave the example of a social marketing campaign that addresses drink-driving and young people, and how it may implicitly accept binge drinking. A website

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that becomes a “hub of information” on systematic reviews, similar to the Cochrane Collaboration, is a possible solution that MYD is investigating.

Professor George Patton, in his keynote address the following morning, highlighted one of the key problems with this approach by pointing out that it is very common to find unclear effects in research on interventions in adolescence. In Professor Patton’s view, advocating for the importance of adolescent health research was a critical step. More well-resourced centres of excellence with a shared research agenda, for example, between epidemiology, social science and education, are needed. A subsequent panel session further highlighted the need for practitioners to value research and to provide incentives for researchers to disseminate their findings.

In terms of initiatives in the youth health field, the Sydney-based Inspire Foundation team gave an impressive five-paper session. Research into marginalised young people and their use of information and communications technology was discussed, as well as recent additions to the Reach Out! website. One addition is the forthcoming launch of ReachoutPro in mid-2008, in response to the discovery that approximately 20% of the users of the Reach Out! site are professionals. The presenters also outlined technical improvements to Reach Out Central, an online-game based youth mental health education program.

One of the highlights of the program was the keynote on the final day given by Dr Ken Ginsburg, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, and University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Dr Ginsberg spoke passionately and authoritatively on service provision to young people, with a particular focus on the seven C’s of resilience: confidence, competence, connection, character, contribution, coping and control. He believes that young people will be more resilient if important adults in their lives believe in them unconditionally and hold them to high expectations. Dr Ginsberg pointed out that awareness of the impact of cognitive development on a young person’s understanding will help tailor messages that make sense to young people, rather than the use of abstract terms. The importance of positive coping skills was highlighted, and Dr Ginsburg directed delegates to a “not yet wonderful” but nevertheless useful interactive stress management plan for teenagers at www.aap.org/stress

Overall, the conference was inspiring in many ways. The involvement of young people was not only in evidence physically at the conference, but several papers addressed their active and highly valued involvement in research, program delivery, service delivery and education. Throughout the conference, delegates were challenged to consider how young people can continue to engage in these processes and questioned whether positive youth development initiatives can be successful without such involvement. While the young people vocalised their frustration at times with the academically focused presentations, and the adults may have shuffled to the back of the hall during the hip-hop band’s session, there was an evident passion, respect and common goal for all present.

Many examples of programs and research were presented, and readers are directed to a number of websites below for some of the programs, agencies and services discussed at the conference, a mere handful of which have been discussed in this report.

Reach Out! And Reach Out Central
www.reachout.com.au
www.reachoutcentral.com.au

Ministry for Youth Development (NZ)
www.myd.govt.nz

Centre for Adolescent Health (Victoria)
www.rch.org.au/cah

Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health (NSW)
www.caah.chw.edu.au

Youth 2000—New Zealand Youth: A profile of their health and wellbeing
www.youth2000.ac.nz

Youth Connectedness Project, Victoria University of Wellington, NZ
www.vuw.ac.nz/youthconnectedness

A substantial body of longitudinal research now exists that points to a very small group of males who display high rates of antisocial behaviours across time and in different situations.

Elly Robinson is the Manager of the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
News in brief

New AFRC publications

**AFRC Issues No. 2**—Prevention and early intervention in strengthening families and relationships: Challenges and implications, by Elly Robinson and Robyn Parker, Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse.

This paper examines challenges and strategies associated with encouraging individuals to engage in prevention and early-intervention activities focusing on healthy relationships. The concepts of family and couple wellbeing are examined in order to provide a set of key positive characteristics that can inform service delivery. Influences on an individual's willingness to seek help to strengthen his or her relationships are explored, as well as relevant policy and practice issues.


**AFRC Resource Sheet No. 2**—Prevention and early intervention in strengthening families and relationships: Challenges and implications, by Elly Robinson and Robyn Parker, Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse.

This Resource Sheet is based on information contained in AFRC Issues No. 2 and provides a concise and informative summary of the Issues paper.


There is widespread recognition that strong family relationships and good family functioning are essential for individual, family and community wellbeing, as well as providing long-term benefits to broader society. This is certainly also true in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, although there are considerable differences in the structures of Aboriginal families and their functional dynamics. Despite the importance of good functioning, a limited evidence base exists to describe how well Aboriginal families function or the factors that support family harmony or contribute to dysfunction. This paper discusses the contemporary evidence base, including case studies of programs that work, to provide insights into the protective effects and risks that influence forms of functioning among Aboriginal families.


**AFRC Briefing No. 8**—Family issues in suicide postvention, by Louise Flynn, Jesuit Social Services, & Elly Robinson, Australia Family Relationships Clearinghouse.

Every year in Australia, the suicides of thousands of individuals leave behind family members and friends to cope with the aftermath. Prevention and early intervention strategies to reduce the rate of suicide appear to have had some effects, but less attention has been paid to post-suicide outcomes for those closest to the one who died, particularly family and friends. These outcomes are explored in this paper and strategies to support and counsel the suicide-bereaved are outlined. Recent national initiatives that guide postvention activities are also discussed and relevant resources provided.


**AFRC Briefing No. 9**—Father-inclusive practice and associated professional competencies, by Richard Fletcher, University of Newcastle.

It is widely accepted that, over recent decades, fathers’ roles have changed to include more care of infants and young children. In this paper, the research
relating to fathers’ involvement with children is described and the evidence of effective practice for including fathers is summarised. Factors that may influence fathers’ involvement with services are reported. The competence of practitioners to engage with fathers, when they do come into contact with the services, is also discussed.


Other clearinghouse publications and resources

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

**Aware: ACSSA Newsletter No. 16**

This newsletter edition features two articles from workers in the sexual assault prevention field: “Tell Us What You Know: Surveying University Students’ Attitudes About Sexual Assault”, by Melanie Boursnell, Tamara Lee and Donna Chung, workers from the Violence, Abuse and Neglect (VAN) services, and “Engaging Young People in Leadership Roles in the Prevention of Sexual Assault: The CASA House Peer Educator Project”, by Rene Imbesi, CASA (Centre Against Sexual Assault) House in Melbourne. The newsletter also reviews the report by the Upper Murray CASA with Jigsaw Research, entitled Where is the Care in the Country?, and the book Lighting the Path, a collection of work on counselling young women with sexual assault issues. The News in Brief section outlines some of the major current issues in sexual assault, and a comprehensive literature section provides up-to-date information on the latest releases.


**ACSSA Issues No. 8**—Sex workers and sexual assault in Australia: Prevalence, risk and safety, by Antonia Quadara.

Authored by ACSSA’s Senior Research Officer, Dr Antonia Quadara, this paper provides a review of contemporary research on the sexual assault of sex workers in Australia, a population identified as experiencing high, but usually hidden, rates of sexual assault. The paper highlights the extent and nature of sexual assault against sex workers in Australia; examines the impacts of sexual assault on sex workers; identifies the barriers to disclosure and accessing support services faced by sex workers; identifies the conditions that make sex workers vulnerable to sexual assault; identifies strategies that may help to prevent sexual assault against sex workers; and suggests future research directions.

*ACSSA Issues No. 8 is available at: www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/issue/i8.html*

**National Child Protection Clearinghouse (NCPC)**
www.aifs.gov.au/ncpc

**Child Abuse Prevention Issues No. 26**—“Getting the big picture”: A synopsis and critique of Australian out-of-home care research, by Leah Bromfield and Alexandra Osborn.

Child Abuse Prevention Issues No. 26 is a systematic review of Australian out-of-home care research completed over the last 10 years. The paper describes:

- what we know from Australian out-of-home care research;
- the quality of the evidence base;
- research gaps; and
- the priorities for future research.


**Child Abuse Prevention Issues No. 27**—Family group conferencing in Australia: Ten years on, by Nathan Harris.

Child Abuse Prevention Issues No. 27 tracks the implementation of family group conferencing in Australian child protection services and compares Australian models of conferencing to the original model developed in New Zealand. Implications for policy and practice are discussed. Family group conferences are held to decide whether a child is in need of protection from abuse and neglect and how this need can best be addressed. While professionals may provide information and advice, the family (parents, extended family, child/young person) decides how to ensure the care and safety of the child (this plan must be agreed to by the child protection worker). Conferences are often convened where court orders would otherwise have been sought.

*Child Abuse Prevention Issues No. 27 is available at: www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/issues/issues27/issues27.html*
Child Abuse Prevention Newsletter No. 15(2)

This edition includes the following articles:
- Research utilisation project (Clearinghouse research);
- Promising practice in out-of-home care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children (Clearinghouse research);
- Everyone’s got a bottom (Book review);
- Stewards of children (Program profile);
- Good practice in child protection (Book review); and


Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet

Indigenous Social and Emotional Wellbeing web resource

The Indigenous Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) web resource is a “one-stop info-shop” for people working, studying or interested in addressing issues that influence the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. This web resource also supports a yarning place that provides electronic services to encourage information sharing and collaboration among the full range of health professionals and others involved in the area of Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing.

The web resource can be found at: www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/html/html_community/social_health_community/social_index.htm

Other publications and resources

Child Trends: Evaluation Resources

Child Trends, an independent, non-partisan research organisation providing research and analysis to practitioners and policy makers concerned with improving children’s lives, has published a series of Research-to-Results Briefs. These focus on identifying and implementing evidence-based practices relating to out-of-school time programs in the USA, and enhancing their replication and evaluation. Despite their restricted focus, the principles outlined in these papers can be applied to a range of programs.

The first paper1 provides definitions of key terms and a number of web-based resources for identifying and applying evidence-based practice across programs of various types. The second paper2 sets out steps through which practitioners can identify and select suitable evidence-based practices, facilitate and sustain their adoption. In the third paper,3 stages of implementation and six core components (grounded in research) of successful implementation of evidence-based practices are discussed. The final paper4 focuses on the need to be able to replicate programs or practices in other settings, and thus the need to keep this goal in mind at the design and development stages.

Further Research-to-Results Briefs discuss the need for program evaluation, the costs and benefits of evaluation, and selecting the appropriate evaluator for the project, and offer brief overview of the steps involved in undertaking process and outcome evaluations. They can be found at www.childtrends.org/_listResources.cfm?LID=85404DAF-BC61-4DCF-94554EC9C51115CA#evid


The authors report on a national, random telephone survey of 3,746 young Australians and 2,005 parents regarding the sources of help they were likely to access if they or their child experienced one of a range of mental health problems, and the barriers to obtaining that help. Intended sources of and barriers to obtaining help varied by age. Young people were less likely to access help through their GP, and their reluctance was based on embarrassment or concern about others’ perceptions of them. Barriers for parents trying to obtain assistance for their children centred around the child’s resistance to receiving help. The authors offer some suggestions for improving access to and

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3 www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2007_10_01_RB_SuccessDriversRev.pdf
uptake of mental health services, particularly for younger people. The article is available at: www.mja.com.au/public/issues/187_10_191107/or10336_fm.pdf


The review in 2006/2007 of the original Living is for Everyone: A Framework for Prevention of Suicide and Self-harm in Australia (the LIFE Framework) (2000), identified the need for practical documents and resources that could be used by the wider community. The framework document is aimed at a broad audience including academics and researchers, and practitioners and service providers across a range of sectors and organisation types. It incorporates the latest information and research findings about suicide prevention, including risk and protective factors, tipping points and warning signs. For more information, go to: www.livingistoreveryone.com.au/LIFEFramework.asp

**Bridging the digital divide: Creating opportunities for marginalised young people to get connected.** (2007), Michelle Blanchard, Atari Metcalf & Dr Jane Burns (Inspire Research Report No. 1), Balmain: Inspire Foundation and ORYGEN Youth Health.

Information and communication technology (ICT) is increasingly being used in health and wellbeing promotion initiatives. ICT has the potential to foster social inclusion and civic engagement and promote mental health among young people from a range of marginalised groups. Information was gathered from young people and service providers via interviews, focus groups and a survey. The report concludes that young people are creative in the way they access ICT and use it to safely manage their online and offline social networks. Service providers are less savvy about ICT and require education and training to make full use of its potential. The full report is available at: www.inspire.org.au/uploads/files/pdfs/BDDReport_1_December2007.pdf


This report combines quantitative and qualitative methods to document the experience of Tasmanian families on low incomes who are caring for a disabled child. In-depth interviews with carers and service providers were conducted and policy documents and research papers reviewed. Wellbeing and hardship were measured. The author makes a series of recommendations aimed at policy, service provision, social participation and financial and community support that would improve the situation for and quality of life of families caring for their disabled child. The report is available at: www.anglicare-tas.org.au/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=155&Itemid=81


This is a special report from the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index Survey. At least two surveys have been conducted each year since April 2001. This report examines the levels of depression and stress and the personal wellbeing of a sample of 4,107 people in caring roles who are listed on the Carers Australia database. As a group, carers report the lowest overall wellbeing ever recorded in this survey. The report details the findings in five major areas: demographics and employment, carer challenges, carer resources, intensity of the carer role, and satisfaction with caring and leisure. The report is available at: http://acqol.deakin.edu.au/index_wellbeing/Survey_17.1.pdf


Growing numbers of grandparents are taking on the role of primary caregiver for their grandchildren. Drawing on data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian and international research literature, and the practice wisdom of Mission Australia service providers, this brief report offers an overview of reasons for taking on this role, the prevalence of grandparent–grandchild families, and the types of formal and informal arrangements in which the care is provided. It also discusses the following issues facing grandparents in their caring role: financial resources, legal and parenting issues, social supports, and health and wellbeing. Current initiatives and gaps in support for grandparents and in research, policy and program development are identified. The report is available at: www.missionaustralia.com.au/document-downloads/doc_view/15-grandparents-raising-their-grandchildren?tmpl=component&format=raw


This paper presents a review of the ways in which post-separation child contact arrangements are addressed across a number of jurisdictions: Australia, Canada, United States, Sweden, New Zealand, France, Denmark, England and Wales. The author points out that, while policy in this area in particular must be based on solid research evidence, robust, systematic evaluations of the services provided by the countries reviewed are relatively rare. The report is available at: www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/201147/0053739.pdf
Later-life divorce


This paper examines the impact of divorce on individual wellbeing among older people. Using data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, the authors compare the social connectedness, perceived social support, life satisfaction, and general health of men and women aged 55–74 years old, who are divorced and single, divorced and remarried, and married and never divorced. A previous paper by these authors found negative financial consequences of divorce among older people. Similarly, the results of this study indicated a negative impact of divorce on personal wellbeing in older age groups.


Australian statistics show a trend towards divorces later in life; in 1985, 15% of divorcing husbands were aged 50 or older, but in 2005, 28% were in this age group. There is also an increasing trend towards divorces involving couples who had been married for 25 years or more. This article summarises the five-yearly statistics from 1985 to 2005 and discusses social and demographic reasons for the trends.


This study explores how parental divorce that occurs after children have reached adulthood affects parent–adult child contact and proximity. Data are from the 1987–88 and 1992–94 waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (USA) and include 1,463 respondents. The findings suggest that divorce affects parent–child contact and proximity differently for mothers and fathers. Compared with stably married fathers, fathers who divorced were more likely to experience a decline in co-residence and weekly contact with at least one adult child. However, divorced mothers were more likely than stably married mothers to report an increase in weekly contact with an adult child. At the same time, the data intimate that divorce may slightly increase mothers’ likelihood of little or no contact with an adult child.


This article is part of a series in which a number of contributors examine some of the challenges facing couples in the later years of marriage. It is published as an aid to educators working with couples in long-term relationships. The author discusses the topic of marital midlife crisis. Compared to those issues surrounding the newly married or cohabiting couple, far less has been written about issues relevant to marriages that have lasted a number of years. However, given what is known about the incidence of later-life divorce and separation, the author argues that issues faced by couples who have been married for a considerable time are worthy of more attention.

Retirement


This report compares key characteristics of retirement for men and women, including reasons for retiring, transitions to retirement, life satisfaction, the effect of the presence of a spouse or partner, and financial security. The study is based on a literature review and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey; the population considered were men and women aged 45 and over. The report presents new findings about differences in life in retirement for single and partnered women, as well as confirming existing findings; for example, the importance of education and health as factors influencing retirement.


The ageing of Australia’s baby boomers will significantly change Australian society. However, it is unclear what is known about the expectations and plans of this cohort for their retirement and old age. This paper provides a first step by reviewing the Australian literature, focusing on areas of health, housing, work and income, and responsibility. The review identified that, despite agreement about the significance of baby boomers’ ageing, empirical work directly addressing the research topics was rare. In particular, there was little coverage of baby boomers’ ascription of responsibility for their welfare in older age. If policies are to be effective, empirical research obtaining information directly
from baby boomers is required to fill the gaps identified through this review. (Journal abstract, edited)

For better, for worse, but not for lunch. (2002). Alvey, E. Threshold, 72, 9.

This article is part of a series in which a number of contributors examine some of the challenges facing couples in the second half of marriage. It is published as an aid to educators working with couples in long-term relationships. The author discusses a program she designed for couples preparing for retirement. The rationale for this was based on the gap between the many opportunities for retirees to obtain advice on financial planning, housing and leisure ideas, but a lack of information on aspects of the relationship.


Retirement is a major transition that has considerable potential to affect the marital relationships of those who retire. Retirement can have an impact on a person's roles and identity, the amount of time a couple spends together, and the roles and responsibilities of each partner following retirement. This paper reports findings from a four-wave panel study of men and women retirees. These retirees were tracked from just before they retired until three years after retirement. Information was collected on a range of aspects of the marital relationship, from both the retiree and their spouse. The paper describes the extent and ways in which marital relationships change following retirement, and identifies factors related to the different marital outcomes following retirement. (Author abstract, edited)


The concept of retirement has been undergoing change, and opportunities for a variety of retirement lifestyle options are increasing. Retirement plans for one cohort are examined in this context. Responses to a questionnaire of 200 public sector employees attending a retirement seminar were analysed by gender. Findings suggest that both men and women viewed retirement as a positive experience, focusing on opportunities for further personal development. This approach was more evident among women. However, both men and women would prefer to maintain a form of reduced employment after retiring. There were no gender differences in reasons for retiring at that time, but those with partners were more likely to retire because of family responsibilities. Implications for theories of ageing and public policy are discussed. A more flexible approach to retirement policy is urged. Retirement may provide more opportunities for personal growth than decline. (Journal abstract, edited)


This study explored the range of expectations and plans for retirement of Australian baby boomers. Participants were recruited to 12 focus groups in New South Wales in 2004, grouped by socioeconomic status, gender and geographical location. Topics raised included work, retirement, and financial and other planning. Transcriptions of the sessions were analysed manually to identify the range of views on each topic and any variation by the selected study variables. Although some baby boomers had planned for their retirement, many had not. Socioeconomic status was the most important variable associated with planning. The findings increase understandings of how baby boomers from different backgrounds are thinking and planning for their retirement. Baby boomers from low socioeconomic backgrounds consider that responsibility for retirement funding should rest either solely, or partially, with the government as they have not had time to accumulate sufficient superannuation. (Journal abstract, edited)


For many men, work and the ability to work have strong associations with masculinity, status and self-esteem. The authors examine mental health promotion options for men between 50 and 65 before they retire. They believe that men do not plan productively for retirement because they are constrained by restrictive interpretations of masculine identity. The authors suggest that a proactive social and health policy is integral to bridging the gap between expectation and experience. They call for all levels of the community, including government, unions, and large and small businesses, to become involved in realistic retirement planning.


Using data from the first three waves of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, this paper examines the retirement plans of middle-aged workers. Although about two-thirds of men and more than half of women appear to be making standard retirement plans, more than 20% of others have delayed their retirement plans and about 10% do not know when or whether they will retire. Those workers who do not know when they expect to retire are those who face uncertainty and have concerns about their retirement income. Men’s retirement plans are altered in response to labour market shocks, while women’s are more likely to be altered in response to changes in their own or their partners’ health.
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 www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/conferences.html

12th Annual Smart Marriages Conference

2–5 July 2008
San Francisco, California, USA

This conference is for marriage educators, counsellors, clergy, social workers, family life educators, therapists, policy makers, family advocates, teachers and the public. There will be a wide range of keynote presentations and workshops, as well as pre- and post-conference training institutes.

Further information: Smart Marriages website: www.smartmarriages.com/conferencedetails.html

10th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference—Families Through Life

9–11 July 2008
Melbourne Exhibition Centre, Vic.

This national event offers a forum for extensive debate surrounding a wide range of family issues that are of key relevance to researchers, policy makers and practitioners. It provides a platform for researchers to report findings from their family-related research and to contribute to ongoing discussions and provide policy input.

The conference will focus on five major themes: Family relationships; Children, youth and patterns of care; Families and work; Families and community life; and Violence and protection issues.

Further information: conference website: www.aifsconference08.com; Email: info@aifsconference08.com; Phone: (03) 9682 0500

First National Research Conference on Child and Family Programs and Policy

10–11 July 2008
Massachusetts, USA

Bridgewater State College’s School of Arts and Sciences invite conference submissions/research abstracts that focus on promising child and family programs, interventions, preventions, rules/regulations, and policies. Research that has strong implications for child and family programs/policies is also invited.

Further information: www.bridgew.edu/ExternalAffairs/ CCFPP%20Welcome%20Page.cfm; Email: Logistics information: Jenna Stephenson, jstephenson@bridgew. edu; Conference topics: Dr. Emily M. Douglas, Emily. Douglas@bridgew.edu

Drugs, Alcohol and Family Violence

14–16 August 2008
Port Douglas, Far North Qld

RANZCP Section of Forensic Psychiatry Bi-National Conference 2008. Keynote Speaker: Dr Mark Schuckit.


ACWA08—Strong, Safe and Sustainable: Responding to Children, Young People and Families in a Civil Society

18–20 August 2008
Sydney, NSW

The Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies invites you to attend the 2008 ACWA conference. This conference has become the most important event for the children, youth and family industry. The conference will allow delegates to network with local, interstate and international colleagues.

Further information: ACWA: www.acwa08.com

2008 National SARRAH Conference—Many Paddocks: One Herd

27–30 August 2008
Yeppoon, Qld

The biennial Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH) conference is the peak opportunity for rural and remote allied health and oral health professionals to come together and present, discuss, debate and summarise elements of our professional lives that bind us together.

Further information: www.sarrah.org.au/site/index. cfm?display=87530
5th World Conference on the Promotion of Mental Health and the Prevention of Mental and Behavioural Disorders—From Margins to Mainstream

10–12 September 2008
Melbourne, Vic.

Accepting responsibility for mental health should be everybody’s business. This conference will explore new ways that health services, governments and community organisations can promote mental health and prevent mental illness. Topics will include: social participation, freedom from violence, freedom from discrimination, and increasing access to economic resources.

Further information: conference website: www.margins2mainstream.com; Email: info@margins2mainstream.com; Phone: (03) 9370 1265

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

Contributing to Family Relationships Quarterly

Guidelines for contributors

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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