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Girl reading in deck chair, Peter Campbell, 2002
Watercolour on paper

From The London Review of Books Calendar 2002

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The “fertility crisis” has been the subject of active debate in the last year or so. We have been subjected to newspaper headlines such as: “Populate or stagnate”, “Procreate or perish”, “Marry and multiply”, “Adapt or depopulate”. It has certainly been a fertile area of endeavour for sub-editors!

The debate has ranged far and wide, and has included issues to do with work and family, women’s participation in the paid workforce, the ageing of the population, paid maternity leave, child care, the structure of family payments, the environment, the future of immigration, to name a few.

But some contributors, such as Malcolm Turnbull, have emphasised that for governments to address low fertility raises difficult issues. In an article in *The Age* (16/7/02) entitled “The crisis is fertility, not ageing”, Turnbull notes that: “The task of policy formulation is extremely challenging and complex. The answers are far from self evident . . . [but] we should be identifying policies that actively promote ‘united caring families’ and the social values they represent.”

Some have suggested the need for a “population policy” for Australia. According to Paul Kelly of *The Australian* (“It’s breeding obvious”, 4/9/02): “The core aims of such a policy should be to reverse the fertility decline, to devise a strategy of long-term population growth, and to support women in integrating family and job.”

The Hon. Kevin Andrews MP, the Minister for Ageing, has emphasised that Australia’s low fertility rate is one of the main causes of our rapidly ageing population, and has called for national discussion on the issue. In *The Age* (21/8/02, “The challenge: procreate or perish”), he noted that: “There are limitations to what governments can do about boosting fertility rates, but it is important we do something. We have an obligation to future generations and we ignore the falling fertility rate at our peril. Every year we fail to tackle the declining fertility rate is a precious year wasted so far as future generations and the economic welfare of the country is concerned.”

The Treasurer, The Hon. Peter Costello MP, circulated an “Intergenerational Report” at the time of the 2002–2003 Budget (14 May 2002), to assist in considering the Commonwealth’s fiscal outlook over the long term, and to identify emerging issues associated with an ageing population. While Australia is considered to be well placed to meet the challenges of an ageing population, it is noted that “the current generation of taxpayers is likely to impose a higher tax burden on the next generation”. The report observes that “the trend towards having fewer children, later in life, is a key influence on Australia’s changing population structure”. The Treasurer has also emphasised that: “fertility rates can be moved to some degree by financial incentives, but the movements are small and the incentives need to be very large” (*Herald Sun* 9/8/02, “Paying for babies”).

Professor Peter Saunders of the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales has noted that “the research suggests that while pro-natalist politics can have an impact, they are unlikely to bring about major changes over the short term, particularly where the (financial) magnitudes involved are small” (SPRC Newsletter, no. 82, November 2002).

In a speech to the Sydney Institute on 2 July 2002 (“Is the Australian family an endangered species?”), the Shadow Minister for Family and Community Services, The Hon. Wayne Swan MP, emphasised that: “In the long term, Australia must dramatically rethink its approach to supporting families . . . If families are forced to choose between either work or family, our birth-rate will continue to decline to a point where our future economic capacity as a nation will be put at risk.” And he has argued that “we need comprehensive policies that allow families to combine work and child-rearing” (*Sydney Morning Herald* 23/7/02, “$10 a week won’t fix mothers’ problems”).

We need to keep in mind that there has been a long history of debate on this issue in Australia. Indeed, way back in 1904 a New South Wales Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birth Rate defined the then fertility
decline as a grave problem attributable to the deliberate control of reproduction by women who were “led astray by false and pernicious doctrine into the belief that personal interest and ambitions, a high standard of ease, comfort and luxury are the essential aims of life”.

In 1942 an official inquiry was established by the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia to investigate the causes of the decline in the birth rate, a problem “such as to cause, even now, the gravest anxiety about the future of the Australian people”.

These debates formed an interesting backdrop to the introduction (with bipartisan support) of universal child endowment to support all mothers with children. A package of economic, social welfare and medical services to families were seen as necessary to provide an incentive to child-bearing and child-rearing. (See Bettina Cass, “Population policies and family policies: State construction of domestic life”, in C. Baldock and B. Cass, Women, Social Welfare and the State in Australia, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1983.)

As an aside, it is interesting that the “father” of the post World War II Welfare State in the UK, Sir William Beveridge, was also a strong advocate of tax-financed universal children’s allowances. Such a scheme was introduced in the UK in 1945. In part, Beveridge thought such provisions would help to assist the decline in the birth rate. In his famous 1942 Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services, he observed that: “A means of reversing the recent course of the birth rate must be found. It is not likely that allowances for children or any other economic incentives will, by themselves, provide that means and lead parents who do not desire children to rear children for gain. But children’s allowances can help to restore the birth rate, both by making it possible for parents who desire more children to bring them into the world without damaging the chances of those already born, and as a signal of the national interest in children, setting the tone of public opinion.” (p. 154)

Beveridge formed these views in the 1930s after he observed that: “A means of reversing the recent course of the birth rate must be found. It is not likely that allowances for children or any other economic incentives will, by themselves, provide that means and lead parents who do not desire children to rear children for gain. But children’s allowances can help to restore the birth rate, both by making it possible for parents who desire more children to bring them into the world without damaging the chances of those already born, and as a signal of the national interest in children, setting the tone of public opinion.”

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This issue of Family Matters makes a contribution to the “modern” fertility debate by drawing together available evidence on the trends involved. There is much room for differences of policy emphasis and perspectives that particular ideological views may bring. The Institute has sought to present some of its own research in the area, as well as provide a forum for the flavour of some of the debate to come through.

Several articles by Institute researchers David de Vaus, Ruth Weston and Robyn Parker provide useful overviews and interesting and timely discussions of the relevant statistical trends and possible explanations for them. As well, the Institute’s Diana Smart draws on data from the Australian Temperament Project to discuss young people’s (and their parents’) views on marriage and parenthood. This material is complemented by contributions from leading academics such as Frank Castles, Catherine Hakim and Peter McDonald.

Issues relating to fertility will also form part of the discussions at the 8th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference to be held at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre at Southbank from 12–14 February 2003. The conference has been set around three major themes – Children and Parenting, Family and Marriage, and Families and Society. We have received an excellent response to our call for papers from both Australia and overseas, and we look forward to seeing you at the conference.

I would like to take this opportunity to send seasons greeting to our readers. It will be the last time I do so from these pages, as I’ve decided to rejoin my family in Canberra on a full-time basis. My three and a half years with the Institute have been stimulating and challenging and I have very much enjoyed the opportunity to perform the duties of Director of the Institute. I thank Minister Vanstone (and her staff) and the Board of Management for their support.

In particular, I would like to thank all the staff at the Institute for their hard work and support. I have every confidence that the Institute will go forward as a centre for excellence for research and information on family wellbeing in Australia.

Sandra Martin

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The 8th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference will be held at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre on Southbank, from Wednesday 12 to Friday 14 February 2003.

Australian Institute of Family Studies

Steps forward for families: Research, practice and policy provides an opportunity for wide-ranging discussion about family issues, and it provides a valuable forum for researchers to report on their family research results and contribute to ongoing debate and policy input along with other interested parties.

Themes

The conference has been set around three major themes: Children and Parenting; Family and Marriage; and Family and Society. These themes reflect the current work being undertaken by the Institute and also relate directly to government policy and areas of particular interest for families, and those who work with them.

Program

The conference program includes two keynote addresses, by Dr Catherine Hakim and Professor Bob Gregory, and contributions from Australia’s leading family researchers and policy makers. As well as a range of individual papers, there will be symposia and workshops on a broad range of subjects relating to families.

The outline below represents the principal ideas and themes underpinning the conference.

- Papers from the Institute’s current research include the Longitudinal Study on Australian Children (LSAC); research on child care and child development; and the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey.
- There will be a number of presentations by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, and by Centrelink – the service delivery arm of social welfare for the Australian Government.
- Sessions will cover a range of other topics, including:
  - Work and family life
  - Fertility
  - Income support and welfare reform
  - Child care
  - Child protection and family violence
  - Post-separation families
  - Family services provisions and change
  - Family Court and legal issues
  - Roles of fathers, grandparents and foster carers
  - Social capital
  - Family diversity

The full conference program, including abstracts of papers can be viewed at: www.aifs.gov.au

Special panel discussion

In addition to the conference’s two distinguished keynote speakers, a special highlight of the conference will be the closing session. This will comprise a panel of Australia’s leading academic, media and political commentators discussing and debating the key issues facing families and family policy today and in the future.

Registration

The Australian Institute of Family Studies welcomes your participation at its conference and looks forward to receiving your registration soon. Register online at www.aifs.gov.au or by completing the registration brochure. If you have not yet received your brochure, please contact The Meeting Planners via email at aifs8@meetingplanners.com.au or by phone on (03) 9417 0888.

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Australian Institute of Family Studies

The Australian Institute of Family Studies eighth conference, entitled Steps forward for families: Research, practice and policy, provides an opportunity for wide-ranging discussion about family issues, and it provides a valuable forum for researchers to report on their family research results and contribute to ongoing debate and policy input along with other interested parties.

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The Australian Institute of Family Studies is pleased to announce the attendance of two internationally known researchers as keynote speakers at its eighth conference – *Steps forward for families: Research, practice and policy*.

**Catherine Hakim** is an internationally renowned authority on women’s employment and role in the family, sociologist who will speak on *Competing family models and competing social policies*. Dr Hakim is currently a Senior Research Fellow at the London School of Economics. Her experience as a professional social scientist includes policy research and advice in the British civil service, and a spell as Director of the ESRC Data Archive in Britain.

Dr Hakim has published over 60 papers in books and social science journals, including the Australian journal *People and Place*, and three textbooks on research methods. Her most recent books are *Key Issues in Women’s Work* (Continuum 1996), *Between Equalisation and Marginalisation: Women Working Part-Time in Europe and the USA* (Oxford University Press 1997), *Social Change and Innovation in the Labour Market* (Oxford University Press 1998), *Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century: Preference Theory* (Oxford University Press 2000), and *Models of the Family: Ideals and Realities* (Ashgate 2003). (See also Dr Hakim’s ABC Radio National interview elsewhere this edition of *Family Matters*.)

**Bob Gregory** is Australia’s foremost labour market economist, Professor of Economics and Head of the Economics Program at the Research School of Social Sciences, at the Australian National University, Canberra. His research interests are primarily in Australian labour markets and economic policy generally. Through 1990 to 1993 he was Principal Consultant in a series of Aged Care Reviews for the Department of Community Services and Health. He was a Member of the Board of the Reserve Bank of Australia from 1985–1995. From 1986–1991 he was a member of the Australian Sciences and Technology Council. And from 1989-98 we was a member of the Board of the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Professor Gregory is an elected Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences (1979). In 1996 he was awarded the Order of Australia Medal.
Two countervailing trends dominate demographic discussion. On the one hand, the world’s population is increasing rapidly; on the other, fertility is on the decline. In Australia, the population was 10.5 million in 1961 – the year when the fertility rate was at its peak for the 20th century (3.5 babies per woman) and when the oral contraceptive pill was approved for distribution. Since then, Australia’s population has increased to more than 19 million yet the total fertility rate has fallen to 1.7 babies per woman.

In the context of long life expectancy, Australia’s falling fertility has resulted in an ageing population both in absolute and relative terms, and projections by the Australian Bureau of Statistics suggest that the population will decline this century if the total fertility rate falls below 1.6 (ABS 2000). On the basis of their empirical research, McDonald and Kippen (1999) conclude that the capacity for immigration to slow down population ageing is quite limited. They provide evidence suggesting that while the first 80,000 net migrants per year have a substantial effect on this process, at higher levels there are diminishing returns.

Although the effects of population trends, and thus fertility trends, are controversial (see Guest and McDonald 2002; Hamilton 2002), they involve a number of immediate and long-term economic and social challenges, as outlined by others in this edition of Family Matters.

Many interacting factors underpin the fall in the fertility rate – a complexity that makes the choice of where to begin this review somewhat arbitrary. Some factors are transparent and certain; others are not. Perhaps the most obvious are the development of modern fertility control measures and the related changing patterns of family formation, including couple formation. The review thus begins with these issues.

**Control over fertility**

A key explanation for the fall in fertility is that first births have increasingly been postponed thereby shortening women’s total childbearing years and increasing their chances of childlessness (Jain and McDonald 1997). While some women attempt to extend their reproductive life through assisted reproductive technology, such procedures account for only 2 per cent of all births (McDonald 2001a).

It appears that, although they tend to revise their family size preferences downward when in their 20s, women now end up having fewer children than they would like to have (de Vaus in this edition of Family Matters; McDonald 2001b) or intend having (Quesnel-Valee and Morgan 2002). Such trends are in marked contrast to those of some 40 years ago when couples often had more children than they expected because of relatively inefficient means of contraception (Petersen 1961). Clearly, the effects of the development of the contraceptive pill and its widespread acceptance have been revolutionary.

In Australia in 1961, the contraceptive pill became available for distribution via medical prescriptions from those practitioners who approved of its use. In 1972, sales tax on all contraceptives was removed and the pill was placed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits List, thereby lowering the price substantially, increasing its use, and leading to widespread acceptance. Other advances in contraception that contribute to the modern fall in...

However, the average age of women giving birth to their first child continued to increase well after the pill became readily available. The median age of married women giving birth to their first child of this union was 25.3 in 1981, 29.3 in 1991, and 29.8 in 2001, although some of these women would have had children from previous relationships. As outlined below, advances in reproductive technology facilitated a number of other life course changes that combined to accentuate the delay in first births and fall in fertility (ABS 2001, 2002).

Life course changes
Life course changes affecting fertility include delays in those transitions that typically precede the family formation process, most particularly leaving home and forming partnerships, an overall fall in the formation of partnerships and an increase in their rate of breakdown, consequent diverging reproductive histories of potential partners, and women's increased financial independence.

Delayed transitions preceding having children
Although leaving the parental home remains an important transition in life, it is no longer quite the symbol of adulthood it once was. Young adults are taking this step at an older age than in the past, and the first move is likely to be temporary rather than permanent. Between 1979 and 2000, the proportion of those in their early 20s living with their parents increased from 46 per cent to 52 per cent for men and from 25 per cent to 39 per cent for women. In two surveys conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in 1981 and 1998, the proportion of those in their early 20s who had returned after leaving home increased from 52 per cent to 67 per cent for men and from 44 per cent to 57 per cent for women (McDonald 1995; Weston, Stanton, Qu and Soriano 2001).

Where marriage used to be the main reason for leaving home, these days young adults leave for a variety of reasons, and start living together as a couple later in life than previously (Qu and Weston 2001). Furthermore, their first union is unlikely to start with marriage – in 2001, for example, 69 per cent of marriages that were first marriages for both the bride and groom were preceded by cohabitation (or de facto relationships). Yet couples still typically wait until they are married before having children, although this trend is weakening. While the proportion of babies born outside marriage has been increasing progressively, a trend that probably largely reflects the increase in cohabitation, two-thirds of babies are born within marriage (69 per cent in 2001, compared with 90 per cent in 1976) (ABS 1995, 2002). Research in the United States reported by Barber and Axinn (1998) suggests that, while some individuals opt for cohabitation rather than marriage because they do not want to have children, the experience of cohabitation itself may lower intentions of having children. Although such research is by no means definitive, it is possible that one partner may opt for cohabitation because he or she does not want to have children and, over time, changes the other partner's views about having children.
More broadly, individuals’ life decisions are usually influenced by general societal trends, decisions which can then perpetuate these trends. Delayed milestones that precede having children represent an example of this process (ABS 2001). In turn, as marriage becomes increasingly delayed, people who wish to marry eventually can increasingly afford to wait because the pool of eligible partners remains large at a later point in the life span (Kohler, Billari and Ortega 2001).

Nevertheless, the rate of overall partnering has fallen. In essence, while cohabitation rates have increased, this increase is not large enough to offset the fall in marriage rates (Birrell and Rapson 1998), a trend that would contribute to the increased rate of childlessness which is now expected to apply to at least 20 per cent of women who are currently in their early childbearing years (Merlo and Rowland 2000).

While partnering rates have fallen, the fragility of relationships, coupled with postponement of childbearing, increases the chances of childlessness, or of smaller than intended families.

**Fragility of relationships**

As noted above, cohabitation is now the dominant pathway to marriage. To outsiders, the period of cohabitation might thus be seen as an “engagement” or at least a symbol that the partners are committed to each other. But for some couples, the meaning of cohabitation may be uncertain, may differ for each partner, or change with time. In the meantime, with the delay in the establishment of this union, the woman’s “biological clock” is ticking. There is some evidence that first unions that begin with cohabitation are increasingly likely to end in separation and that relationship breakdown is an important reason for women losing opportunities of having the children they once intended to have (Qu and Weston 2001; Qu, Weston and Kilmartin 2000).

Like cohabitation, the fragility of marriage can also limit opportunities for having children. The divorce rate rose dramatically following the Family Law Act 1975 as the backlog of long-term separations were formalised and some divorces were brought forward. The divorce rate then subsided but has remained at a much higher level than prior to the Act. In the mid to late 1980s, the rate varied between 10.6 and 10.9 divorces per 1000 married women, and has since fluctuated at the higher level of 12.0 to 12.9 divorces per 1000 married women between 1995 and 2000.

While fragility of relationships may disrupt opportunities for childbearing, there is also evidence to suggest that unhappily married couples are less likely than other couples to have a (further) child (Lillard and Waite 1993). This may be more likely in contemporary marriages given that their survival is often under threat when emotional, sexual and companionship needs are not being met (Wolcott 1999). That is, intact but unhappy marriages may also result in lowering fertility.

**Parents without partners**

In a context of high relationship breakdown, there are also many parents without partners, some of whom may have hoped for more children. But their status as parents appears to lower their likelihood of forming new partnerships and may also lower their likelihood of having more children should they partner (Greene and Biddlecom 2000; Stewart 2002; Thomson 1997a, 1997b).

However, Stewart (2002) points out that few fertility studies have taken into account the impact of stepchildren, and most of those that do, have not only ignored their “step” status (by combining biological children with stepchildren), but have also limited their attention to the children of the mother who are living with her and her partner.

Little is known about the extent to which parenting responsibilities of fathers without partners (including the amount of child support they are required to pay) affect their views about, and their likelihood of, partnering and having further children. In the United States, where child support regimes vary across states, research by Bloom, Conrad and Miller (1998) suggests that child support enforcement reduces the likelihood of marriage for low income men. On the other hand, if marriage does occur, fathers (low income or otherwise) are just as likely as “non-fathers” to have a child in this relationship.

**Women’s growing financial independence**

Women’s increased workforce participation and financial independence appears to be centrally linked with fertility trends. Women can now earn high incomes and are thus no longer as reliant on finding a partner for financial support as in the past. Indeed, women’s high incomes may pose a barrier to partnership formation (Birrell and Rapson 1998).

Furthermore, women’s opportunities to remain in paid work after they marry have increased over the past 35 years. It was not until 1966 that women were permitted to be appointed or to remain as permanent officers of the Commonwealth Public Service upon their marriage and to return to their jobs after the birth of their children. Since this period, participation in the labour force has increased dramatically for married women in all age groups (Weston et al. 2001).

Such a major social change inevitably requires other adjustments within the home, workplace and community to facilitate the new way of life. But as Moen and Yu (2000) point out, some of these adjustments take time to occur. A number of explanations for low fertility relate to such time lags. These include inflexible workplace practices; women’s “double burden”; limited access to affordable, high quality child care; financial, career and other work-related costs linked with giving up work partially or fully to care for children; and potential clashes in values, attitudes or beliefs about family and paid work responsibilities.

**Summary**

In short, two-thirds of babies are born to married couples and most of the remainder appear to be born to couples who are cohabiting. The fertility rate thus depends largely on the formation and continuation of “live-in” partnerships, most particularly marriage. But partnerships are occurring later in life, their rate has fallen overall, and the risk of their breaking down within the first few years of their formation is considerable.

Furthermore, the presence of children from previous relationships may lower chances of partnering and of having additional children. Finally, women now have opportunities for financial independence and career success – opportunities that may interfere with partnership formation or their plans to have children.

What is behind these changing life course patterns?
Labour market, economy and other broad structural forces

Several authors maintain that trends in the labour market and the economy in general influence fertility rates, in part through their impact upon life course patterns.

Not surprisingly, there is strong historical evidence that Australia’s economic circumstances have played a major role in influencing fertility rates since well before modern methods of birth control were introduced. Indeed, the sharp fall in fertility in the 1890s is explained in terms of the sudden economic collapse that occurred in 1893 (Ruzicka and Caldwell 1982). As de Vaus points out in this edition of Family Matters, the Great Depression of the 1930s saw the total fertility rate falling to 2.1 babies per woman in 1934, then rising as the economic outlook improved.

But if the economic outlook is so important to the fertility rate, why has the rate continued to fall in recent times?

Several authors have implicated the globalisation of the economy and associated labour market changes of the last two decades. Low-skilled yet relatively highly paid and secure jobs available to early school leavers have virtually disappeared, having been replaced by jobs entailing fixed-term contracts and part-time or casual hours, thereby providing limited economic security (Kohler et al. 2001; McDonald 2000a, 2001c; Saunders 2001).

McDonald (2001a) also argues that this era of job insecurity has been accompanied by a strong economic cycle of “booms and busts” and rising or fluctuating house prices which combine to encourage continuing dual employment amongst couples as an insurance against dual joblessness, and to lead young people to invest in their own “human capital” (their education and career development) before considering having children. Investment in education, in turn, increases debts which may lead to further postponement of childbearing (Jackson 2002). According to McDonald (2000b, 2001d), childbearing is also discouraged by the limited financial, child care and other supports available to couples when mothers wish to participate in the labour force.

Inextricably linked with these broad structural forces are the considerable costs of having and raising children. These costs and their interplay are likely to cast a shadow on the benefits of having children and reinforce the need for educational and career investment.

Are the benefits of having children decreasing?

Schoen and colleagues (1997) argue that few children are required to strengthen family and friendship networks, and Kohlmann (2002) maintains that restricting family size may even increase the chances of receiving some benefits. According to this argument, in countries where economic benefits of children only apply in old age, it is more efficient for parents to have few children thereby allowing strong investment in their education.

In short, while having children can be very rewarding, several researchers maintain that such rewards do not accumulate as family size increases. In fact, the chances of receiving some benefits may decrease as family size increases. The financial costs, on the other hand, can be a force by themselves – as can the many non-financial costs of children.

Are the costs of having children increasing?

The fall in fertility rate has been attributed to a number of rising costs of having children, most particularly direct and indirect financial costs, but also emotional costs relating to giving up paid work and costs that might never eventuate but that nonetheless encourage couples to “think twice” about having children.

Financial and work-related costs

Over time, material living standards have increased in modern societies, with many of yesterday’s perceived luxuries becoming today’s perceived necessities – thus highlighting the importance of values in shaping considerations about whether or not a couple can afford to have children. Indeed, divergent views about the material necessities in life and associated expenditure patterns may partly explain the fact that the people who can least afford it are having the largest families (see de Vaus elsewhere in this edition).
In addition to the direct financial costs of having and raising children (for example, food, clothing, housing, education and possibly child care) are the indirect costs such as reduced earnings and potentially curtailed careers when caring for children takes precedence over paid work. While it appears that the foregone earnings of women who have children have diminished somewhat since the 1980s, when cohorts with the same level of education are compared (Gray and Chapman 2001), women’s improved career opportunities mean that increasing numbers have a great deal to lose should they decide to relinquish full-time work to raise a family. Such losses are emphasised by McDonald (2000a, 2000b) as a central reason for the fall in fertility.

The deprivations are not only monetary, but can be felt in relinquishment of work-related prestige and diminished opportunities for social relationships, job skill development, and mental stimulation and challenge (see Barnes 2000; Perry-Jenkins, Repeti and Crouter 2000). Thus, while the labour market and economic context may encourage the accumulation of educational and career-based accomplishments, the benefits of this pathway may compete with having children as alternative avenues for self-fulfilment (Quenel-Vallee and Morgan 2002).

Parents may, of course, use non-parental child care to enable each partner to remain in full-time work, but this introduces other monetary and time costs, with women typically carrying most of the child care and other domestic responsibilities (Bittman and Pixley 1997; Bittman and Matheson 1996; Moen and Yu 2000). These costs, along with potential difficulties in accessing high quality child care and worries about the suitability of child care for very young children, may contribute to couples’ decisions to have few if any children, or to continue to defer decision-making.

The above issues relate to the “gender equity” explanation for low fertility: McDonald (2000a, 2000b) maintains that, in countries where educational and work opportunities of women are similar to those of men, but are seriously diminished for women if they have a child, then women will have fewer children than they might otherwise have had. In his view, high cost of non-parental child care and tax benefits that operate as disincentives for taking up part-time work combine to encourage women to have small families, as does lack of access to family-friendly work benefits.

While several policies have been introduced to adjust to workers’ caring responsibilities, access to such work benefits appears to vary both between and within organisations (Gray and Tudball 2001). Furthermore, workers with family responsibilities may be reluctant to take advantage of existing benefits if they believe that doing so is likely to cause major disruptions at work, or jeopardise either their career advancement or their relationships with others in the workplace (Judiesch and Lyness 1999; Galinsky 1999; Marshall and Barnet 1993). The prevalence of such hidden barriers in Australia and their relevance to decisions about having children remains uncertain.

But how much value do women attach to paid work? McDonald (2001c) cites research suggesting that women tend to approve of and adopt a gradual return to the labour force as their youngest child grows older. But some authors argue that McDonald gives undue emphasis to the importance of paid work in women’s lives (Hakim 2001; Manne 2001). In the United Kingdom, Hakim (2000) concludes that, while some women are career-centred (giving priority to work rather than raising children) and others are home-centred (giving priority to family and thus preferring not to work), the majority try to achieve a balance between the two. This debate highlights the relevance to fertility trends of values and beliefs about children’s needs, and has sparked lively discussions about the appropriateness of some policies directed towards supporting women (or couples) in their roles as paid workers and parents (see interview with McDonald and Hakim in this edition of Family Matters).

In summary, it seems quite easy to identify many potential financial and work-related costs that may contribute to the falling fertility rate. Most of those discussed above are tangible costs, but the spectre of the intangible may also deter couples from having children, encourage them to postpone starting a family, or defer making decisions about having children.

Dealing with the “unknowns”

McDonald (2000b) points out that economic and non-economic (psychosocial) costs of having children can be difficult to decipher, and that negative “unknowns” may encourage individuals to err on the side of caution. For instance, people may decide against having children because of uncertainties about job stability, housing prices, interest rates, or about chances of returning to paid work should they take time off to care for a child. Some couples may worry about the possible disruptive effects of a child on their relationship, the possibility that this child may follow worrying pathways or be harmed in some way, and the difficulties in coping with raising a child. These worries may be more prevalent than in the past, in line with the arguments of some authors that the social world has become increasingly hostile to the health and wellbeing of children and young people (e.g. Eckersey 1998; Garbarino 1995).

Kohler et al. (2001) point out that postponing having children can reduce some of the uncertainties, such as those relating to financial and relationship stability. They further note that starting a family is irreversible while planning or lack of planning is not. In their view, this situation encourages couples to postpone the decision to have children. Over time, choices thereby become increasingly restricted to having few if any children (and for those who postpone too long, there is no choice).

Costs linked with societal norms and personal values

As already noted, perceptions of the financial costs of children are inextricably linked with people’s values. Allan, Hawker and Crow (2001) maintain that today’s
parents (in Britain and Europe) express greater concern about the quality of their children’s everyday experiences, their emotional development and educational achievement compared with parents in earlier times. Consistent with these observations, Australian time use surveys suggest that parents are investing more time in fewer children (Bittman 2002). Given these issues, children are expensive in terms of time, money and energy.

Others have argued that people have become increasingly concerned about achieving self-realisation, autonomy, and freedom from the bonds of traditional forces, including religion, and that these values are incompatible with parenting (Coleman 1999). It is interesting, though, that in a similar albeit more moralistic vein, the Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birth Rate (the “Mackellar Commission”), established around the turn of the 20th Century to inquire into decline in fertility in New South Wales, concluded that the fall in the birth rate was ultimately caused by “growing selfishness”, as reflected in part by “a love of luxury and of social pleasures” (Hicks 1978: 23). Nevertheless, those who emphasise pursuit of freedom, along with the belief that responsible parenting requires much self-sacrifice, may be deterred from having children.

Changing values attached to children and parenting may also add to the costs of having children. In King’s (2002) opinion, Australian society has become increasingly intolerant of children and parents tend to be disparaged, while in the United States, Crittenden (2001) maintains that a job devoted to nurturing a child full-time tends to be equated with “doing nothing”. The diminishing importance of motherhood in women’s lives is revealed in three Australian surveys. The proportion of married women under the age of 35 who agreed with the statement, “Whatever career a woman may have, her most important role in life is still that of becoming a mother” fell from 78 per cent in 1971 to 46 per cent in 1982 (McDonald 1983), and to 26 per cent in the 1991 Family Formation Project conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Also potentially relevant to decisions about starting a family are prospective parents’ beliefs about whether young children need full-time parenting and, if not, whether they can access suitable child care. Research by Evans and Kelley (2002) suggests that most Australians believe that mothers should stay home full-time to care for children under school age. Under these circumstances, the psychological costs of using non-parental child care for children under school age may be high for some parents. The psychological costs might also be high for working parents who reject the notion that young children need full-time parenting, but who are unhappy about the suitability of services available. According to Wise (2002), parents’ judgments of “suitability” of child care are based on a range of issues, including the warmth displayed by carers, and health and safety issues. She also notes that some of the qualities emphasised by parents vary according to their cultural background.

Drago, Scutella and Varner (2002) have specifically linked fertility with clashes in values. In their opinion, the trend towards part-time work for mothers in Australia reflects the presence of two beliefs that have a negative impact on fertility: that responsible mothering cannot be achieved with full-time work, and that ideal workers are committed to uninterrupted employment involving long work hours. These authors maintain that such beliefs lead many career-oriented women to opt for childlessness.

As mentioned above, the fall in fertility may itself generate social norms that further reinforce the fall – norms that would not necessarily increase the costs of having children. This issue, along with other social effects and personal beliefs that might contribute to the fall in fertility, will be considered next.

Other social influences and personal beliefs

Changing life course patterns that result in small families and childlessness lead to greater tolerance and eventually become “norms”, shaping the expectations and preferences of those entering adulthood. Increasingly, partnering and having children have become “choices” rather than inevitable pathways in life. Furthermore, as family size falls, those who decide to have children will be increasingly likely to restrict their choice between having only one or two children.

The decision to delay having a family may also be influenced by beliefs about the success of assisted reproductive technology as women (and men) age. Successes, not failures, tend to be publicised. Little is known about the prevalence of such beliefs, how they may have shifted with technological advances, and their impact on fertility decision-making.

The experiences of personal friends and other associates are also likely to play a major role in influencing family formation decisions. In fact, Kohler et al. (2001) argue that the tendency of prospective parents to draw on the experiences of others in their social networks has contributed to the postponement of decision-making and, consequently, low fertility rates. They maintain that prospective parents prefer to wait until they get a good idea of how others fare. But this takes time thus further delaying the decision.

When couples disagree

Given all the above trends that may discourage childbearing, it is increasingly likely that at least one partner will either want to remain childless or will want to defer having children. What happens when couples disagree?

As Greene and Biddlecom (1997) note, most discussion of fertility trends ignore men and the couple dynamics. There is thus scant information about the reasons for, or consequences of, divergent preferences of partners regarding total family size, whether or not to have a first or additional child, or the timing of the next child. Little is also known about the ways in which couples resolve their differences.

The few studies that have taken into account the views of each partner suggest that men’s preferences or expectations do influence childbearing outcomes. For instance, Thomson (1997a, 1997b) found that when couples disagree about having children, intentions tend to shift towards not having a child, while Greene and Biddlecom (2000) cite evidence suggesting that a difference in opinion over the timing of the (next) birth are particularly influential in determining whether or not a couple has a child.
Conclusion

Australia's total fertility rate is well below replacement level, is at an all-time low, and is continuing on a downward slide. This trend has created considerable angst, given its contribution to the ageing of the population and the projection that, if the rate falls below 1.6, the population will decline this century (ABS 2000).

Of course, not everyone agrees that the economic and social consequences for Australia of this scenario are necessarily dire. For example, Hamilton (2002: 1) argues that: “Population growth will not make us richer in economic terms and it will almost certainly make us poorer in terms of environmental amenity.”

Nevertheless, if the master plan is to prevent total fertility from falling below 1.6, then we need to have a good understanding of the factors at play that are driving the birth rate down. These factors are complex and often mutually reinforcing, with fundamental ones being postponement of first births and consequent shortened childbearing years and increased risk of childlessness. The factors appear to include broad technological, structural, cultural and social changes, shifting pathways of friends and associates, changes in personal financial and life course circumstances, and shifts in beliefs and values of prospective parents.

However, there is a great deal of controversy about the relative importance of some issues, such as “gender equity” considerations and women's work preferences, and little is known about other issues, such as men's contribution to childbearing decisions and the impact on future childbearing of disagreements between partners. Furthermore, the nature and relative importance of forces deterring couples from having children will vary somewhat for different sub-groups in the population, and understanding these sub-group differences is a long way off.

Under these circumstances, it is little wonder that governments are struggling to develop policies that might curtail the falling birth rate. Perhaps the greatest hope stems from the fact that, despite all the known and uncertain forces operating against having children, most people want to become parents (Fisher 2002) and it appears that prospective parents are well informed about this matter. But they also need solid evidence that assures them that parenting will not close off all other avenues for a rewarding life, and that there will be much assistance from multiple sources (extended families, schools, neighbourhoods, communities, governments) in rearing the next generation.

Fertility Decision Making Project

The Australian Institute of Family Studies has joined in a partnership with the Office for the Status of Women, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, to conduct a study that will lead to a greater understanding of the reasons underlying the fertility decisions of men and women, both individuals and couples – the Fertility Decision Making Project.

A national random sample of approximately 2,500 people between the ages of 20 and 39 years will be selected to participate in phone interviews. Both retrospective and prospective data will be gathered in order to compare respondents' views of their past preferences with their current circumstances, desires, intentions, reproductive behaviour (use of contraception, sterilisation, terminations), and their expectations for the future.

The study focuses on the following themes and issues:

- the extent to which men and women have clear preferences and make firm decisions;
- the change in fertility preferences and decisions by age group;
- the relationship element in fertility preferences and decisions;
- the gender dimension of fertility preferences and decisions;
- the perceived costs, benefits and risks, including employment related and financial issues, that men and women consider in developing fertility preferences and in making decisions; and
- the outcomes of the fertility decision-making process.

The project is currently in the planning and development stage, with interviews expected to commence in April 2003.

For further information about the Fertility Decision Making Project, contact Ruth Weston or Robyn Parker, researchers with the Family and Marriage Program at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

REFERENCES


Ruth Weston is a Principal Research Fellow and Head of the Family and Marriage Program at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Robyn Parker is a Senior Research Officer in the Institute’s Family and Marriage Program.
The declining birth rate is a major factor in population ageing and also has important implications for the way families function, for the economy and society more generally, and for issues of environmental sustainability.

Although fertility decline has been apparent for some time, it has only recently been taken seriously by policy makers. However, as the baby boomer generation ages, the workforce shrinks and health care and income support costs increase, the implications of a low birth rate are becoming more evident. Fertility decline also has economic and institutional implications. Population growth has traditionally been a key source of economic growth, and concern has been widely expressed that without steady population growth, economic growth will stall. Fertility decline also has substantial implications for age based social institutions such as schools and universities where fewer children will mean reduced demand for places.

The purpose of this article is to sketch some of the dimensions of fertility decline in Australia. It will briefly describe the extent to which fertility levels have declined and then describe the groups in society where fertility rates are relatively low. Since the paper by Castles in this issue of Family Matters deals with some of the international dimensions of fertility change, this article focuses on Australian patterns.

Fertility levels and trends

Australia has experienced almost uninterrupted fertility decline since 1961. This decline has occurred in three main phases (Figure 1). The first phase from 1961 to the mid-1970s was a period of sharp and dramatic decline when the fertility rate dropped from 3.55 in 1961 to 2.15 in 1975 – a decline of 1.4 children per woman in just 15 years. The second phase was a period of relative stability in the 1980s when the fertility rate fluctuated between 1.84 and 1.92. The third and current phase, which began in the early 1990s, is a period of gradual fertility decline from 1.91 in 1990 to 1.73 in 2001. Overall, the fertility rate has halved from 3.55 to 1.73 in a period of just 40 years.

Changes in fertility do not occur in isolation from other social, cultural and economic changes. Although it is often difficult to establish cause and effect patterns, the three modern phases of Australian fertility decline were accompanied by parallel developments. The first period of sharp decline began at the same time as the oral contraceptive pill became widely available. The second and third periods occurred at the same time as the labour force participation of married women and mothers increased, when both men and women began to marry later, when cohabitation became more common, when school retention rates improved and more people went on to tertiary education, and when the nature of the workforce changed markedly, especially for younger people.

The impact of fertility decline depends partly on the rate of decline and the level to which fertility declines. Sharp and rapid decline will have a different impact from gradual decline. While institutions and the economy may adjust to a gradual decline in numbers, it is much more difficult for institutions to adjust to a rapid fertility decline.

The other element of fertility decline is the level to which fertility drops. Australia’s total fertility rate (TFR) in 2001 was 1.73. The total fertility rate indicates the number of children a woman will have if she experiences the current age-specific fertility rates at each age of her reproductive life. Demographers frequently focus on replacement level fertility, or the estimated number of children a woman would need to have in her lifetime to replace herself and her partner. They estimate that in order to maintain a stable population size over
the longer term each woman needs to have, on average, 2.1 children. Fertility levels below this rate will lead, in the longer term, to population decline. Australia’s fertility rate fell below this replacement level in 1976 for the first time in the 20th century and has continued to decline thereafter.

Australia’s below replacement fertility level is hardly unique among the developed economies (see Castles elsewhere in this issue). Of all the OECD countries, only Turkey and Mexico have above replacement fertility, and the United States, with a fertility level of 1.9 (ABS 2002a), has the next highest fertility level. Indeed, with a fertility level of 1.73, Australia has a relatively high fertility level among the OECD nations.

### Number of children

Total fertility rates provide a picture of average fertility. However, averages do not allow us to answer important questions about the components of fertility decline. How much of the decline is because more women are remaining childless? How much is because women who are still having children are avoiding having large families? Is the decline because single-child families are becoming popular?

Identifying the components of fertility decline can help focus on some of the factors that might lie behind the decline. The reasons for remaining childless are likely to be very different from those that lead a woman to have three rather than five children. Accordingly, any action designed to have an impact on fertility levels needs to be targeted at the particular components that contribute to fertility decline.

#### Childlessness

Childlessness may be voluntary or involuntary, although the line between these two routes to childlessness can be rather blurred. It is estimated that approximately 7 per cent of couples of reproductive age are infertile (ABS 2002b). The rate at which couples are infertile increases with age – especially that of the woman.

Levels of childlessness are estimated in different ways. One way is to base estimates on women who have completed their childbearing. This is achieved by observing the levels of childlessness among women aged 45-49 years. However, these estimates do not reflect the patterns of women currently of reproductive age and thus they provide an

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**Figure 1** Total fertility rates, Australia, 1920-2001

![Graph showing Total fertility rates, Australia, 1920-2001](image)

Source: ABS Social trends, 1996 and ABS Births, 2001 Australia, ABS cat no.3301.0. The total fertility rate represents the number of children a woman would bear during her lifetime if she experienced current age-specific fertility rates at each age of her reproductive life.

**Figure 2** Proportion of females who were childless at age 45-49 years

![Graph showing Proportion of females who were childless at age 45-49 years](image)

Figure 2 reports the levels of childlessness among women aged 45-49 who were born between 1901 to 1957 as reported by Rowland (1998). This figure shows high levels of childlessness (31 per cent) among women born at the beginning of the century, who experienced the Great Depression in their early thirties and who had completed their childbearing by 1950-1955. These rates of childlessness declined steadily and reached their lowest level among women born between 1930 and 1945 of whom less than 10 per cent remained childless. Rates of childlessness among women born since the World War II have gradually increased and, as indicated above, are projected to increase yet further. If these projections are correct, the rates of childlessness will return to levels close to those evident among women born a century earlier.

Larger families

The propensity of women to have larger families is an important component of the fertility rate. The decreasing number of women having large families has played a major role in fertility decline. The falling off in the total fertility rate since 1960 has been accompanied by a reduction in the number of women having five or more children. In 1960, almost 12 per cent of children born were the fifth or subsequent child born to the mother. Since then this percentage has steadily fallen away so that by 1996 just 2.3 per cent of births were fifth or higher order births.

One reason why the Australian total fertility rate is not as low as that in many parts of Europe is that Australian women are still more inclined than European women to have more than two children (McDonald 1998). McDonald estimates that if the Australian women who have more than two children reduced their fertility to just two (like their typical European counterparts) the total fertility rate would drop to 1.4 (McDonald 1998).

The importance of these relatively fertile women for the overall fertility rate is reflected in McDonald’s (1998) estimate that today’s younger women who have more than two children reduced their fertility to just two (like their typical European counterparts) the total fertility rate would drop to 1.4 (McDonald 1998).

The importance of these relatively fertile women for the overall fertility rate is that women are starting families later. The sharp fertility decline from 1960-1975, followed by a period of relative stability in the 1980s and then gradual
decline again in the 1990s partly reflects this pattern. Carmichael and McDonald (1999) note that the period of relative stability in the 1980s was because the women who had delayed having children in their twenties (and thus contributed to the fertility decline) had babies in their thirties. This delayed fertility masked the fact that there was continuing fertility decline among women in their twenties.

Two sets of data bear directly on the question of fertility decline versus fertility delay. The first set of information is the average family size of women who have completed their families. Table 1 reports the average number of children born to women aged 45 and over. It shows that the average number of children to which women give birth is declining. Those women who had most recently completed their childbearing period (women aged 45-49) had an average of 2.3 children. Older women who therefore completed their families in earlier years had a higher average number of children. Fertility for women aged 50-54 was 2.4 and 2.7 and 2.8 for the older age groups.

The difference in the number of children of these younger and older women represents true fertility decline that is not attributable to childbearing delays - in this case there is a fertility decline of 0.5 of a child per woman in just 15 years (from 2.8 for those aged 60-64 to 2.3 for those aged 45-49).

The other set of evidence that relates to the issue of fertility decline versus fertility delay are the age related fertility rates. Figure 4 displays the age specific fertility rates for three younger groups of women – those aged 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29 years. In all three age groups the fertility rate has declined since 1960. The sharpest fertility declines were among those in their early twenties. In 1960, 220 per 1,000 women aged 20-24 gave birth to a child in that year. By 2000 this rate had fallen to a quarter of the 1960 level, with just 58 women per 1,000 in this age group giving birth in 2001. The decline among women in their late twenties was also sharp but not as dramatic. In 1960, 216 per 1,000 women in their late twenties gave birth. By 2001, this had halved to 104 births per 1,000 women.

The pattern of fertility decline for women aged 30 or over is quite different from that for younger women (Figure 5). From 1960 to 1975 the fertility rate of these older women declined, but at a much more subdued rate than among younger women. After 1975 the fertility rate of these older women reversed and began to increase – albeit at a gentle rate. This pattern suggests that some of the fertility decline in the 1960-1975 period was due to delaying births. The effect of this is evident in the increased fertility of older women after 1975 and the subsequent slowing rate of overall fertility decline.

However, the fertility decline cannot simply be explained by fertility delays. The increase in fertility among women aged 30 and over is nowhere near enough to compensate for the rate of decline among younger women. The fact that between 1960 and 2001 the fertility rates have dropped in all age groups attests to the fact that a substantial part of the change in fertility rates is due to fertility decline rather than just fertility delay.

Who has the babies?

Fertility behaviour must be understood within a social and cultural context. Not all women want or have children, and the number of children women both want and have varies somewhat depending on the social context in which they live. Fertility change also must be understood within the wider context of social and economic changes such as increasing educational participation of women, extended periods of training for both men and women, the changing nature and increased instability of relationships, greater female labour force participation and changing individual and cultural values and aspirations.

One part of understanding fertility patterns is to identify which groups of women are having no children, and those who are having more than the

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<th>Figure 4</th>
<th>Age specific fertility rates, women aged 15-29, 1960-2001</th>
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<td>[Graph showing age specific fertility rates for women aged 15-29, 1960-2001]</td>
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<th>Figure 5</th>
<th>Age specific fertility rates, women aged 30-44, 1960-2001</th>
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<td>[Graph showing age specific fertility rates for women aged 30-44, 1960-2001]</td>
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<th>Figure 6</th>
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normal number of children. While identifying which types of women have few children and which have large families does not tell us what the causes of low or high fertility might be, it can nevertheless point us in the direction of factors that may encourage or discourage fertility.

This section focuses on fertility differences according to the age, country of birth and indigenous status of mothers, social and economic disadvantage and where they live.

Age

Age-specific fertility rates provide a useful snapshot of the ages at which women are most likely to have children. Figure 6 shows that childbirth is concentrated within a fairly narrow age band. In 2001, fertility rates were highest among women in their late twenties and early thirties. The year 2001

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<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Number of children ever born to women aged 45-49 by marital status 1996</th>
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<td>Separated/divorced</td>
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<td>Never married</td>
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<td><strong>Social marital status</strong></td>
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<td>Married</td>
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<td>Not married</td>
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Source: ABS 1996 Census 1 per cent Confidentialised Unit Record File. Those recoded in 1 per cent sample file as having 4 or more children are treated as, on average, having had 4.5 children.

Table 3 Number of children ever born to women aged 45-49 by mothers education, 1996

| Mean | No child % | One child % | 4 or more % | N    |
|------|           |            |             |      |
| No qualifications | 2.4  | 8.8      | 9.4         | 16.2  | 3837 |
| Vocational | 2.3  | 10.1     | 11.6        | 9.4   | 464  |
| Diploma | 2.2  | 11.8     | 11.8        | 12.7  | 584  |
| Degree or higher | 2.0  | 18.0     | 12.2        | 7.8   | 817  |

Source: ABS 1996 Census 1 per cent Confidentialised Unit Record File. Those recoded in 1 per cent sample file as having 4 or more children are treated as, on average, having had 4.5 children.

Figure 7 Fertility by social and economic disadvantage of region


It is hardly surprising that Table 2 shows that married women have more children than those who have never married. Nor is it surprising that married women aged 45-49 have more children on average than similarly aged divorced or widowed women. However, it is instructive to note that women who have never married have nevertheless had, on average, 0.4 children. This translates to 22 per cent of never married women having had at least one child.

The same table also indicates that women aged 45-49 who are currently in de facto marriages have fewer children than those in registered marriages (1.9 compared with 2.5 children). This reflects the fact that 20 per cent of women aged 45-49 in de facto relationships have no children at all. The lower fertility of women in this age bracket who live in de facto relationships may indicate that men and women in de facto relationships want fewer children. This may be because they are less keen on having children or because they are less confident in the stability of the relationship, or because deciding not to formally marry and not to have children is a deliberate choice about the way in which such couples wish to live.

Social and economic disadvantage

Fertility is lower among women who are in relatively advantaged social and economic positions. This pattern can be seen from a number of sets of evidence.
First, the higher a woman’s education the fewer children she has. Table 3 shows the distinctive fertility levels of women with a university degree, especially compared to those with no post-school qualification. Women aged 45-49 with a degree were twice as likely than those with no qualification to be childless (18 per cent compared with 8.8 per cent). Conversely, women with a degree were only half as likely as those without a qualification to have four or more children (7.8 per cent compared with 16.3 per cent).

This link between education and number of children is probably a two-way link. Having more children may reflect a poorer range of choices for those women with lower education. It also probably reflects the fact that having children at a younger age makes it more difficult to complete or continue with one’s education.

Further evidence of a link between fertility and social and economic disadvantage comes from the higher fertility levels in the more socially and economically disadvantaged areas of the country. Using the ABS (1998b) classification of Social and Economic Disadvantage (SEIFA index), areas can be grouped into ten deciles. These decile groups are ranked from the 10 per cent of regions that are the most disadvantaged through to the 10 per cent that are the least disadvantaged (Figure 7).

This figure shows that the least disadvantaged areas have the lowest fertility rate (under 1.6). The fertility rate steadily increases as the region becomes more socially and economically disadvantaged. The fertility in the second most disadvantaged regions (ninth decile group) is over 2.

The higher fertility rate in the more disadvantaged regions should not be attributed only to the higher levels of social disadvantage in these areas. Areas have different population profiles, age and ethnic mix and the like, and these factors, as well as levels of social and economic disadvantage, may contribute to the higher fertility levels in the poorer regions.

**Ethnicity and indigenous status**

Ethnic and racial background are also associated with family size (Table 4). Women aged 45-49 who were born in New Zealand, Western Europe and Asia (except Vietnam) have the smallest families with an average of about 2.1 children. New Zealand born women are especially likely to have no children at all (21 per cent).

The highest fertility was among women born in the Middle East and North Africa where the average woman had 2.7 children. Middle Eastern women were also the most likely to have large families – 28 per cent had four or more children.

Australian born women, together with those born in the United Kingdom and Southern Europe had fertility levels between these extremes. Australian born women aged 45-48 had an average of 2.3 children (higher than projected for women still in their reproductive years) and around 10 per cent were childless.

Indigenous Australian women, on average, have larger families than non-indigenous women (Table 4). In 1996, indigenous women aged 45-49 had an average of 3.1 children compared with the 2.3 children borne by other women.

Indigenous women had distinctive patterns of fertility. Just 6 per cent had no children (compared with 10.5 per cent for non-indigenous women). However, the sharpest difference between indigenous and other women was the percentage that had four or more children. While 14 per cent of non-indigenous women had four or more children, over a third (36 per cent) of indigenous women had this many children. However, higher infant mortality rates among

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<td><strong>Mother’s country of birth</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle east/ North Africa</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Europe</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asia</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mother’s indigenous status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non indigenous</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 1996 Census 1 per cent Confidentialised Unit Record File. Those recoded in 1 per cent sample file as having 4 or more children are treated as, on average, having had 4.5 children.

**Figure 8** Fertility rate by location in state

**Figure 9** Fertility rate by remoteness
indigenous children will mean that there will not be such a stark gap between indigenous and non-indigenous women in their number of living children.

**Location**

Where people live is linked to their fertility levels. Women living in capital cities have a lower fertility rate than those living elsewhere. Figure 8 indicates that in each state women living in capital cities have a fertility rate of between 0.3 and 0.5 children lower than elsewhere.

These differences between the capital city and other rates will be due to a variety of factors including a different population mix in different regions. In the Northern Territory, for example, the indigenous population outside Darwin will contribute to the higher fertility in the rest of the Territory. Education levels, job opportunities and cohabitation rates are also higher in capital cities and these will undoubtedly be part of the reason for lower rates of capital city fertility.

The part played by access to educational, employment and other services is partly captured by the link between remoteness and fertility. The ABS has constructed the ARIA index to indicate the remoteness of a location from major population centers. Using this index, Figure 9 shows a clear link between remoteness and fertility. In the most remote areas the total fertility rate is 2.28 compared to that in the most accessible locations where the total fertility rate is 1.65.

**Desired versus actual number of children**

While it may once have been the case that many women ended up having more children than they wanted, the ready availability of contraception should mean that most men and women are able to avoid having more children than they want. More to the point, the competing demands of work and children, relationship breakdown and disagreement among partners, as well as fertility difficulties due to delaying having children, may mean that some men and women do not have as many children as they ideally want (Qu, Weston and Kilmartin 2000; Qu and Weston 2001).

The World Values Survey of 1995-1997 asked Australian men and women how many children they had and how many they had wanted. Table 5 reports the match between the ideal number and the actual number of children among men and women aged 45 and over.

The table shows that the patterns for men and women are remarkably similar. Just over 50 per cent of those aged 45 and over had their desired number of children; overall men and women of this age group had smaller families than they originally wanted, with younger men and women (those aged 45-54) being the most likely to have their desired number of children. Two-thirds of women in this age group had their desired number of children compared to just over 40 per cent of women aged 65 or over. Almost a quarter of men and women aged 45-54 had fewer children than they ideally wanted, and only 11 per cent of women and 14 per cent of men aged 45-54 had more children than they wanted.

In the past, considerable effort has been given to helping women control their fertility and limit the number of children they have. The observation that almost a quarter of women who have completed their childbearing have fewer children than they ideally wanted points to the need to understand the barriers to achieving these fertility goals.

**Concluding comments**

Australian fertility has reached an historical low point. Some people are alarmed at this low and declining fertility rate because of its social and economic implications. Others welcome it because of the link between population pressures and environmental degradation.
The policy levers that are available to governments to influence fertility are limited. To the extent that fertility reflects personal value preferences and lifestyle choices governments only have a very limited role to play in influencing values and preferences. Furthermore, declining fertility levels can reflect other positive changes in our society including better education and a wider range of choices for women. It would be both wrong and unacceptable to reduce opportunities for women with a view to increasing fertility.

However, preferences can be influenced by the barriers that discourage having children. The role of policy should be to enable couples to have the number of children they choose. This may mean that policy will support proper family planning to limit family size where desired, and to remove barriers and disincentives to having the desired number of children.

Some barriers to fertility are not within the domain of policy to influence – for example, there is relatively little that policy can do to encourage men and women to either want a partner or to find a suitable partner. While relationship education and support services can assist people in developing and sustaining relationships there are nevertheless limits to the extent to which these programs can alter the wider patterns of changes in partnering.

However, there are some disincentives that social policy can address. These disincentives include the financial costs of rearing a child and the opportunity costs for women in taking time out of the workforce. Industrial relations policies that encourage family-friendly work practices and taxation structures that do not penalise parents, especially single income families, are all part of the mix that may remove some of the barriers to fertility.

However, we still know too little about exactly what the barriers and disincentives to fertility are. We know that at a macro level changes in fertility are associated with other macro level social, economic and cultural changes (see Castles in this issue). But as well as understanding the structural, demographic and social context in which fertility occurs, there is a need to understand the decisions individuals make about having children. While these decisions occur within a broad social, economic and cultural context, individuals still make decisions.

A better understanding of fertility decision making must add this subjective dimension in order to gain a fuller grasp of the factors behind declining fertility rates. A number of studies in which the Australian Institute of Family Studies is currently involved will add to this knowledge base. These include a joint study being conducted with the Office of the Status of Women, the HILDA panel survey (see article by Weston and Wooden in this issue), and the Australian Temperament Project (see article by Smart in this issue). When we have a better appreciation of how individuals make (or do not make) their fertility decisions we will be in a better position to identify the types of policies that will enable men and women to achieve the levels of fertility they desire.

Notes

1 This is in the situation in which there is no net migration. Migration can help sustain stable population levels when fertility rates are below 2.1. However, McDonald and Kippen (2000) and others have argued that, when the fertility levels decline to those currently seen in Australia and many European countries, the levels of migration required to maintain a stable population are either unachievable or may be politically unacceptable and potentially socially divisive. Furthermore, McDonald and Kippen maintain that immigration does not have much impact on the population age structure.

2 Those born in 1957 would have reached the end of their childbearing years by 1996 census

3 This is the actual number of children born by women in this age group. It is higher than the projected fertility rate of 1.72 which is estimated from current fertility levels across the age group of women of reproductive age.

4 Although some of the actual fertility decline may result from infertility that results from delaying childbearing.

5 This estimate from the 1% per cent sample file is subject to sampling error because of small numbers. The full census indicates that the actual figure is 3.24 (ABS 2001).

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Three facts about fertility

CROSS-NATIONAL LESSONS FOR THE CURRENT DEBATE

In a world where socio-economic and cultural patterns are usually slow to change, there has been a radical reversal in the traditional factors that influence levels of fertility.

The current debate on below-replacement fertility, and the policy instruments Australia might adopt to tackle the problem, is both welcome and confused.

The debate is welcome because, with some exceptions in the work of Peter McDonald and his colleagues at the Australian National University, such a debate is long overdue. Australia’s fertility rate has been at below-replacement level for more than two decades now, and the possibility that this is in some way linked to the weak development of family-friendly public policies in this country is clearly an hypothesis which merits investigation.

The debate is confused because the main protagonists frequently offer quite different accounts of recent fertility trends, of the factors shaping fertility behaviour, and of the linkages between fertility and public policy. Sometimes commentators appear to be contradicting each other; at other times, they appear to be talking past each other.

In this debate, appeals are frequently made to cross-national experience. That is sensible because other countries offer us natural experiments of the probable impact of alternative policies. Before we adopt paid maternity leave, or increase public spending on child care, it is worth considering the experience of countries that have already done these things.

However, most appeals to cross-national experience are made on an exemplary rather than an exhaustive basis. Commentators choose the countries they discuss with an eye to making the cases of which they hope to persuade us. This itself is a potent reason why much of the current debate is both confusing and contradictory.

This paper seeks to supply a corrective to this tendency. The object, too, is to examine the cross-national evidence in order to provide a context to the debate on fertility change and public policy. However, rather than taking an exemplary and hence essentially anecdotal approach, this paper seeks to be more systematic, highlighting the conclusions that emerge from looking at the experience of the widest possible range of countries with which it is reasonable to compare Australia.

In what follows, evidence from 21 OECD countries is used to describe the recent trajectory of fertility change in advanced industrialised countries, to identify changes in the nature of the trade-off between work and family in these countries, and to establish which of a wide variety of family-friendly policy measures is most conducive to high levels of fertility. The paper argues that this evidence points to three extremely significant facts about contemporary fertility patterns that must be taken...
into account in debating the sources of population decline, and the most appropriate policies for combating this trend.

The trajectory of change

Table 1 (over page) describes the trajectory of change in period total fertility rates in 21 OECD countries in the period 1960–1998. These countries are grouped into Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, continental Western European and Southern European “families of nations”, with Switzerland and Japan unclassified in these terms. All of these countries are advanced industrial societies and the comparisons in this paper relate only to differences and contrasts within this group of countries.

Throughout the period, Australia has been in the top half of the OECD fertility level distribution: fifth in 1960; eighth in 1980; and equal fifth in 1998. However, although Australia neither is nor has been a low fertility country by international standards for developed countries, its fertility has certainly declined. In 1960, its fertility rate was 3.48, 70 per cent or so above the 2.08 level required for population replacement. However, already by 1980, in common with the vast majority of other OECD nations, the Australian fertility level was well below replacement level. Since 1980, the Australian fertility rate has continued to fall, standing, in 1998, at 1.76 and most recently at 1.70.

A recent United Nations report (2001) suggests that countries with period total fertility rates above 1.60 may be able to avoid the most serious consequences of population decline by means of migration and increased labour force participation. Australia is not yet in the danger zone where such remedies are unavailable, but may well be moving quite rapidly in that direction.

Some demographers have questioned whether period total fertility rates are a good guide to birth-rate trends over the long term. Unlike cohort fertility rates, period rates are responsive not only to changed fertility preferences, but also to changes in the timing of births. In all western countries, family formation is getting later and it has been suggested that some of these deferred births will later be made up. To the extent that this is so, period fertility rates will exaggerate the trajectory of fertility decline. It seems most unlikely, however, that anything like the total shortfall below replacement levels can be explained in this way (Lesthaeghe and Willems 1999; McDonal 2002). OECD average fertility levels at 1.59 are already below the United Nations danger-point, and the trajectory of overall decline has been maintained over recent decades even if it is nothing like as extreme as in the decades 1960–1980.

There has been much speculation on the causes of fertility decline in western nations, with the dominant demographic paradigm being that of a “demographic
transition” in which declining infant mortality makes it possible for parents to have fewer children without reducing the number surviving to adulthood (Chesnais, 1992; van de Kaa, 1996). This explains fertility decline to at and around replacement level, but not the recently observed tendency for decline to continue well below that level. Theoretical explanations of this phenomenon are primarily economic, alternatively stressing the increased opportunity costs of fertility for women with high levels of investment in education and career (Becker 1991), or the increasing financial rewards that result from postponing family formation (Easterlin and Crimmins 1991).

However, as we shall see in the next section, the cross-national evidence does not provide prima facie support for these economic hypotheses. Rather, as shown in Figure 1, patterns of fertility decline manifest a massively convergent character over time, with a country’s trajectory of fertility change in the period 1960–1998 substantially inversely proportional to its level of fertility in 1960. That is, the higher the fertility rate in 1960, the greater was its decline by 1998.

The most persuasive explanation for convergence on this scale – a downward trend in fertility in all countries markedly reducing initial cross-national differences – is the progressive adoption of clinical and supply methods of contraception in the advanced countries of the West after 1960, the year in which the contraceptive pill first became available in the United States (Castles 1998).

The sequencing of this trend fits very well with what we know about the diffusion of contraceptive methods. In the period 1960–1980, fertility decline was almost exactly inversely proportional to initial fertility levels across the OECD except in Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain, countries in which religious and legal prohibitions delayed the adoption of such methods. After 1980, substantial fertility decline was restricted to just these four countries which, during this period, relaxed prohibitions on the use and supply of this technology. The sheer strength of the relationship reported in Figure 1, explaining no less than 84 per cent of cross-national variance, argues for the impact of a variable with effects inherently proportional to the initial distribution. Economic variables do not have this characteristic, but the introduction of contraceptive technology does, since the higher the initial level of fertility, the greater the potential of contraceptive technology to reduce it.

This is the first fact about fertility revealed by cross-national analysis: that the pattern of fertility decline has been convergent and almost certainly explicable in terms of the introduction of a technology that for the first time conferred on women the power to control their own fertility – a development that Dr Catherine Hakim (2000) sees as crucial to changing preferences for work and family in contemporary society in recent decades.

It suggests two obvious conclusions. The first is that the 45 per cent reduction in fertility experienced by OECD countries over the past four decades will not be easy to reverse, since the key underlying mechanism is irreversible. No democratic government could possibly restrict the sale and use of contraception on any substantial scale. The second is that any leverage that governments may have on fertility rates must come from changing the parameters within which women (or couples) exercise their choices concerning levels of fertility. When women control their own fertility, it is their preferences which translate into outcomes, and it is their responses which determine the effectiveness of family-friendly policy initiatives.

Factors shaping fertility

An important reason for confusion in this area is how much things have changed and how quickly. Because the convergence pattern noted previously took place in two stages, it involved a series of major reversals in fertility leaders and laggards. In 1960, it was Anglo-Saxon baby-boom countries that had the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Period total fertility rates in 21 OECD countries, 1960, 1980, 1998, and change over time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>4.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family mean</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family mean</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>2.73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2.41</td>
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<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>3.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family mean</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>2.28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family mean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall mean</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 1: Convergent trajectory of fertility 1960–1998
highest rates of fertility in the advanced world. Two decades later, because of late contraceptive adoption in Ireland and Southern Europe, it was these countries which were in the vanguard, with the countries of Scandinavia well in the rearguard. Two decades later there had been another great reversal (see Chesnais, 1996). Southern Europe was now at the foot of the league-table, with the Anglo-Saxon countries again exhibiting the highest average levels of fertility, but with the Scandinavian countries close behind. Indeed, Scandinavia actually exhibited a slight upwards trend in fertility during this period. Table 1 suggests that Sweden was an exception to this trend, but that is more apparent than real. Between 1980 and 1993, the Swedish fertility rate increased from 1.68 to 2.13, a level second only to that of Ireland, only to fall precipitously during the course of Sweden’s worst labour market decline since the Depression of the 1930s.

However, even more dramatic than changes in cross-national patterns of fertility are changes in the apparent relationships between those patterns and a range of factors widely seen as shaping the incidence of fertility in western nations. Most of us were brought up to associate high levels of fertility with traditional values stressing the primacy of the family, and with a traditional gender division of labour in the workplace. According to this story, fertility rates were likely to be highest where religious values supported the family and where women’s participation in the labour force was low. This is no longer the case. Chesnais (1996) has pointed out that fertility now tends to be lowest in countries “still commonly labelled as traditional, Catholic, and family oriented.”

Monnier and de Guibert-Lantoine (1996) note that fertility is highest in the countries with the highest divorce rates, the highest rates of cohabitation, and the greatest levels of extra-marital fertility. Esping-Andersen (1999), Castles (1998), and the OECD (1999) have all identified a similar reversal in the sphere of labour market behaviour, with high levels of fertility occurring precisely in those countries where women’s labour force participation is greatest. The extent to which these changes have transformed our understanding of the factors shaping fertility can be gauged from the figures in Table 2 which report correlations between fertility rates in 1980 and 1998 and a range of indicators of traditional cultural values and non-traditional labour market structures.

Some of these are direct measures of women’s labour force participation, with female tertiary education, service employment and low female unemployment serving as more indirect proxies of expanded female employment opportunities. In 1980, all the reported relationships fit with conventional notions that family-oriented cultural values and a traditional labour market structure are conducive to high levels of fertility. Many of the relationships are strong, with no less than five of them proving to be statistically significant. Only 18 years later, every single relationship has changed sign, indicative of a world in which fertility is now associated with weak family-oriented values and high levels of female employment opportunity.

Nor are the shifts small. All seven of the reported relationships are statistically significant. Five involve changes from statistically significant negative to statistically positive relationships or vice versa. In a world where socio-economic and cultural patterns are usually slow to change, the world of fertility has almost literally been turned upside down in a matter of decades.

This complete reversal of the patterns of traditional factors that influence levels of fertility is the second fact about fertility change revealed by cross-national analysis. It is hugely significant because such a change can only readily be explained by a change in preferences among women (and couples) concerning the desired trade-off between work and family.

Traditional relationships of the kind reported in the first column of Table 2 make sense in a world where there is widespread acceptance that work and family are inimical, and that for women it is family that has the highest priority. In such a world, traditional values encourage women to stay at home, to avoid workforce participation and to have large families. The kinds of relationships reported in the second column of Table 2 make sense only in a world where most women wish to work and where the trade-off issues they must consider involve the possibility, practicability and timing of combining work and family. This “brave new world” is a natural outcome of economic and educational changes...
that have increased women's opportunities relative to those of men, and to the technological transformation already discussed which has made it possible for women to control their fertility.

The consequence is a reversal of much of the standard logic by which we comprehend the choices confronting couples in contemporary societies. The standard assumption is that more work means less fertility. As revealed by the relationships in the second column of Table 2, the truth is that the greater the availability of women’s work (more female labour force participation, female employment, service jobs), the easier it is for women to get that work (higher levels of women's employment and lower levels of women's unemployment), and the weaker the voices (including those of policy-makers) telling women that work and family are incompatible (low salience of traditional values), the more likely it is that the birth-rate will be relatively high.

In a world where women's work is an economic necessity and a cultural preference, factors promoting women’s work are simultaneously and necessarily factors promoting higher national levels of fertility.

Which policies work best?

Women’s preferences do not work in a vacuum but are shaped by the policy context in which they occur. A major confusion in the debate is about which policies are most family-friendly. Some policies encourage fertility by making it financially easier for women to leave the labour force to have children. Child benefits, wages for housework and generous maternity leave arrangements with no commitment to return to the labour force all have such an emphasis. Other policies make it easier for women to combine work and family. Policies leading to low-cost child care are the most obvious measures in this category, but also important are policies promoting flexible working hours and linking maternity/parental leave to return to the labour force.

Arguably, in a world where women’s (and couple’s) preferences are for combining work and family, it is policies of the latter type that are properly to be regarded as family-friendly in character, because, in their absence, families, and in particular large families, are likely to be relatively few and far between.

An obvious empirical question hitherto virtually unaddressed in the literature is which policies lead to the highest fertility rates?

The absence of research in this area has largely been due to a lack of adequate data on cross-national variance in family policy measures. In particular, it has been extremely difficult to procure information on aspects of the policy environment only indirectly shaped by the actions of government – for instance, on the availability and cost of child care provided by the market and the voluntary sector, and the flexibility of working arrangements in the private sector. Fortunately, such data are now becoming more available and the latest OECD (2000) survey of factors shaping work and family life makes it possible to examine linkages between a wide range of policy instruments and fertility outcomes.

The correlations reported in Table 3 on the links between family policy and fertility are extremely interesting. They reveal that, on the whole, government expenditures on families and on maternity leave are not linked to higher levels of fertility. Indeed, they show that high replacement rates for maternity leave tend to be associated with lower levels of fertility – a finding probably best understood as a consequence of a tendency of governments concerned about low rates of fertility to use maternity leave as an instrument to persuade women to leave the labour force to have children.

Arguably, the Australian government’s present interest in such measures can also be interpreted in such terms. The findings also show that government expenditure on child care is not of itself enough to promote higher fertility, with public expenditure on those between three and six years of age, again counter-intuitively, associated with lower levels of fertility.

All this, however, is far from saying that there is no evidence of a clear link between family policy and fertility. On the contrary, the linkage is extremely strong, with the availability of formal child care for the under-threes explaining up to 50 per cent of 1998 fertility variance within this group of OECD countries. The average level of formal provision for children under six years of age explains only marginally less. Obviously, the availability of child care – irrespective of whether it is provided publicly or otherwise – is a key contextual parameter for women with a preference for combining work and

### Table 3 Patterns of association between 1998 period total fertility rates and various measures of family-friendly public policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure of Public Policy</th>
<th>Correlation with period total fertility rates</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Formal child care provision (public and private)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of maternity leave (weeks)</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement rate (per cent average wages)</td>
<td>-.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total leave (weeks)</td>
<td>-.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social expenditure on families</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of GDP on family cash benefits</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family cash benefits per capita</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of GDP on family services expenditure</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family service expenditure per capita</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flexible workplace arrangements</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of employees working flexi-time³</td>
<td>.50*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of women voluntarily working part-time</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes and Sources: Correlations are Pearson’s R. * = significant at .05 level; ** = significant at .01 level. * = 18 cases only. Data on formal child care coverage, maternity/child care leave, and flexible working arrangements, are derived from OECD (2001a). Formal child care arrangements are those which conform with legal regulations and which are registered by the state. Data on publicly funded child care from Daly (2000: 488). Data on social expenditure on families as percentages of GDP are from OECD (2001b). Per capita expenditure is calculated by dividing expenditure as a percentage of GDP by the percentage of the population under the age of 15. Social expenditure data are for 1998; other data are for various time-points in the mid to late 1990s. Data on flexible workplace arrangements are questionnaire responses from national surveys.
family. The measure of formal provision used here does not capture all relevant aspects of variance in this respect. In particular, it takes no account of cross-national differences in the availability of government-provided pre-school education, or of differences in the extent to which child care is provided by the extended family.

The fact that, despite these omissions, the relationship is so strong simply underlines how crucial this factor is as a determinant of contemporary fertility choices. That what matters most under modern circumstances is what lets women combine work and family is further underlined by the significant link between survey findings on the flexibility of women's working hours and higher levels of fertility.

The story – and the third fact about fertility – is that the great weight of the available evidence shows that policies that permit and, indeed, encourage women to stay in the labour force when they have children are the policies most conducive to maintaining levels of fertility at or near replacement level.

A final word on present policy choices

The three facts about fertility revealed by systematic cross-national analysis appear to be closely linked. The huge change in the trajectory of fertility wrought by the adoption of clinical and supply methods of contraception has been one of the most potent factors contributing to a dramatic transformation in women's (and couples') preferences concerning work and family life, and that transformation has, in turn, created a situation in which policies making it easier to combine work and family are now those most likely to promote higher levels of fertility.

Not everyone accepts the link between technological and social change on the one hand, and its likely policy implications on the other. For example, Catherine Hakim (2000) goes all the way with the story as it is presented here – the contraceptive revolution leading to changed women's preferences – except in believing that the best route to higher fertility is to adopt policies making it easier for women to work.

Hakim's recipe for a higher birth-rate is to focus policy on the small minority of women who remain "home-centred" in the traditional way, by offering them financial incentives to stay out of the labour force and to have large families. However, she concedes that such women are relatively few in number: 10–20 per cent compared to the 60–80 per cent of women she describes as "adaptive", who seek to combine work and family. Thus, the only sound basis for a "home-centred" strategy would be if it could be shown that such a strategy was three or four times more effective than one focused on the "adaptive" group.

The evidence in this paper suggests that the opposite is the case. A "home-centred" strategy might well lead to a further reduction in the Australian fertility rate. The more effective approach to stemming the fertility decline is likely to be the provision of affordable and attractive child care for women who want to combine work and family.

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substantial change in the transition to marriage and parenthood has taken place over the past 30 years. In the early 1970s, the median age of marriage was 21 years for females and 23 for males. At the start of the 21st century, the median age of marriage had climbed to the mid-to-late twenties. Likewise, the most common age range at which women gave birth was 20-26 years until recent decades. However, by the year 2000 the highest birth rates were among women aged 30-34, slightly higher than among women aged 25-29, and considerably higher than among women aged 20-24 years. In 2000, the median age at which married women gave birth to their first child was 29.5 years (ABS 2001).

Recent Australian research has shown that young people are entering into their first serious relationships later in life than previously and are increasingly likely to live with their partner before marrying (Qu and Weston 2001). Nowadays, cohabitation is frequently a stepping stone to marriage. British research, for example, shows that two out of every three cohabiting couples eventually marry (Ermisch and Francesconi 2000; see also Qu and Weston 2001). While the rate of ex-nuptial births has risen notably, from 5 per cent in the 1960s and 1970s to just under 30 per cent in 2000, it is still the case that most young people do not embark on parenthood until they are married.

The postponement of marriage and childbearing has contributed to the falling birth rate, since the increase in births among older women has not been large enough to offset the decrease in births among younger women. Furthermore, the duration of childbearing years is reduced if the first child is postponed, curtailing potential family size. Among the wide range of factors underlying the trend for later marriage and parenthood (see Weston and Parker in this edition of Family Matters), the dramatic changes in the lifestyle and circumstances of young people over the past 30 years are undoubtedly major contributing factors.

Up until the 1970s, most young people had settled into stable career paths, married and became parents by their mid twenties. However, for many young people nowadays, the period following secondary schooling is one of prolonged financial and material dependence, with a much higher proportion undertaking further education and training than in the past. Employment and occupational opportunities are changing rapidly and are more uncertain, and it is expected that individuals will traverse multiple career paths during their working lives. There is greater societal acceptance of cohabitation, which is fast becoming the normal pathway to marriage. As Arnett (2000: 469) notes, the years from the late teens through the middle twenties have become a period in which a “variety of possible life directions in love, work, and world views” are explored. Lifespan theories suggest that one of the most important tasks of this developmental period is the development of the capacity for close, intimate relationships (Erikson 1965).
As yet, it is not known whether these changes in the lifestyle and circumstances of young people are paralleled by a shift in their aspirations for relationships, marriage and parenthood. However, such a shift seems likely, given the more complex and extended pathways to marriage and parenthood which young people now follow. That such aspirations are important is indicated by research showing that aspirations for parenthood were powerful predictors of later childbearing (Qu, Weston and Kilmartin 2000; Schoen, Astone, Kim and Nathanson 1999).

Such aspirations may also be influenced by the individual’s family and peer group environment. Starrel and Holm (2000) found substantial congruence between the aspirations of teenagers and their mothers for marriage and parenthood by age 24. Aspirations were unrelated to mother’s age at first marriage or first birth, suggesting the concordance reflected a transmission of values rather than a modelling of parental behaviour. The study also found that boys with more extensive peer networks more frequently aspired to marriage. It is plausible, but not yet established, that aspirations are also influenced by the individual’s family experiences. For example, young people reared in a harmonious and supportive family environment might hold more positive aspirations than those who experienced discord, upheaval or unhappiness.

Although there is a lack of corroborating research, it is likely that individuals’ personal characteristics influence their aspirations. For example, high achieving young people might envisage spending a longer period in education and further training, and might prefer to delay marriage and parenthood. Likewise, temperament style (for example, shyness, reactivity or volatility) and behaviour problems (such as depression and aggression) might have influenced individuals’ past interpersonal relationships and might colour their expectations of future ones.

This paper reports on a study of aspirations for relationships, marriage and parenthood among young people at the threshold of adulthood. It
seeks to shed light on trans-generational influences by also obtaining the views of parents on these issues.

Three broad questions are addressed. What expectations do teenagers and their parents have concerning the young person’s future relationships, marriage and parenthood? Are there differences in the aspirations of teenage boys and girls? Are these aspirations related to family circumstances, interpersonal relationships, and personal characteristics?

**Australian Temperament Project**

The context for the study is the Australian Temperament Project (ATP). This longitudinal study of a large, representative cohort of Victorian families is investigating the contribution of individual, family and environment factors to individuals’ development and adjustment from infancy to adulthood (for more details see Prior, Sanson, Smart and Oberklaid 2000). Thirteen waves of data have been collected by mail surveys from infancy (4-8 months) to young adulthood (19-20 years). Aspects of functioning measured include temperament style, behaviour problems, school adjustment, health, social competence, peer relationships and civic engagement. Aspects of the family environment assessed include family structure, socio-economic background, parent–child relationships and parenting style.

In the year 2000, the views of approximately 1,250 participants aged 17-18 years and their parents (usually the teenager’s mother) were sought concerning whether and when the young people would form long-term relationships, marry, and have children. Views concerning desired family size and the age at which young people hoped to have their first child were also obtained.

**Aspirations of teenagers and parents**

What were the aspirations of teenagers and parents regarding future relationships, marriage and parenthood? The overall trends are discussed first and differences between boys and girls are looked at later.

What aspirations did teenagers and parents hold regarding long-term relationships? The great majority of the teenagers hoped to be involved in such a relationship within the next five years (81 per cent), with the second most popular choice being the next six to ten years (11 per cent). Only 1 per cent hoped for such a relationship in 11 or more years’ time. A small number had not thought about this issue yet, while 1 per cent did not aspire to a long-term relationship at all.

Parents’ attitudes about the commencement of long-term relationships were somewhat different. Only about one-third hoped their teenager would form a long-term relationship in the next five years, with a slightly higher proportion hoping for this in the next six to ten years. A relatively small number hoped their teenager would form a long-term relationship in 11 or more years’ time (5 per cent). Almost one-fifth of parents had not considered this issue yet, while very few did not desire a long-term relationship for their teenager in the future.

Turning to teenagers’ and parents’ aspirations regarding marriage, these were found to be remarkably similar. The most popular choice was for the teenager to be married in the next six to ten years (55 per cent), and the second most popular choice was for marriage to take place in 11 or more years’ time (19 per cent). Few teenagers and parents hoped the young person would marry within the next five years although slightly more teenagers felt this way than parents (8 per cent of teenagers and 3 per cent of parents). A sizeable number of parents and teenagers had not thought about this issue yet (13 per cent of teenagers and 20 per cent of parents). A small number of teenagers and almost no parents rejected the idea of marriage for the teenager.

Aspirations for parenthood were noticeably more delayed. Again, teenagers and parents had very consistent views. A similar proportion (just over one-third) hoped the teenager would become a parent in six to ten years, or 11 or more years’ time. Very few teenagers and parents hoped the teenagers would become parents in the next five years (3 per cent of teenagers and 1 per cent of parents). Here too, a sizeable proportion of parents and teenagers had not yet thought about this issue (18 per cent of teenagers and 23 per cent of parents). Very few (less than 1 per cent of parents and 4-5 per cent of teenagers) had no desire for the teenager to become a parent in the future.

When asked “How old would you like to be when you have your first child?”, teenagers gave a variety of responses ranging from a specific age to an age span. To accommodate this diversity, their responses were grouped into five-yearly blocks (below 25 years, 25-29 years, 30-35 years, 36 years or older, unsure). Close to two-thirds of teenagers hoped to have their first child between 25 and 29 years of age, the second most popular choice was 30 to 35 years (20 per cent), and less than 1 per cent hoped to start a family after 35 years of age. Just over ten per cent of teenagers hoped to be starting a family before 25 years of age, and a small number felt unable to nominate a specific age.

Similarly, when asked “How many children would you like to have?”, teenagers often answered with a range (for example, two to three children). Accordingly, the responses have been grouped (one child, one or two children, two children, two or three children, three children, three or four children, four or more children). Almost all teenagers hoped for a family size of two or more
children (94 per cent), with the most popular choice being two children (46 per cent), followed by three children (22 per cent), and then four or more children (9 per cent).

**Aspirations of boys and girls compared**

Were there differences between boys and girls in their aspirations for relationships, marriage and parenthood? Figures 1 to 8 show the attitudes of 17-18 year old boys and girls and their parents towards long-term relationships, marriage and parenthood.

Figures 1 to 7 (over page) show a consistent trend for teenage girls, and parents of girls, to hope that the girls would form relationships, marry and become parents at an earlier age. On the other hand, a higher proportion of teenage boys, and their parents, wished the boys to delay marriage and parenthood for 11 years or longer. These trends may indicate greater maturity or readiness for such developmental transitions amongst 17-18 year old girls, a possibility also suggested by the higher proportion of teenage boys who had not thought about their future in terms of marriage or parenthood yet. In contrast, Figure 8 shows that teenage girls and boys had fairly similar aspirations regarding family size.

The impact of contemporaneous family circumstances, family and peer relationships and individual characteristics on aspirations is next examined. Only significant findings are presented (chi square analyses). Significant differences often applied to infrequently chosen responses, and thus to only a minority of teenagers.

For example, in general very few teenagers aspired to become parents in the next five years. However, within this small group, a significantly higher proportion of teenagers living in rural and regional locations than teenagers living in a metropolitan area hoped to become parents in the next five years (5 and 7 per cent respectively compared with 1 per cent). As noted previously, the most popular choice was for parenthood in six to ten years’ time. Among the group who aspired to parenthood in six to ten years time, similar proportions were from metropolitan, regional and rural locations; however, a significantly higher proportion of teenagers from metropolitan, regional and rural localities hoped to become parents in 11 or more years time. Thus, although there were significant differences in the parenthood aspirations of teenagers from differing localities, these differences primarily reflected a greater willingness for parenthood in the next five years among youth from regional and rural areas.

In the following discussion, therefore, it is important to view the results within the context of the broad trends described previously. In general, hopes for long-term relationships were least strongly, and aspirations for parenthood most strongly, influenced by the personal and environmental factors investigated. Thus, the following sections focus primarily on aspirations for parenthood.

**Aspirations and family circumstances**

The family environment factors included in the analyses were the family socio-economic background (as measured by both parents’ occupational and educational levels), metropolitan–regional–rural residence, number of children in the teenager’s family, the teenager’s birth order, and the parents’ marital circumstances.

Teenagers’ and parents’ hopes concerning future parenthood were significantly related to family socio-economic background. Individuals in the two lowest socio-economic status quartiles most often aspired to parenthood in the next 6-10 years, while those in the two highest quartiles most frequently hoped for parenthood in 11 years or more. Furthermore, teenagers in the highest socio-economic quartile were more willing to postpone having their first child until they were in their thirties (28 per cent) by comparison with those from the other quartiles (20 and 19 per cent in the middle quartiles, and 14 per cent in the lowest quartile). Similarly, teenagers from the lowest quartile were much more likely to endorse parenthood before 25 years of age (20 per cent) compared with teenagers from the other quartiles (12 and 13 per cent in the middle quartiles, and 5 per cent in the highest quartile).

Teenagers’, but not their parents’, aspirations regarding parenthood were weakly related to residential location, with teenagers from rural and regional locations a little more likely to hope to have children in the next five years (5 and 7 per cent compared with 1 per cent) and less likely to endorse parenthood in 11 years’ time or longer (32 and 35 per cent compared with 39 per cent).

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**Teenage girls hoped to form relationships, marry and have children at a younger age than teenage boys.**
As might be expected, teenagers and parents living in larger than average families were more likely to aspire to earlier marriage, parenthood and a larger family size. Similarly, teenagers who were only children more frequently preferred to delay parenthood until 11 or more years’ time (32 per cent compared with 21 per cent of those from a two-children family, and 16-17 per cent of those from families with three and four children), and more often aspired to a smaller family size of one child or of one to two children (13 per cent compared with 5 per cent of those from larger families).

Aspirations were not significantly related to the young people’s experience of parental separation or divorce, or the death of a parent, during their lifetime.

Aspirations and family and peer relationships
As noted earlier, aspirations may be influenced by the individual’s family and peer relationships. The factors included as measures of relationships were marital relationship quality and conflict, parenting style (for example, warmth, discipline, supervision, use of reasoning), parent-adolescent relationship quality and conflict, teenagers’ attachment to parents, sibling relationship quality, family cohesion, and teenagers’ attachment to peers. Somewhat surprisingly, few of these “relationship quality” indices were related to teenagers’ parenthood choices, and none were related to parental aspirations.

Teenagers from less cohesive and connected families were more likely to reject the idea of parenthood (7 per cent compared with 3 per cent), and less likely to expect to have children at the most commonly chosen time of six to ten years hence (32 per cent compared with 40 per cent). They were also a little more likely to aspire to a smaller family size of two children or fewer (57 per cent compared with 50 per cent).

Teenagers whose parents found them difficult to get along with were much more likely to reject the idea of parenthood (14 per cent compared with 4 and 5 per cent of those rated as easy or average) or to hope for parenthood in the next five years (11 per cent compared with 2 and 4 per cent of easy or average individuals). In contrast, teenagers rated as “easy” were more willing to delay parenthood until 11 or more years (40 per cent compared with 32 and 30 per cent of average and difficult teenagers respectively).

Those who had high quality sibling relationships more often hoped to marry in the next five years (23 per cent compared with 13 and 7 per cent of those with average or poor sibling relationships). More also hoped to marry in the next six to ten years (71 per cent compared with 67 and 64 per cent of those with average or poor relationships). Similarly, more teenagers with good sibling relationships tended to aspire to parenthood in six to ten years’ time (54 per cent compared with 44 and 45 per cent of those with average or poor relationships).
Aspirations and teenagers’ personal characteristics

The question of whether personal characteristics affected aspirations was explored using measures of the teenagers’ temperament style (such as sociability-shyness, reactivity, persistence, activity); adjustment problems (such as depression, anxiety, delinquency, hyperactivity and aggression); attitudes (such as optimism, identity clarity and readiness for intimacy); self-esteem; and school achievement and adjustment.

In general, teenagers with more “difficult” temperament or behavioural characteristics more often aspired to earlier relationships, marriage or parenthood. Thus, teenagers rated as lacking persistence by parents more commonly hoped to have their first child before 25 years of age (17 per cent compared with 12 per cent of average and 7 per cent of highly persistent individuals). More of the highly persistent teenagers hoped to begin parenthood between 25 and 29 years (73 per cent compared with 61 per cent of teenagers with average or low persistence).

Parents of teenagers prone to react intensely and to be volatile more frequently hoped their teenager would form a long-term relationship in the short-term (40 per cent in the next five years compared with 30 per cent and 28 per cent of those average or low on reactivity), perhaps hoping that such relationships might help the teenagers learn to modify their temperament style.

Teenagers who were high on depression had aspirations similar to teenagers who were not depressed, except that depressed teenagers were significantly more likely to reject the idea of future marriage or parenthood. There were differences between teenagers who were prone to “act out” and those who were not. Those who were high on delinquency, aggression or hyperactivity were more likely to desire early parenthood: they more often hoped to have their first child before the age of 25 years and less often hoped for parenthood between 25 and 29 years.

Teenagers’ readiness for intimacy was strongly related to their aspirations. This capacity was measured by items such as “I care deeply for others”, and “I’m ready to get involved with a special person”. Those with high readiness more often hoped for marriage in the next five years and parenthood in the next six to ten years, while those low on readiness more frequently wished to delay long-term relationships, marriage and parenthood.

Similarly, teenagers with high identity clarity (measured by items such as “I’ve got a clear idea of what I want to be”, and “I know what kind of person I am”) more often hoped to marry in the next five years and were significantly less likely to wish to wait 11 or more years before marrying. There were no significant differences in aspirations in terms of the teenagers’ optimism for the future or their self-esteem.

Teenagers who felt they were doing well academically appeared more willing to delay parenthood,
while those who were struggling more frequently hoped for early parenthood. Thus, the most popular choice for teenagers who rated themselves as "a lot above average" or "above average" in terms of academic achievement was for parenthood in 11 years’ time or more. In contrast, the most popular choice for those rating themselves as "average" or "below average" was for parenthood in six to ten years’ time. More teenagers who were average or below average academically hoped to have their first child before the age of 25 years (18 and 15 per cent compared with 4 and 8 per cent of those above average), whereas about a quarter of teenagers who were doing well at school hoped to begin parenthood in their thirties compared with about 15 per cent of those average or below.

Discussion and implications

In general, the ATP study found that teenagers clearly aspired to be involved in long-term relationships, to marry, and have children. Most hoped to be involved in a serious relationship in the next five years, and the majority hoped to be married in six to ten years’ time. About one-third hoped to become parents in the next six to ten years, while a further third hoped to begin parenthood in 11 or more years’ time.

There was considerable consistency of views across teenagers and parents, with the exception of aspirations for long-term relationships. Parents tended to hope these would begin later than did teenagers. Most hoped to be involved in a serious relationship in the next five years, and the majority hoped to be married in six to ten years’ time. About one-third hoped to become parents in the next six to ten years, while a further third hoped to begin parenthood in 11 or more years’ time.

Comparison with trends from earlier decades is difficult as the questions asked and methods of collecting data vary greatly across studies. Much research has explored young people’s orientations (for example, whether or not they endorse the idea of marriage), and the focus has generally been on a somewhat older age group. However, data from the United States National Survey of Children allows a broad comparison (Starrels and Holm 2000). The data were collected in 1981 from teenagers aged 11-16 years. The sample is from a different country as well as a different time period, making conclusions more tentative, although it should be noted that trends across the two countries tend to be similar. For example, over the period 1996-2000, around 80 per cent of American teenagers said they expected to marry, and 4 per cent did not expect to marry (National Marriage Project 2002), rates which are almost identical to the ATP trends. The 1981 study found that approximately 80 per cent thought they were “somewhat” or “very” likely to be married by age 24, and around two-thirds thought they would have a child by that age.

The proportion expecting early marriage and parenthood is much higher than in the ATP study almost 20 years later. A substantial shift in expectations for the timing of marriage and parenthood seems to have occurred. Interestingly, the aspirations of this group of young Australians closely parallel the actual demographic trends described at the outset.

The National Social Science Survey, conducted during the mid to late 1980s, sought views about ideal family size from a sample of 18-25-year-old Australians (cited in Hartley 1992). Only 1 per cent thought zero or one child to be ideal, 44 per cent opted for two children, about one-third for three children, and 23 per cent considered four children to be ideal. While the question posed is somewhat different from that used in this ATP study, there is a noticeable trend for a higher number of teenagers in the more recent ATP study to prefer a two-child family and for fewer to prefer a larger family, suggesting a downward shift in aspirations concerning family size. Furthermore, McDonald (2000) suggests that young people’s aspirations regarding family size diminish as they move through their twenties. Thus the aspirations of the young people in this study may fall in the future.

There was a noticeable gap between the age at which teenagers hoped to form a long-term relationship and the age at which they hoped to marry. While not directly asked, this could imply that many young people expect to live with a partner for a substantial period of time before committing to marriage. The effect of the increasing trend towards cohabitation is not clear, although Weston and Parker in this edition of Family Matters note that one recent United States study suggested that cohabitation may reduce aspirations for parenthood.

A range of family and individual factors were found to be related to aspirations, particularly for parenthood. Teenagers from relatively advantaged families were more willing to delay parenthood than others, suggesting that the effect of the increasing trend towards cohabitation may reduce aspirations for parenthood.
than those from less well-off families. Slightly more teenagers from rural and regional areas anticipated earlier parenthood than teenagers from metropolitan areas. The experience of growing up in a larger than average family was linked to a greater willingness to marry and have children earlier, and to hope to have a larger than average family. Similarly, those who grew up in a single-child household were somewhat more likely than those from larger families to wish to delay parenthood and to have a smaller than average family. These trends may reflect across-generation influences and transmission of values.

Family environment characteristics (for example, socio-economic background, family size) were generally more influential than family relationships (for example, attachment to parents). Nevertheless, some facets of family relationships, such as family cohesion, teenagers’ sibling relationships, and how well parents and teenagers got along together, were related to teenagers’ aspirations. However, parental factors (for example, marital conflict, marital relationship quality) and the style of parenting used by parents, did not seem to impact on aspirations. Peer group factors were also not found to be related to aspirations. On the whole, it seemed that in looking forward to adult life away from the family, few aspects of the teenagers’ family and peer experiences while growing up had an impact on their expectations.

A number of individual characteristics were related to aspirations. Teenagers with “difficult” characteristics (for example, a less adaptable temperament style or “acting out” behaviour) more often hoped for an earlier transition, perhaps sensing an opportunity for a “fresh start”. Those who valued and felt ready for intimacy, and those who had a clear idea about the sort of person they were and where their lives were going, seemed more psychologically prepared and interested in moving on to marriage and parenthood. Likewise, girls tended to look forward to making each type of transition somewhat earlier than boys, while boys were more willing to wait, or were undecided. As noted earlier, this may reflect greater maturity among girls than boys at this age, or perhaps a greater investment and interest in relationships among girls.

Teenagers’ aspirations for long-term relationships and marriage were not related to their academic progress. However, high achievers more often anticipated delaying parenthood, with a quarter hoping to have their first child when in their thirties. This trend probably reflects expectations of the time required to complete postgraduate study and develop a professional career. It may also reflect perceptions of the impact of childbearing on career development, or perceived difficulties in combining work and family life. Merlo and Rowland (2000) estimate that at least 20 per cent of young women will remain childless. As delaying parenthood is likely to be one cause of childlessness, the relatively high desire for late childbearing among the most able young people may mean that a number will not realise their parenthood aspirations.

Conversely, among the small group of teenagers looking forward to early marriage and childrearing were a higher number who had “difficult” temperamental and behavioural characteristics, or were doing less well academically, or came from a disadvantaged family environment, than those who preferred later marriage and childbearing. A number of these young people may find parenting a rather challenging experience and may require more support in successfully fulfilling their childrearing roles.

In conclusion, this Australian Temperament Project study has shown that while young people continue to aspire to marry and have children, they are expecting to make these life transitions at a later age than in previous decades, and are more inclined to hope for a smaller family size. We are continuing to explore this important topic in our latest survey wave at age 19-20 years, focusing particularly on the impact of a range of personal, social, financial and career factors on attitudes towards parenthood.

References


Diana Smart is a Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies and is responsible for the Australian Temperament Project.
The fertility decline over the last 30 years (see de Vaus elsewhere in this issue) has gone hand in hand with sharp changes in marriage patterns. While marriage and children were once a package deal for all but the involuntarily childless, this is no longer the case. The order in which people married and had children was firmly established – children were meant to follow marriage – preferably by more than seven months.

However, the last three decades have seen a sharp decline in marriage rates and a steady increase in the age at which people marry. While the changing marriage patterns have largely mirrored changing fertility patterns, the link between marriage and children has been loosened substantially.

Since the mid 1970s there has been: a sharp rise in cohabitation; a steady rise in the proportion of children who are born to unmarried parent(s); an increasing gap in the time between marriage and having the first child within the marriage; a rise in the number of married couples who remain childless; and changing attitudes to the importance of marriage and two parents for the bearing and raising of children.

Ex-nuptial births

Children born to unmarried parents (ex-nuptial births) have increased sharply since the 1960s and especially since the mid-1970s (Figure 1). Just after World War II approximately 4 per cent of births were ex-nuptial. By 1981 this figure had increased to 14 per cent, and just ten years later had risen to 23 per cent. By the year 2001, 31 per cent of all births were to mothers who were not living in a registered marriage (ABS 2002a).

Some of this rise was due to more single women having children, and some was due to the increase in cohabiting relationships. The rise in cohabitation meant that many of the births to unmarried mothers were nevertheless births to a couple rather than to a lone mother. In fact, according to the statistics collected by the Midwives Collection (Nassar and Sullivan 2001) the women in 87 per cent of all confinements in 1999 were living with a partner – either in a registered marriage (71 per cent) or in a de facto marriage (16 per cent). Thus about 13 per cent of all births in 1999 were to women not currently in a relationship. This 13 per cent consisted of 11.5 per cent of single women having children, and some was due to the increase in cohabiting relationships. The rise in cohabitation meant that many of the births to unmarried mothers were nevertheless births to a couple rather than to a lone mother. In fact, according to the statistics collected by the Midwives Collection (Nassar and Sullivan 2001) the women in 87 per cent of all confinements in 1999 were living with a partner – either in a registered marriage (71 per cent) or in a de facto marriage (16 per cent).

The couple/marital status of mothers differs for Australian women depending on the country in which they were born. Table 1 shows that of all mothers giving birth in 1999 over 90 per cent from Lebanon, Hong Kong, India and Malaysia were married at the time of confinement. Of all mothers, those most likely to be single were from Australia, New Zealand and Vietnam.
A key purpose of marriage has traditionally been for the bearing and raising of children. Similarly, the only legitimate context in which to give birth was within a registered marriage. The last 30 years have seen major changes in marriage patterns.

Mothers born in Australia, New Zealand or the United Kingdom were the most likely of all groups to be in a de facto relationship when their child was born.

On average, unmarried mothers having a child are younger than married mothers. In 2001 the median age of married mothers at confinement was 31 years. In the same year the median age of unmarried mothers at confinement was 26.5 years where paternity was acknowledged, and 24.4 where paternity was not acknowledged (ABS, 2002a).

Marital status of teenage mothers

Since the early 1970s there has been a steady decline in the number of births to teenage mothers. Alongside this decline has been a change in the marital status of teenage mothers (Table 2). In 1971 two-thirds of births to teenage mothers were to married teenagers. A considerable proportion of these marriages would have been due to pregnancy. By the year 2001 just 9 per cent of births to teenage mothers were to married teenagers. This change from 67 per cent to 9 per cent reflects the dramatic change in attitudes to having children outside of marriage (ABS, 2002a).

Of course, not all unmarried teenage mothers are lone mothers – many births to unmarried teenage mothers will be to a couple. In 1999, of all conﬁnements of teenage mothers, 45 per cent were to mothers who were either married or living in a de facto relationship. Nevertheless, 54 per cent of teenage conﬁnements were to teenage mothers who were not living with a partner (Nassar and Sullivan, 2001).

Timing of births within marriage

The once tight link between marriage and childbearing reflected the social disgrace attached to non-marital pregnancy and illegitimacy and the absence of economic supports for unmarried mothers. Unmarried women who became pregnant “had to get married” or release their child for adoption (Weston, Stanton, Qu and Soriano, 2001). These so-called “shotgun weddings”, along with adoption of Australian-born children, have become much less common in recent years. Changed attitudes towards ex-nuptial children, together with better birth control and the widespread access to abortion, means that the old shotgun wedding (deﬁned as having a child within seven months of marriage) is now a relatively unusual event. Even where births occur within seven months of marriage we can no longer assume that it was because a couple “had to get married”.

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<th>Married &amp; de facto %</th>
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Sources:

- ABS, Births, 1999
- Data exclude New South Wales.
- AIHW Data for Tasmania unavailable, 1998 data used as an estimate.
In 1998, only 9.5 per cent of all first births within marriage occurred within the first seven months. Such births were much more common among teenage brides. Of first births to newlywed teenage brides, over half (54.8 per cent) were within seven months of marriage. For woman aged 20 and over, very few had a baby within seven months of the wedding (Figure 2). However, despite such births being relatively common among married teenagers they were nevertheless rare among teenage mothers overall. Of all births to teenagers in 1998 only 4.3 per cent occurred within seven months of their marriage – a dramatic decline from 1971 when 40 per cent of births to teenagers occurred within seven months of their marriage.

One of the factors contributing to the lower number of births to teenagers is the rate of abortions among teenagers. Although national data are not available, South Australian abortion statistics indicate that since 1995 teenage pregnancies are more likely to result in an abortion than a birth. Of all age groups, teenagers are the most likely to have abortions (ABS 2000).

The ability of women to control their fertility, together with less pressure to marry because of pregnancy, has meant that the time between marriage and having the first child within the marriage has increased sharply since the mid-1960s when the oral contraceptive pill became widely available (Figure 3). In the early 1920s the average time between marriage and the birth of a child was just 11 months. This gap increased during World War II, partly no doubt due to husband absences. After the war the gap between marriage and giving birth dropped somewhat, but from 1965 onward there was a sharp increase in the gap between marriage and having a child. This gap increased further in the 1970s so that by the late 1970s the average gap was over 28 months. Since then the gap has remained reasonably stable, just increasing to 30 months by 2000.

Although women are married, on average, for about two and a half years before they have their first child within the marriage: a third of couples have their first nuptial child within less than a year of getting married; almost another quarter (22.8 per cent) have their first child within one and two years of marriage (Figure 4); and most married couples who have children have their first child within the marriage within five years of marriage. In 1998, 79.2 per cent of first nuptial births were to couples who had been married for less than five years.

### Attitudes about marriage and children

The changing demographics of children and marriage have been accompanied by shifting attitudes among younger people associated with these changes. While a bare majority of adults (53 per cent) believe that it is not acceptable for unmarried people to have a child, younger people are much more accepting of such ex-nuptial births. Of men and women in their twenties, just 29 per cent disapprove of ex-nuptial births and 40 per cent of those in their thirties disapprove of ex-nuptial births. These figures contrast with a disapproval rate of more than 75 per cent among those aged over 60 years.

Accompanying these views about ex-nuptial children are views about the desirability of unpartnered single women having children. While almost two thirds (64 per cent) of adults did not approve of a woman
without a stable heterosexual relationship having a child, there is less disapproval among younger people. For example, while just on half of those in their twenties did not approve of an unpartnered woman having a child, more than three quarters of those aged over 60 did not approve of such arrangements.

While there is still a generally positive view about the importance and value of having children, there seems to be a declining emphasis among younger people. For example, the National Social Science Survey found in 1996 that while two thirds of those aged 60 years or older thought that life without children is incomplete, only a third of those in their twenties felt this way. Similarly, while about two thirds of those aged 60 or over thought that a childless marriage is incomplete, only a third of those in their twenties felt this way. For younger people the link between marriage, children and happiness is much less tight.

Certainly there is considerably more acceptance of the view that having children should be seen as an option rather than a necessity for women. Even among those aged over 60, less than a third say that a woman needs children to be fulfilled. Among those in their twenties just 9 per cent stress that children are a precondition for women’s happiness. More recently, in a 2001 national survey, just 10 per cent of people expressed the view that there is something wrong with a woman who does not want children.

Concluding comments

Giving birth and being married have traditionally been part of the same package. A key purpose of marriage has traditionally been for the bearing and raising of children. Similarly, the only legitimate context in which to give birth has been within a registered marriage. The last 30 years have seen major changes in marriage patterns, with fewer people are marrying, and marrying later. Part of the decline in marriage is due to more people cohabiting, but is also due to fewer adults living with a partner (married or de facto) than just 15 years ago.

Some of the decline in fertility is linked to these changing marriage patterns. Later marriage, cohabitation, and being unpartnered are all associated with having fewer children. At the same time, however, there has been some unravelling of the marriage and fertility package. Marriage is no longer seen to be inextricably bound up with having children; marriage is no longer a social prerequisite for giving birth; and pregnancy of an unmarried woman does not mean that she must marry if she is to have the child. These changes are evident in attitudes and behaviour, and are reflected in social policy such as access to income support, child care, family law provisions, and similar matters.

It is impossible to be certain about what the future holds. We do not know at this stage to what extent changes in fertility are a consequence of changing marriage patterns, and to what extent changing marriage patterns are due to changing fertility preferences. However, current trends suggest that both marriage and giving birth are increasingly a matter of choice, and that the nexus between the two aspects of family formation will continue to be redefined.

Note

1 These data do not include New South Wales figures. However, figures from previous years indicate that this omission does not alter these percentages. The percentages slightly overstate the percentage of mothers living without a partner, since the data from Tasmania include those in a de facto relationship as single.

References


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Lesbian Issues, strengths

Evidence obtained from clinical encounters and polls conducted within the gay and lesbian community indicates that in the vicinity of 20 per cent of Australian lesbians, gay men and bisexuals have children (VGLRL 2000; Lesbians on the Loose (LOTL) 2000). The 1996 census indicated that there were 11,288 same sex male couples, of whom 275 lived with children, and 8,296 same sex female couples, of whom 1,483 lived with children in Australia (Mikhailovich et al 2001). This is felt to be an under-representation as it does not allow for non-cohabiting couples or single lesbians to respond, and it is believed that many same sex cohabiting couples did not declare their relationship status. These children have been conceived via self-insemination, clinically-assisted donor insemination, other assisted reproduction procedures, as well as sexual intercourse.

Although it remains difficult in Australia for unmarried people to adopt children, and few newborn children become available for adoption, some lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people have adopted children in the context of heterosexual partnerships. Increasingly, foster-care agencies in Victoria recruit carers from within LGBTI community networks.

There are indications that the number of lesbian-headed families in Australia is increasing (LOTL 2000; Millbank 2002), yet many Australians believe that two people of the opposite sex provide the best framework for raising children (Kershaw 2000). Questions are regularly raised as to whether children in lesbian and gay families are at risk.

Similar concerns about the welfare of children born of lesbian and gay parents in other parts of the developed West have given rise to a substantial body of literature on the psychological health and wellbeing of these children.

Much of the available research has of necessity involved small, unrepresentative samples, recruited using convenience sampling – however, this methodology is seen to have some validity for marginalised population groups (Bradford, Ryan, Honnold and Rothblum 2001).

The international research that compares children in lesbian-headed families with children in heterosexual families shows consistent evidence of good adjustment among children raised by lesbians, with no notable differences in the development of the children’s sexual identities (Patterson 1992, 2000). Further, no differences have been found between lesbian and heterosexual mothers on measures of self-concept, happiness, overall adjustment or psychiatric status, nor in terms of parenting style and general ability to parent children effectively (for a comprehensive review of the research on children in gay and lesbian households see Patterson 1992, 2000; see also...
parenting and challenges


Although investigations that compare child outcomes across family types are informative on one level, they do not demonstrate how the experience of growing up in a lesbian household differs from one family to the next. Recent studies are now paying attention to how these families function. Chan, Raboy and Patterson (1998) conclude that the evidence to date suggests that family processes, such as parenting stress and conflict, rather than family structure and parental sexual orientation, predict children’s social functioning.

There has been little empirical research conducted in Australia about LGBTI families. Two small studies commissioned by a New South Wales lesbian magazine assessed the number of lesbians with children and planning children (LOTL 1996 and 2000). There has been some work regarding the legal difficulties faced by Australian lesbian and gay parents with regard to family recognition in law (Sandor 2002; Millbank 1998, 2000) and restrictions regarding access to assisted reproductive technology have been documented (Stuhmcke 1997; Walker 2000; McNair 2000). Australian social and health researchers have thus far largely ignored wider considerations regarding the experiences, practices or concerns of LGBTI parents and their children.

A new study of lesbian and bisexual parents and prospective parents examined the structuring of family relationships, preferred methods of conception, the nature and level of involvement of biological fathers in the lives of children, the use of social and support networks, and the challenges and triumphs experienced by these families.

Lesbian and Gay Families Project

The Lesbian and Gay Families Project was designed to answer a number of questions regarding lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender and intersex families. This article focuses on aspects of the data collected from 136 women participants living in Victoria. (Later papers will present the men’s data and comparison with other states.)

The issues explored included family formation and methods of conception; reasons for choosing such methods; family structure including roles and responsibilities of the biological and non-biological mothers and the biological father; levels of social and professional support; and finally an exploration of the self-perceived strengths of and challenges for lesbian-led families. Key findings are presented in each of these areas.

Participation in this project required completion of an anonymous, mail-back questionnaire. Separate questionnaires were provided for men and women in order to allow the use of gender appropriate language, although the content of each questionnaire was approximately the same. Draft questionnaires were piloted, and the final version included 55 closed (“tick the box” type) items and 11 open-ended questions. All Victorian women and men who identified as members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex communities with children under the age of 18 were eligible to participate. Prospective LGBTI parents planning to conceive, adopt or foster children within the next two years were also eligible.

Owing to the problems associated with accessing stigmatised/hard-to-reach populations, the sampling strategy followed established methods for purposive rather than random sampling (see Lee 1993; De Vaus 1995; Plumb 2001). Questionnaires were distributed in five ways: via selected health clinics and general practitioners with a known LGBTI clientele; via mailouts to members of established LGBTI mailing lists, including all known lesbian parents and prospective parents’ groups in Victoria; via advertising in the local LGBTI community media, including radio, television and newspapers; through LGBTI
community agencies in urban and rural settings; and through “snowballing” in that participants were asked to inform eligible friends/acquaintances about the study.

The results that follow have limited generalisability due to the small sample size, and the possibly non-representative nature of respondents. Results are therefore descriptive of this sample only. Due to very small numbers of transgender and intersex participants, comparisons between the different gender groups have not been possible. Significance tests have been used for comparisons between parents and prospective parents.

**The participants**

Table 1 presents the age, sexuality, relationship and parenting status of the 136 women who completed the questionnaire. Twenty per cent of the sample had been in their current same sex relationship for “more than ten years”, 33 per cent “between five and ten years”, and 33 per cent “between two and five years”. Relatively few women had been in their relationship under two years, with 9 per cent “between one and two years” and 5 per cent “under one year”. In 12 per cent of cases, participants were already parents and planning more children, or they were biological as well as non-biological parents. Of the total sample, 47 per cent were prospective parents with no other children, 32 per cent had one child, 16 per cent had two children, 3 per cent had three children, and 1 per cent respectively had four and five children.

International studies have shown that the lesbian parents recruited into research are highly educated (Chan, Raboy and Patterson 1998; Jacob, Klock and Maier 1999; Brewaeys 2001). In some studies comparing matched lesbian and heterosexual families, both the biological mother and her female partner have higher educational levels than the heterosexual couples (Brewaeys et al. 1997). This may relate to sampling methods, or to an actual trend, whereby lesbians with greater educational and financial resources more frequently embark on parenthood.

Women in the current study were in general very highly educated, with 27 per holding a degree and 43 per cent having post-graduate degrees or qualifications. This compares with 17 per cent of Victorian women who have university degrees and only 8 per cent who have post-graduate degrees or qualifications (ABS 1997). The length and complexity of the questionnaire may have been a factor in this, as well as the recruitment methods, which to some extent privileged the inner urban LGBTI community networks.

Melbourne dwellers were over-represented in the sample. Again, this could relate to recruitment methods; however, the fact that big cities act as “magnets” for gay men and lesbians is well documented in the international literature (Weston 1995). Sixty-five per cent of participants lived in inner Melbourne, 20 per cent per cent in outer Melbourne, and 16 per cent lived in a regional centre or rural area.

**Methods of family formation**

Lesbians achieve parenthood most commonly through either conception during a heterosexual relationship or within a current lesbian relationship via self-insemination or clinic-based donor insemination. An Australian study of the health care experiences of 92 lesbian and gay families, involving 167 children, showed that 57 per cent of the children resulted from sexual intercourse and 33 per cent respectively have one, two, three, and four children.

### Table 1 Gender, age, sexuality and parenting status of participants and cohabiting partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Cohabiting partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male to female transgender</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersex</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In same-sex relationship</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-cohabiting</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(some parents fall into more than one category)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective parent (10% also had other children)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological parent</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-biological parent</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian or Foster carer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total participants/cohabiting partners</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
followed donor insemination or self-insemination (Mikhailovich et al 2001). Only 1 per cent of children in that study came into the family through adoption and fostering.

Stepfamily formation has taken place for many mothers subsequent to “coming out”, whereby children from the previous heterosexual relationship are brought to live with the mother and her lesbian partner (Lewin 1993). Over recent years, lesbians and gay men have increasingly sought to become parents within the context of their same-sex relationship. A survey of Victorian same-sex couples showed that 41 per cent were hoping to have children, with 63 per cent of those under 30 planning to be parents (VGLRL 2001).

Self-insemination with fresh semen at home has become widely practised among lesbians since the late 1970s, via the dissemination of feminist self-help knowledge; where legally possible, lesbians have also made use of clinical donor insemination. Such women in these states either travel interstate to access assisted reproductive technology services or choose self-insemination with a known sperm donor. With these social and legislative considerations in mind, the current study sought to determine not only which conception methods were chosen, but also the reasons for such choices.

One hundred and fifteen children under the age of 18 were described by participants. Only 17 children (15 per cent) were not living with the participant. Of the children living with participants, 65 per cent were the biological child of the participant, 18 per cent the non-biological child, and 2 per cent a housemate’s child. Fourteen per cent were of the participant, 18 per cent the non-biological child, and 65 per cent were the biological child living with participants, 65 per cent were the biological child.

Table 2 compares the method of family formation being used by those planning to conceive with that used by current parents. Equal numbers of children were conceived in lesbian as opposed to heterosexual relationships. The most striking difference is the much larger proportion of current parents than prospective parents using sexual intercourse to conceive. Fifty-two per cent of the current parents used sexual intercourse, with 87 per cent doing so within the context of a heterosexual relationship, whereas only 2 per cent of prospective parents intended to conceive by having sexual intercourse. Self-insemination was the most frequently used conception method for prospective parents in this study (44 per cent).

All but six of the 115 children were biologically related to the participant or her partner, two being children of housemates, two having been adopted, and two fostered. Given that several foster care agencies in Melbourne are now actively recruiting carers within the lesbian and gay communities, the numbers of participants involved in foster care in this study was lower than anticipated.

Reasons for choice of different family formation methods

Parents were asked about their reasons for choosing particular conception methods (see Table 3). This was of particular interest to the research team, given recent controversy over who should have access to “IVF”. A common assumption by contributors to the media-led debate about access of lesbians and single heterosexual women to assisted reproduction is that “socially infertile” women would only use self-insemination or donor insemination to conceive.

Table 3 Method of conception and reason for choice (parents only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for conception method</th>
<th>Sexual intercourse</th>
<th>Self insemination</th>
<th>Clinic (a)</th>
<th>IVF/GIFT (b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n=109 biological children</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for the child to know identity of all biological parents</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost/affordability of the option</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs regarding women’s rights to control their fertility</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineligible for access to donor insemination program in Victoria</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to involve partner in the insemination</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition to medical intervention</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time urgency (age of biological mother)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety of the procedure (less risk of infection)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for anonymous sperm donor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other methods had been unsuccessful</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosed fertility problem</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological mother was in a heterosexual relationship or having casual heterosexual sex at the time</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: (a) Clinical insemination occurred in interstate clinics for all but two participants. (b) Invitro fertilization (IVF) and gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT) are invasive and expensive forms of assisted reproductive technology. These technologies are reserved for women who have been unable to conceive through methods involving transfer of sperm to the vagina (sex, self insemination, clinic-based insemination) and are therefore deemed to be infertile. In approximately 30 per cent of women and 50 per cent of heterosexual couples, no medical cause is found for such infertility.
would seek expensive and invasive treatment procedures at the expense of other “medically infertile” tax payers (McNair 2002, forthcoming).

**Use of IVF**

Only 6 per cent of the children of participants in this study had been conceived via the use of IVF. All of the parents using this method had done so only after attempting other methods that had been unsuccessful. Thirteen per cent of prospective parents were planning to use IVF. The results indicate that lesbians seek to use IVF, just as women in heterosexual relationships do, when other less medically-interventionist forms of attempting to conceive fail to work.

### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of donors and fathers, as defined by female participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>n=106 fathers or donors in 85 families</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Donor or father?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship to participant or her partner</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous source (sperm bank)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent to advertisement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother or other family member of biological mother’s partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexuality</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown (includes the 16% sperm bank donors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living situation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With partner in heterosexual relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown (includes the 16% sperm bank donors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With partner in same-sex relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With friends or housemates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With partner and children (heterosexual relationship)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With partner and children (same-sex relationship)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Self-insemination**

Although the reasons determining the choice between self-insemination and clinic based-insemination are complex, knowing the donor’s identity was an important reason – for the 28 per cent of parents who had used self-insemination, 96 per cent did so due to a “desire for the child to have the option of knowledge about biogenetic heritage”. A “belief in women’s rights to control their fertility”, “opposition to medical intervention”, and the “desire to involve their partner in the reproductive process”, were equal second as determinants of self-insemination as a choice. For half of the women who chose self-insemination, the choice was also influenced by the lack of access to clinic-based insemination in Victoria, and 54 per cent stated that cost was a factor, as clinic based-insemination is considerably more expensive.

**Clinic-based donor insemination**

Where fertility services were required, participants expressed preferences for services that were overwhelmingly at the non-invasive and “low-tech” end of the spectrum. Eighty per cent of those who chose donor insemination (clinic-based) did so due to their belief in the safety of the procedure, in the knowledge that clinical intervention via sperm screening and storage removes any risk of transmission of sexually transmissible infection via the insemination process.

Although initial sperm screening and counselling for lesbians choosing self-insemination and their known sperm donors can already be provided legally in Victoria, many women and some doctors may not be aware that this is the case. Sixty per cent of those using donor insemination did so due to a preference for donor anonymity as opposed to negotiating insemination with a man known to them via personal networks. At the same time, 20 per cent of women opting for clinical donor insemination also expressed a “desire for children to know about their origins”, indicating some ambivalence about the policies of interstate donor insemination services, where for the most part women cannot easily obtain information as to the identity or more than basic physical characteristics of the sperm donor.

### Fathers and donors

Debates regarding the use of and access to assisted reproductive technology services have raised questions about how to define parenthood in relation to men. Whereas once donor insemination was defined in law and practice as a remedy for male infertility in heterosexual couples (Haimes and Daniels 1998), lesbian mothers have challenged this model and, implicitly, the need for a male parent. Previous studies have demonstrated that lesbian mothers have different expectations of biological fathers’ social relationships with children depending on the context in which the children were conceived. Lewin (1993) found that the lesbian mothers in her study who had previously been in relationships with their children’s fathers generally assumed that fathers were important and should be “continuing figures” in the children’s lives. Where children are conceived via self or donor insemination in the context of a lesbian relationship, “father” is a more ambiguous concept.

Donovan (2000: 161) found that the lesbian parents by donor insemination in her study made a “sharp distinction between biological fatherhood and the caring practices of
parenting”. A belief in the significance of children’s “right to know” who their fathers are often resulted in the choice of a known donor whose involvement with the family and children was negotiated rather than assumed.

In the current Lesbian and Gay Families study, the role of the biological father within lesbian families was explored from the participant’s perspective. Half of the 106 men who were described were defined as fathers, and half as donors (Table 4). Most of the fathers were ex-partners of the biological mother; however, 28 per cent of known sperm donors were also defined as fathers. Figure 1 shows the involvement of donors and fathers with the lesbian family members. Fifty-six per cent of all the men described (59 men) were known to participants, partners and children and were also involved with the children in some way. Twenty per cent (21 men) were known to participants, partners and children but not actively involved in their lives. Seventeen per cent (18 men) were completely anonymous to all parties, and 5 per cent (five men) were known to the participant and/or her partner, but not known to the children.

Defining the child’s biological father as a “donor” did not mean he was anonymous or unknown to the children, nor did defining him as a “father” necessarily denote involvement. Seventy-six per cent of fathers and 40 per cent of donors were known to the parents and children and were actively involved with the children in some way. Eighteen per cent of donors were known to the parents and children but not involved with them, and 8 per cent were known to the lesbian parents only. Seventeen per cent of fathers (eight men) were known to but not involved with the lesbian parents and children, and one father was known to the parents only.

Lesbian mothers via donor insemination drew a distinction between “father” or “donor”, and “parent”, whereby 83 per cent of prospective lesbian mothers anticipated that the child’s parents would be the biological mother and her same-sex partner. Thus in situations where children are born into lesbian relationships, the content and performance of the “father” role is frequently imagined as separate from a notion of “parenthood” (where parenthood is defined as day-to-day decision making, care and residency of the children).

Levels of satisfaction with the relationship and levels of contact the fathers/donors had with the lesbian parents and children were high. Sixty per cent of the 81 participants who responded to this question were very satisfied and 22 per cent were quite satisfied; less than 20 per cent were not satisfied. There was no statistically significant

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**Where children are born into lesbian relationships, the content and performance of the “father” role is frequently imagined as separate from a notion of “parenthood”:**

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**Table 5** 
Extent to which support needs are met among parents and prospective parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Current parents mean (SD)</th>
<th>Prospective parents mean (SD)</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work colleagues/associates</td>
<td>2.46 (.54)</td>
<td>2.35 (.57)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family</td>
<td>2.30 (.64)</td>
<td>2.11 (.61)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>2.70 (.50)</td>
<td>2.70 (.51)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbours/members of your local community</td>
<td>2.12 (.66)</td>
<td>1.82 (.56)</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community services (e.g. health, education, social services)</td>
<td>2.34 (.60)</td>
<td>2.21 (.58)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Scale: 1 = support needs not met, 2 = support needs somewhat met, 3 = support needs completely met. * Significance level = .05

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some studies examining individual differences in family functioning in lesbian households suggest that the amount of social support from families, friends and community sources may help to explain differences in the adjustment of children (Gartrell et al. 1999). The relevant literature suggests that community support for families, including access to family support, health and welfare services, is predictive of family functioning and child wellbeing.

Poor access to social support and negative social interactions can place families under stress, limit the resources that are available to stimulate children’s positive growth and development, and diminish parental self-esteem and parental personal development. Support from family and community can play a critical role in mediating the potentially adverse effects of discrimination within political and legal systems.

The Lesbian and Gay Families study explored parents’ and prospective parents’ relationships with various family and community contacts and community-based services in terms of the support that they receive from these networks, and disclosures about their sexual orientation. The data set used for the analyses included responses from a total of 125 women. This included 67 parents (including biological, non-biological, foster or guardian) and 58 women who were not currently parents, but were planning to become parents. The study provides a picture of lesbian parents enjoying generally high levels of acceptance and support relative to their needs within family, friendship and community networks (Table 5).

Children raised by lesbian parents were well accepted by family and friends, and were reported as having few relationship difficulties overall as a result of their parents’ sexuality. Some of the data suggest that lesbian parents work hard to construct an environment that is accepting and supportive of their family and conducive to their parenting role. Despite this, some parents did report that children experienced difficulties with friends in regard to their unconventional family background.

Some parents reported experiencing difficulties as parents because of their sexuality, including unwanted attention, fear of harassment, difficulties in the parent-child relationship and lack of access to services. Although parents were generally very open about their sexuality to family, friends and work colleagues (and, on average, more open than prospective parents), a meaningful proportion of parents did not disclose their sexuality to professionals nor to children’s age mates at school and within the community more broadly, a strategy used by some to avoid negative reactions that can create stress for parents and children alike (Table 6).

One-way analysis of variance showed that “openness about sexual orientation” did not differ to any statistically significant degree by respondent income and level of education. Independent samples t-tests also showed no differences in levels of disclosure by respondent age (under 40 years or over 40 years), or location (urban or rural). Wide variations were seen in the written comments regarding the preferred level of openness regarding sexuality, but creating a high level of openness in key settings was seen to be an important and educative process.

**Perceptions of parents and prospective parents**

Lesbians who were planning parenthood anticipated significantly greater difficulties for both themselves and their children than the experience of current parents suggested was typical. Prospective parents anticipated less acceptance and support as parents, including less support from professionals and services, and they anticipated that a number of parenting challenges would make the parenting role significantly more difficult. Prospective parents anticipated significantly more difficulties for their children, including less acceptance and a more negative effect on relationships among children’s age mates at school and age mates in the local community than was actually reported by current parents. Discrepancies between the scores of parents and prospective parents reflect the success of parents in creating a supportive environment for parenting and family life.

Parents were asked to indicate the level of support from a range of professionals and services that parents generally come into contact with during the course of a child’s development. Those people who did not disclose their sexuality to providers were excluded from the analysis. Participants reported relatively little discrimination and good support from services and professionals within the local community (see Table 7).

**Parenting challenges and strengths**

Participants were provided with ten statements describing issues and events that can make the task of parenting difficult for lesbians and asked to identify parenting difficulties that applied to them. Lack of legal recognition as a parent (particularly towards the non-biological mother), and lack of legal recognition as a family, were reported as being the most frequently applicable problems confronting them, and were also perceived as creating the

### Table 6: Parents’ and prospective parents’ openness about and acceptance of their sexuality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Openness</th>
<th>Acceptance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current parents mean (SD)</td>
<td>Prospective parents mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work colleagues/associates</td>
<td>4.12 (1.14)</td>
<td>3.74 (1.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family</td>
<td>4.42 (1.01)*</td>
<td>3.96 (1.03)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>4.86 (.49)</td>
<td>4.76 (.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbours/members of your local community</td>
<td>3.57 (1.26)</td>
<td>3.12 (1.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals and community services (eg. health, education, social services)</td>
<td>4.18 (1.04)</td>
<td>3.81 (1.23)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Openness Scale: 1 = no one knows, 5 = everyone knows. Acceptance Scale: 1 = not at all accepting, 2 = somewhat accepting, 3 = completely accepting. *Significance level = .05
most difficulty in parenting. However, comparisons between parents and prospective parents showed significant differences on a number of items, with prospective parents anticipating that certain parenting difficulties would apply more. Having rated applicability of the items, they then rated the level of difficulty caused by the issue (Table 8).

In order to understand the lived experience of lesbian parented families in greater depth, participants were given the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions seeking their views on: “The strengths and/or positive aspects of being part of a lesbian or bisexual parented family” and “The difficulties or challenges faced”. Sixty-seven (lesbian and bisexual) participants contributed written replies. Responses ranged from copious notes to expressions of gratitude to the researchers for the opportunity to share experiences of non-traditional parenting.

Challenges identified as specific to lesbian families included fears and experiences of community prejudice, rejection by family, and discrimination at school. Although strong social support was demonstrated, some participants identified social isolation within both the gay and lesbian and wider communities. Lack of legal and political recognition of lesbian families and, specifically, the non-biological mother, were the most frequently mentioned challenges.

As a result of these issues, many participants described feeling under scrutiny, and having to prove themselves as effective parents.

“I was the non-biological mother in my previous relationship. When this broke down I initially had our daughter half the week. My ex-partner slowly decreased this and then she refused me any contact. I went through family court and mediation but there was no law to protect my rights and the primary bond I had with my daughter. This is shocking, devastating and has to change!”

The major strength identified by lesbian-led families was their pride in successfully raising well-adjusted, happy children despite the constraints and challenges of living within what they consider to be a homophobic society. Participants identified a variety of strengths and described their families as: thoughtfully planned; tolerant and accepting of diversity; having flexible gender-roles; and having interesting, supportive, extended kinship networks that included a wide range of positive role models for children.

**Conclusions**

The findings of the Lesbian and Gay Families Project support a large international research base that the best interests of the child can be served in a variety of family structures including lesbian and gay parented families. In the study, lesbian parents showed carefully considered decision-making in the formation and support of their families. At various levels they consider the interests of their children, including the need to access information about the biological father, safety in the conception process, optimal levels of contact between the father and children, and accessing the most supportive community and professional networks possible.

Choices of family formation that involved pregnancy predominated among participants. Self-insemination was favoured over donor insemination for prospective parents,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Current parents mean (SD)</th>
<th>Prospective parents mean (SD)</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My relationship/family is not recognised in law</td>
<td>2.02 (.83)</td>
<td>1.59 (.66)</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am/my partner is not recognised as a parent in law</td>
<td>2.07 (.81)</td>
<td>1.55 (.59)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I continually have to explain my child(ren)’s family background</td>
<td>2.22 (.52)</td>
<td>1.96 (.56)</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I fear harassment/violence toward me or my child(ren)</td>
<td>2.26 (.71)</td>
<td>1.75 (.78)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t get as much support as a parent as I would like</td>
<td>2.38 (.71)</td>
<td>2.21 (.60)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) has/have difficulties with friends over his/her/their family background</td>
<td>2.41 (.67)</td>
<td>1.75 (.53)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have to keep my identity/sexuality hidden</td>
<td>2.43 (.67)</td>
<td>2.30 (.73)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family is denied services/benefits</td>
<td>2.48 (.72)</td>
<td>1.82 (.72)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get unwanted attention when I am with my family in public (e.g. Staring, pointing)</td>
<td>2.72 (.49)</td>
<td>2.16 (.71)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) and I have difficulties because of my identity/sexuality</td>
<td>2.80 (.48)</td>
<td>2.58 (.70)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Scale: 1 = extremely difficult, 2 = somewhat difficult, 3 = not at all difficult. * Significance level = .05 (Comparing parents with prospective parents using t-test). ** Significance level = .01. *** Significance level = .001
Legal insecurity was the leading challenge for lesbian parents, particularly the lack of access to assisted reproductive technology services in Victoria and the lack of legal recognition of the non-biological mother. Opening access to such services would allow access to counselling services for prospective lesbian mothers (and their known donors), to assist them in navigating emotional vulnerabilities associated with prolonged periods of attempting to conceive, as well as clarifying future parental roles. Such counselling would complement existing self-help practices from a health and welfare angle, whereby issues of physical and emotional health can be counterbalanced against a desire for reproductive autonomy. It could also help to reduce future parenting disputes. The status of the known donor and the non-biological mother is fairly ambiguous in law, and disputes about parenthood between lesbian mothers and known donors have occurred (see Family Court of Australia, “Re. Patrick” 2002).

Other challenges specific to lesbian families included fears and experiences of community prejudice, rejection by family, and discrimination at school. As a result, they had to make regular decisions as to when and where to disclose their family structure. Although strong social support was demonstrated in general, some participants identified social isolation within both the gay and lesbian and wider communities. As a result of these issues, many participants described feeling under scrutiny, and having to prove themselves as effective parents. Parents experienced less discrimination than prospective parents predicted, which is likely to be the result of carefully selected social and professional supports, with a particular reliance on other lesbian parents for support. Education regarding the diversity within lesbian families and their special needs is clearly required for mainstream agencies including child care, school, legal and health systems.

Despite legal restrictions and ongoing societal discrimination, the challenges faced by lesbian families in Victoria are significant but not insurmountable – with attention to improved legal recognition of lesbian parents, improved sensitivity of providers within the health, welfare, legal and education systems, and improved access to community supports. From what is already known about the importance of social support, social acceptance, and a positive lesbian identity to family and child wellbeing, the families involved in the Lesbian and Gay Families Project possess considerable strengths that auger well for positive child development.


We are pleased to publish an edited version of the ABC’s *The Europeans* program, which went to air on Radio National and Radio Australia in September 2002.

Professor Peter McDonald and Dr Catherine Hakim talk to Radio National’s Keri Phillips.

Dr Hakim will be a keynote speaker at the Australian Institute of Family Studies conference in February 2003.

Fertility rates, women in the workforce, and economic health

Today on *The Europeans* we’ll be looking at the connection between fertility rates, women in the workforce and economic health.

The debate over paid maternity leave that is happening in Australia at the moment was resolved decades ago in countries like Norway, France and the Netherlands. The combination of paid maternity leave, free child care and part-time work has meant that in these countries women have continued both to work and have children.

In Europe, of course, the questions for most women are the same as those for women in Australia: One child or two? Or maybe none at all? When to have them? Some women discover that by the time they want to take the plunge into motherhood it’s too late.

To us as individuals these choices are crucial, but governments have discovered that the economic consequences of these personal decisions matter on a national level as well, because although the family benefits on offer in countries like Finland and Sweden were a response to the 1970s feminist demand for equity in the workplace, they’ve meant that women who choose to have children will more often than not have more than one. And it is this critical difference that has kept the fertility rates comparatively high in these countries because each couple is, in a sense, duplicating itself.

We’ll hear why this is significant from Professor Peter McDonald, a Demographer, who fears that countries with a low fertility rate, where couples are effectively having only one child, will face a desperate shortage of workers in 30 or 40 years’ time.

We’ll also hear from Dr Catherine Hakim, a British Sociologist, who believes that paid maternity leave and good quality child care are not what most women really want.

Professor Peter McDonald from the Australian National University agrees that some European governments provide the right incentives for women to remain connected to the world of work after they begin having children.

**PETER** Countries like France, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries – all of the Nordic countries – have very good work and family policies. They have policies which provide for women to remain attached to the labour force; they may be taking leave when the child is very young, but then child care is also very good – universal and free once the child is three or four years old. But also they allow part-time work, and one of the most important policies is that you can work part-time in your own job – you have a right to work at 80 per cent in your own job.

Fertility rates in those countries are about 1.7, 1.8, 1.9 children per woman compared to the rest of Europe where such policies don’t apply, where the fertility rates are more like 1.3 and 1.2.

**KERI** So quite significant?

**PETER** Yes, they are very significant. It doesn’t sound like much maybe. The difference between 1.3 and 1.7 may not sound like much but it makes a huge difference to future population.

**KERI** Yes, well, one is closer to two.

**PETER** Exactly, and 1.3 is closer to one. And with the fertility rate as one, of course, the population – or the generation size – falls in half every 30 years. So that you can see how the population would fall very dramatically under that circumstance.
Are fertility rates related to economy directly? If you have a situation where there is a slightly higher fertility rate, does that mean you have a more thriving economy?

Yes, generally that’s the case. The best example to look at the impact of the economy on fertility rates is actually the eastern European countries – the eastern and central European countries where the economy is in a bad way, almost universally, and fertility rates are also very, very low. Certainly the studies that have been done in those countries, and in Russia, suggest that low fertility is very much associated with the fact that unemployment is high. Studies in Spain also have shown that where unemployment has been high among young people that that contributes to low fertility.

Why should we be worried about low fertility?

Why should we be worried about low fertility? It’s a kind of long-term question really. In the short-term, if we don’t have any children around we don’t have to pay for them, and it’s actually very good for us in terms of the governments’ budget etc. The government’s budget falls because they don’t have to provide schools.

Eventually however, you need workers, and this is where fertility really comes into its own. You have to produce the next generation of workers. If you don’t do that then you’re looking for other sources of workers. Maybe you’re looking for migrants. Migrants are not terribly popular in a lot of European countries and that’s a problem. But even so, the number of workers that you would need to supplement a very low fertility rate – about 1.3 – the numbers of migrants you need are huge, and beyond all reasonable capacity for countries to absorb them. So it’s about future labour supply more than anything else.

There’s also an argument that young workers are more productive workers – that when you’ve got productivity changing through new technology, younger workers are better able to introduce that new technology than older workers, so if you have a great deficit of younger workers, then you’re going to be in trouble.

It’s related to international competition as well. If all countries were experiencing the same situation in respect of their labour supply then there might be a kind of international adjustment to this situation. But that’s not going to be the circumstance. Some countries will have big, young workforces – the one that stands out most is the United States. And when you’re in a global competitive kind of environment it’s not really a good idea to be looking to a future where you have very, very few new entries to the labour force.

Even countries which currently have very big unemployment problems? Should those countries be worried about a decline in birth rate?

Yes, they should be. It’s rather ironic certainly that a lot of countries in Europe are concerned about high unemployment rates – Germany and Spain certainly have been. But what I’m talking about is a situation in 20 or 30 years’ time so it really comes down to what extent do you care what happens in 20 or 30 years compared to what’s happening now?

Another aspect is that it’s very clear that unemployment these days is not so much related to the number of workers as to their skills, so that even in 20 or 30 years’ time, when there may be a huge labour shortage, there’ll still be a lot of unemployment of people who do not have the skills – that nobody wants to employ them essentially.

So we’re trying to peer into the future to see if European countries with low fertility rates will have enough workers for a vibrant economy. Given that 30 years ago there were people working in jobs which no longer exist, is it possible that a shrinking workforce may not be a problem? Technological advances could mean we’ll need fewer workers.

Yes, that’s seems like a reasonable argument but it tends to fall apart due to international competition. That is, in the future, what will be the principal driver of economies and economic growth are the skills of the labour force – a skilled labour force. And those skills are going to come through in each generation with younger workers so that a European country which has had very low fertility for a long period of time will have a very old labour force.

Is there such a thing as an optimum fertility rate, because obviously if people had six children, for example, if you look at societies where there are very large families, often that’s associated with great poverty?

Yes, that’s right of course. Nobody’s suggesting that you should be returning to very high fertility or to anything much higher than a lot of those countries in Europe – France, the Netherlands and so on – 1.7 or 1.8. Those kinds of fertility rates are fine, so that if you’re looking for an ideal number it’s around about two because two replaces one generation with the next, exactly.

The numbers that are involved are very, very substantial. Falls in labour supply, that’s what you have to appreciate . . . in the next 40 years, with fertility rates as they are, the labour supply in Italy would drop almost in half – it would drop by about 11 million workers, so we’re talking about big, big numbers. That’s why you can’t use migration as a way to replace those workers.

To go back to the countries you’ve described that have these policies of paid maternity leave, good quality childcare and part-time work, is the intention behind those sorts of policies to keep the fertility rate up? Is it entirely looking ahead and thinking, yes, we’ll need those workers in the future?

Well, there’s policies that address two issues. One is the fertility rate, but the other important one of course is women’s rights – that is, the right to have a society which is organised in such a way that both women and men can maintain attachment to the labour force while they’re having children. Certainly a country like Norway and a country like Sweden, they’re both very direct that these are policies which will support the fertility rate.

Why is it that some countries identified that as a thing they wanted to do whereas others in Europe didn’t?

Yes, that’s a very good question. If you look at the countries that have put the policies in place against those that have not, the real difference between them is what you might call social conservatism as against social liberalism, and the fundamental reason for low fertility is
that all countries have moved to an economic, liberal regime. But when you try to match an economic, liberal regime with a social, conservative regime, they clash. And so it really is the socially liberal countries, the ones in fact that have quite high labour force participation rates for women, that have the higher fertility.

**KERI** Tell me a bit about participation rates for women. Are they significantly much higher in countries that have those sorts of policies?

**PETER** Yes. If you go back about 30 years you find across countries in Europe the relationship that you would expect – that where labour force participation rates for women were high, the fertility rates were low (this is 30 years ago). It’s quite remarkable in the last 30 years this has exactly reversed. Nowadays, the countries that have the higher labour force participation rates for women have the higher fertility rates, and those that have the low labour force participation rates, because they don’t make it possible for mothers to work, have low fertility rates.

**KERI** What in your opinion does drive fertility rates? Can governments do a lot to encourage fertility rates?

**PETER** Governments can do enough to affect fertility at the margin, and that’s really what we’re talking about. It’s not a matter of governments looking at the 20 to 30 per cent of women who don’t want to have children because they’re not going to change their mind. It’s really about people who, at the margin, make a decision not to have an extra child. The difference between a fertility rate of 1.65 and 1.4 is 25 per cent of women having one child, so we’re talking affecting fertility rates at the margin. And it does seem that the policies that have been introduced in the northern European countries, and in France and the Netherlands, actually do that. They provide enough incentive for enough women to have that one extra child.

**KERI** Presumably some of the other countries in Europe have looked at the countries with the sort of policies you’ve described. Is it likely that many of these countries will try and introduce the same kinds of policies that we see in, say, Norway?

**PETER** Yes, that’s starting to happen. One thing about Europe is that in recent years they’ve done some very, very good research on the impacts of policies upon fertility, both in the north and in the south, and I think that research has been very convincing.

For example, countries like Italy and Spain – for a long, long time both of those countries refused to say that they were dissatisfied with their fertility level. From 1980 right up to about 1999 there was very low fertility, but they would not say that they were unhappy with this rate, and to some extent that’s related to the sensitivity of pro-nationalism attached to fascism in the past.

But from 1999 both of those countries, for the first time, came on board and said that they considered that their fertility rates were too low. Since then, they’ve started to introduce policies like paid maternity leave, but they’ve still got a long way to go because it’s really about a package, it’s not just one of these things – paid maternity leave, for example. But one of the big problems in southern European countries is that there’s little availability of part-time work. You either work full-time or you don’t work, so that that’s another policy direction that they have to take.

It’s related to the fact that with the movement towards economic liberalism we’ve introduced a degree of competition among young people in the labour force – a degree of uncertainty about jobs – and in that circumstance people have to invest a lot of time, when they’re young, in developing their own human capital. So they spend a lot of time in education, and education levels have risen quite dramatically even in the 1990s, and in the labour force, before they have their first child.

Now when you do that, by the time that a person is considering having the first child, they already have a fairly high wage rate, so that if they’re going to be out of the labour force for a long time, they can see very easily how much money they’re going to be losing.

**KERI** Thank you, Professor Peter McDonald.

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**Dr Catherine Hakim**, Sociologist at the London School of Economics, and author of *Work Lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century*, says that while it is possible for governments to manipulate fertility rates and women’s participation in the workforce through the taxation system, paid maternity leave and access to child care are not really what women want.

She says that, perhaps ironically, what most women want is for governments to pay them to stay at home, especially when their children are very young, and she points to the popularity of the recently introduced Home Care Allowance to support her argument.

**Catherine Hakim**

**CATHERINE** The Home Care Allowance that is being paid to women in France, in Finland and in Norway is not related to whether people were working before or not. It is paid to the woman as a right, and it is explicitly regarded as a payment to the woman for the work of bringing up a child in her own home.

Of all the policies that have been offered to women, this Home Care Allowance is by far the most popular – a runaway winner. It has achieved almost 100 per cent take-up rates within the first couple of years of being offered, which is very rare for a new policy. And so the policies that focus always on working women, and therefore paid maternity leave, I think are a little bit one-sided in ignoring the larger groups of women who actually would be very much happier to stay at home with their children when they’re small, and be given some kind of dignity and recognition for the real work that involves.

**KERI** Where does the idea for a Home Care Allowance come from?

**Catherine Hakim** It comes from the recognition in Finland – I think they were the first country to start it – that some women don’t use public child care services because they’re staying at home with their children looking after them full-time.
But in a kind of a way the public services were biased towards working women and the services they wanted. If one were to be fair, women who stayed at home with their children should get an equivalent allowance or payment. And so it was a new development trying to make a policy for women neutral as between those who did want to work and those who don’t want to work outside the home after they have children.

KERI Are you saying then that the ideas behind maternity leave and child care are predicated on an unrealistic assumption about what women want? That women want a career rather like a man’s career?

CATHERINE It’s predicated on the assumption that most women are career centred, work centred. And this is not the case on the basis of all the evidence that I have reviewed and assembled in my book. It’s simply not the case that the majority of women are work centred. And I would say, on balance, the majority of women want some sort of balance between family and work, and a lot of women want, actually, to give priority to family work rather than paid work.

And the people who make policy tend to be in employment themselves, and therefore there’s always a bias towards thinking that the working woman is the norm, or the majority, or the rule, and in practice that is not the case, and we have to look at the research evidence that it’s quite clearly not the case.

KERI Where does part-time work fit into all this? Would this be something that governments could sensibly do given what you’ve said about what you think women want?

CATHERINE Part-time work is crucial for a lot of women who want to combine paid work and family work without giving priority to either. But part-time work varies hugely between countries. In some countries what is called part-time work, particularly in Sweden, is in fact only nominal part-time work because they simply arrive at work a little later and leave work a little earlier so they can collect their children from nurseries. It’s actually a full-time job with a slight reduction at each end of the day.

KERI What about women who don’t perhaps have a partner, whose marriage may have broken down, who still may have children to raise, may not want to have a full-time job, but might find it economically impossible to get by with anything less?

CATHERINE Women who have to be financially independent obviously will want to do a full-time job, and for women in that situation child care of some sort is going to be essential. But I think we still have to recognise that these women are in the minority. Most women are in a marriage and therefore there are two people, two adults, to look after the children and earn a living, and therefore there’s more flexibility.

KERI If you look around the countries of Europe, which country is getting it right in your view in terms of government policy settings for women?

CATHERINE I particularly admire France because they’ve had governments that have veered from the left to the right and back again. What you’ve got in France are policies that support the women who want to stay at home with their children and full-time mothers, and policies that support the working woman.

What we always hear about from journalists and from academics in France are all the policies that support the working woman and they give the impression that the work rate for women in France is really very high indeed, probably one of the highest in Europe. Well this is simply not the case. The work rate for women in France is no different from Germany and Britain where such policies don’t exist. So in France you’ve got a balance. There are fiscal policies and other policies, including the Home Care Allowance, which strongly support the full-time mother, and there are other policies which strongly support the woman who wants to return to work when her children are young and provide child care and so on, and in France you’ve got that balance between the two groups rather than a focus only on the working woman. So I think France is closer to getting it right than probably any other European country.

KERI There’s been quite a lot written here recently in the press about women who are perhaps so focused on their career that they put off having children and then discover at 40 or in their 40s that it’s too late. In that context, perhaps going back and looking again at what feminists were agitating for in the 1970s, and maybe rethinking those kinds of goals, what’s your view on that?

CATHERINE Oh yes, I agree with you completely on that. I would refer here particularly to the feminist movement in Anglo-Saxon countries, English-speaking countries – America, Britain, I don’t know about Australia – which I think went for goals that were very much career centred, work centred, with an emphasis on the labour market and equality in the labour market.

The feminist movement in certain continental countries, notably Germany, had a very different bias and slant, and there was a lot of emphasis on rights for full-time mothers, possibly payments or monetary payments like a Home Care Allowance for full-time mothers, – the equal status of the non-working woman and the working woman. There was no suggestion in the German feminist movement that you had to have a job to be equal with a man, that you had to have an income to be equal with a man.

I would also point to the fact that in America there are two women’s movements. One is the feminist movement as we know it in Europe which emphasises women’s right to work and equal opportunity. The other is called the Maternalism Movement because it emphasises the dignity and importance and value of women’s work in the home, in particular in bringing up children.

There is a tendency when we talk about the feminist movement to think of only one, but actually there have been several strands to it and it’s just the careerist element that has been given most attention. I think now the other aspect needs to be given a hell of a lot more attention. And the point you’ve made about women thinking they can always have it all and then discovering at 40 it’s a bit late to have children is a real wake-up call.

KERI Thank you, Dr Catherine Hakim.

And that’s The Europeans for this week. Until next week, it’s goodbye from Keri Phillips.
Despite widespread interest and policy relevance, significant gaps exist in our knowledge of contact between non-resident parents and their children. These gaps warrant attention.

In Australia, as elsewhere, research into post-separation parent–child contact has focused almost exclusively on the measurement of one domain: the frequency of face-to-face contact. This is not surprising. Time is tangible – it can be counted, divided, and apportioned – and often the thing that is measured is that which is easiest to measure.

But obviously there is more to parent–child contact than just time. The nature and quality of the interaction is also important, perhaps even more so (Amato and Gilbreth 1999). In the United States context, Melli (1999) has argued that research into contact needs to clearly describe and recognise both qualitative and quantitative differences in the many ways that parental sharing of time with children can occur. To date, however, little information has been collected in Australia on some of the most rudimentary components of contact, such as the distinction between day-only contact versus sleepovers.

The day–night distinction is important for several reasons. To begin with, there are notable qualitative differences between day-time and night-time parenting. Overnight stays help foster the development of close emotional bonds between children and non-resident parents (Lamb and Kelly 2001; Warshak 2000). Time is usually less constrained and structured, allowing the dynamics that typically characterise family life to occur – such as putting children to bed, saying good night, waking and dressing children, and starting the day with them over breakfast. By contrast, daytime contact is typically more time-limited and thus tends to be structured in ways that foster participation in mutually rewarding activities. While these activities are important for building and maintaining emotional bonds, they are only one slice from the broad spectrum of practical contexts necessary for children’s social, emotional and cognitive development.

Furthermore, it can take time for parents and children to get re-acquainted after not seeing each other for a while – even after a week or two. Overnight stays can help this process. They can also encourage children to feel that they have two homes, and that they are not just “visitors”; affirm non-resident parents’ self-identity as a “parent” (Lamb and Kelly 2001); and allow resident parents to gain respite from the immediate responsibilities of care giving (Funder 1993; Ricci 1997).

Another reason that the distinction between day-time and night-time parenting is important is that each pattern of care may have different degrees of durability. For instance, Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) found that overnight stays remained relatively stable over time whereas day-only contact did not. There was a shift from no contact to day-only contact by some non-resident mothers, while the reverse was the case for some non-resident fathers (who shifted from day-only contact to no contact). Day-only contact might thus reflect a more fragile or transitional relationship structure than overnight care, acting as a stepping-stone to or from disengagement.

A fourth reason that the day–night distinction is important is that different patterns of care might foster different psychosocial outcomes. For instance, Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) found that overnight stays remained relatively stable over time whereas day-only contact did not. There was a shift from no contact to day-only contact by some non-resident mothers, while the reverse was the case for some non-resident fathers (who shifted from day-only contact to no contact). Day-only contact might thus reflect a more fragile or transitional relationship structure than overnight care, acting as a stepping-stone to or from disengagement. A fourth reason that the day–night distinction is important is that different patterns of care might foster different psychosocial outcomes. For instance, there is lively debate about whether young children should stay overnight with non-resident parents and, if so, at what age and how often (Gould and Stahl 2001; Kelly and Lamb 2000; Lamb and Kelly 2001; Solomon and Birigin 2001; Younger 2002). This issue is of significant import to separated parents with young children, as well as legal professionals and clinicians.

Finally, each pattern of care can involve different financial costs. Regular overnight stays, for instance, usually necessitate separate bedrooms for children (Woods and...
Associates 1999) while day-only contact does not. Overnight stays also typically require more meals, furniture, bedding, toys, clothes, games, and so on. Recently there has been increasing emphasis on the need to recognise the costs of contact to non-resident parents who have ongoing and regular contact with their children (FaCS 2000). Distinguishing between day-only contact and sleepovers is a necessary prerequisite in any attempt to obtain reliable estimates of these costs.

But Australian data on day-only contact versus sleepovers are sparse. Recent national data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey offer some insights. According to resident parents’ reports, a significant minority (28 per cent) of children with a natural parent living elsewhere, who see that parent, never stay overnight with them. Data from the 1997 Family Characteristics Survey (ABS 1998) put this figure at 34 per cent. Why might so many children not stay overnight? Two possibilities are money and stability. Two households are not as cheap to run as one. Aside from inverting the economies of scale, parental separation duplicates many of the costs of caring for children across two households. Confronted by both the start-up costs of setting up somewhere new to live and child support liabilities, some non-resident parents may not be in a position to provide suitable accommodation to facilitate overnight stays. Thus where one parent is able to provide better accommodation than the other, children might sleep primarily in that parent’s household.

In other cases, stability may be valued for its own sake. A basic axiom of child psychology is that children need stability to ensure their healthy development. One of the cornerstones of stability is having a place to call “home”. For children (especially young ones), home and family are intrinsically intertwined: “My home is where my family lives” (Garbarino 1995: 56). Even though parental separation acts to create two families and two homes for children, a “one home” mindset often persists (Ricci 1997). Stability in this sense might mean “one home, one bed”, with day-only contact reflecting this mindset.

Day-only contact can also indicate concerns about a child’s safety, a lack of knowledge or self-confidence about parenting skills on the part of the non-resident parent, or possibly emotional friction between parents, or between a child and a new partner of a non-resident parent (Taylor, Smith and Tapp 2001). It can thus act as a marker for deeper contextual issues that need to be explored in terms of family dynamics.

Of course, where there are chronic levels of co-parental conflict, or where children have experienced or are likely to be exposed to continuing domestic violence or child abuse, contact (day or night) may be highly inappropriate. The best interests of children should always be paramount in making decisions about contact, with the appropriateness of different patterns of care contingent on a range of factors, including the quality of care, as well as children’s individual temperament, resilience, stage of development, and experience (Gould and Stahl 2001; Ricci 1997).

In sum, significant gaps exist in our knowledge of contact between non-resident parents and their children. One such gap is the distinction between day-only contact and sleepovers. This distinction has important implications in terms of bonding, costs and outcomes.

Data source

One dataset that can offer unique insights into post-separation day- and night-time parenting is the 1997 Family Characteristics Survey (ABS 1998). This large-scale national survey maps patterns of parental care for children aged less than 18 years whose parents live apart. Much of the information in this survey was collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the first time. This included
a question on overnight stays: “Does [child’s name] ever stay overnight with his/her mother/father?”

In this article, data from the Family Characteristics Survey are used to investigate the occurrence of sleepovers, and three potential correlates: family type (single-parent versus repartnered-parent households), age of children, and child support (received or not received). These factors were chosen because each has been identified as a significant predictor of contact more generally: first, non-resident mothers often maintain stronger social ties with their children than non-resident fathers – as evidenced by higher levels of extended contact rather than day-to-day contact (Stewart 1999b); second, younger children are more likely than older children to have contact with non-resident parents (ABS 1998); and third, non-resident fathers who see their children tend to pay child support, unlike fathers who lose or do not maintain contact (Smyth, Sheehan and Fehlberg 2000). While other factors are likely to be important (for example, the quality of the co-parental relationship, geographical distance between parents, and the gender of children), the data set most readily accommodated consideration of the former three key factors.

**Methodological and conceptual issues**

This analysis excludes children who have little or no contact with their non-resident parent (30 per cent of children living with one parent), as well as a sizeable number of children who “were identified as living with one natural parent, but no other parent was living elsewhere” (perhaps due to the loss of contact with, or death of, the other parent) (ABS 1998: 7). The sample thus comprises children under 18 who have some contact with their non-resident parent.

It should also be noted that the Family Characteristics Survey relies on resident parents’ reports (mostly mothers). Differential reporting by women and men is a common feature of research of this nature (Braver and O’Connell 1999), with fathers generally perceiving themselves to be more involved with their children than mothers perceive them to be. This means that the data presented below are likely to be an underestimate of paternal involvement, including the prevalence of overnight stays.

Since non-resident parents were not interviewed, the following analysis is restricted to three family types: single-mother households, single-father households, and repartnered-resident-parent households (of whom 87 per cent were repartnered mothers). These three family types comprised 28 per cent of all families in Australia with children under the age of 18 years in 1997 (18 per cent single-mother families; 3 per cent single-father families; and 7 per cent step or blended families) (ABS 1998).

One final caveat: some caution should be exercised in viewing the three family types presented as static structures. In reality, individuals often pass through a range of family constellations after divorce or separation but this complexity is masked by single-point-in-time data (Maclean and Eekelaar 1997). The fluidity of family form should be borne in mind when examining the accompanying figures.

**Findings**

As context for analysing sleepovers, we first examine the frequency of contact by family type (Figure 1).

Single mothers and single fathers reported very similar patterns of contact between non-resident parents and children. This similarity accords with research overseas (for example, Stewart 1999a, b). Figure 1 shows that over half of children had face-to-face contact with non-resident mothers and fathers at least once a fortnight (59 per cent and 58 per cent), while around a fifth of children saw their non-resident parent every one to three months (21 per cent). In contrast, daily contact with non-resident mothers and fathers was relatively uncommon (6 per cent and 9 per cent), as was contact that occurred less than once every three months (13 per cent for both).

A less regular pattern of contact was evident for children in the care of a repartnered parent (mostly mothers), whereby fortnightly contact was less likely to occur in repartnered-parent households (45 per cent) than in single-mother and single-father households (58 per cent and 59 per cent respectively). However, contact that occurred at least once in a three-month period was more common for children in repartnered-parent households than for children in single-parent households (32 per cent compared with 21 per cent). The same pattern was evident for children who had contact at least once every six months (23 per cent compared with 13 per cent). So, overall, children of repartnered mothers tended to see their fathers less often than children of single mothers.

**Overnight stays by family type**

Figure 2 shows the occurrence of overnight stays by family type. A clear pattern emerged: overnight stays varied markedly by the relationship status and gender of parents. Children in the care of a repartnered parent were more...
likely than children in the care of a single mother or father to stay overnight with their other parent (85 per cent compared with 60 per cent and 73 per cent). So too were children in the care of a single father compared with children in the care of a single mother (73 per cent compared with 60 per cent).

The higher rate of overnight stays reported by single fathers compared with single mothers is somewhat surprising given the similar patterns of face-to-face contact reported by each group in Figure 1. This difference is likely to be a function of traditional gender role expectations. Society expects women to be nurturers—perhaps even in the relatively small proportion of cases where children are not in their care. Interesting work by Stewart (1999a) in the United States suggests that this expectation may not surface in the frequency of face-to-face contact but in the quality of the interaction between non-resident mothers and their children.

According to Stewart (1999b), non-resident parents (male or female) typically face many emotional and practical obstacles that act to inhibit high levels of day-to-day contact with non-resident children. But where non-resident mothers are in contact with children, they tend to be more involved with them in qualitatively richer types of contact, such as using telephone and letter contact to stay emotionally connected to them, and spending longer blocks of time with children, than non-resident fathers (Stewart 1999b). Sleepovers may be another example of this qualitative difference in mothers' and fathers' involvement with children.

Most striking in Figure 2 is the higher rate of sleepovers by children in the care of a repartnered parent (mostly mothers). This pattern might reflect certain family dynamics. For instance, relationships need “adult” time and space. There might also be “push and pull” factors for children around the presence of a step-parent (such as emotional friction with this parent).

Another possibility is that repartnered parents are more likely to each have their own children from a prior relationship to care for, some of whom are likely to be living elsewhere. One way to maintain contact with each set of children is to rotate caring for them over each weekend.

Yet another possibility relates to life stage. Repartnered parents are more likely than single parents to have older children, and older children tend to have less face-to-face contact than younger children (ABS 1998).

**Overnight stays by children’s age**

To explore the possibility that the higher rate of sleepovers by children in the care of a repartnered parent relates to life stage, we examined the occurrence of overnight stays by children’s age and family type (see Figure 3).

Regardless of children’s age, children in the care of a repartnered parent were more likely than children in the care of a single mother to stay overnight with their other parent. (Children in the care of single fathers fell in between repartnered parents and single mothers but not all differences were statistically significant.) Controlling for the effect of children’s age thus suggests that life stage is not driving the apparent differences in sleepovers by children in different families.

When sleepovers are examined within each family type (starting with the largest group: single mothers), clear age-related differences again emerged, with the youngest and oldest groups of children (0–4 years and 15–17 years) being the least likely of the groups to have sleepovers. (Similar patterns were evident for children in the other family types, but these patterns were not statistically significant, probably because of the relatively small size of these groups.) The lower occurrence of overnight stays by children aged 15–17 years accords with their developmental need for independence from parents, while the lower rate of sleepovers by children aged 0–4 years might reflect non-resident parents’ uncertainty about caring for young children or a perception of this by their former spouse (Kelly and Wallerstein 1977).

![Figure 3](source: Family Characteristics Survey: customised tables, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998)

![Figure 4](source: Family Characteristics Survey: customised tables, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998)

![Figure 5](source: Family Characteristics Survey: customised tables, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998)
It is worth noting that a linear pattern emerged within the 0-4 year age group of children in the care of single mothers when this group was further sub-divided. Thirty-eight per cent of children in the 0-2 year age group stayed overnight at their other parent’s house, compared with 60 per cent of children aged 3-4 years (data not shown). That is, older children were more likely than younger children to sleepover in this age group.

**Overnight stays by frequency of contact**

Figure 4 shows the relationship between overnight stays and frequency of face-to-face contact by family type. Not surprisingly, face-to-face contact and overnight stays are related: the more contact children have with non-resident parents, the more likely they are to stay overnight. This pattern holds regardless of the gender or relationship status of the primary caretaker.

Of interest, however, is the tendency for some children in the care of a single parent to see their other parent daily but not to stay overnight with that parent. This pattern of care may be indicative of cooperative parenting (for example, close proximity between parents, and high involvement by the non-resident parent in children’s day-to-day routines), or it may simply reflect inadequate accommodation, or emotional friction with a step-parent.

**Overnight stays by child support payments**

While the main focus of this paper is on the extent to which children in different types of families stay overnight with non-resident parents, the close but complex links between child support and contact deserve attention on the issue of overnight stays. “Paying” and “seeing” tend to go hand-in-hand. But whether this nexus extends to overnight stays is unclear.

Figure 5 shows the relationship between overnight stays and the receipt of child support in the 12 months prior to interview. Child support payments appeared to make little difference to whether children in repartnered parents’ households stayed overnight with their other parent. The vast majority of children in this family type stayed overnight with their other parent regardless of whether or not child support was received (85 per cent and 84 per cent).

However, child support appeared to be related to sleepovers in the case of children in single-parent households, although this relationship was not straightforward.

As noted earlier, non-resident fathers who see their children tend to pay child support, unlike fathers who lose or do not maintain contact. This pattern appears to generalise to sleepovers where the resident mother is a single parent (69 per cent compared with 49 per cent). But the reverse seems to hold for the much smaller group of children in the care of single fathers: children in single-father households that do not receive child support are more likely to stay overnight with non-resident mothers than those in households that do receive child support (77 per cent compared with 48 per cent).

What might explain this anomaly? Single-father households are a relatively small (but growing) group. They tend to be better off financially than single-mother households (Smyth and Weston 2000). As a consequence, child support and contact are often unrelated: frequent, flexible contact remains the norm in the absence of child support payments (Funder 1993). The relatively high rate of overnight stays between children and non-resident mothers who do not pay child support is thus not surprising.

Of course, not all single-father households have sufficient incomes on which to live (Meyer and Garasky 1993). Indeed, in Australia, a significant number of single fathers (24 per cent) have “low incomes” (Smyth and Weston 2000: 8), and their former partners are likely to be in similarly poor circumstances – in which case contact might occur but not sleepovers for all the same reasons that sleepovers may not occur in some single-mother households. Under financial stress, this group of single-fathers may be under pressure to obtain child support even if it is only a small amount. Regardless of what might be driving the different rates of sleepovers between single fathers who receive child support and those who do not, it is important to remember that overnight stays with a non-resident parent are still the norm for children of both groups of single fathers.

**Conclusion**

Overnight stays provide opportunities to engage in an array of interactions and functional contexts that are usually not possible in day-time contact (Lamb and Kelly 2001). Despite the importance of examining different patterns of care by parents after relationship breakdown, very little is known about the distribution of day- and night-time parenting by parents. Our findings point to the importance of distinguishing between day-only contact and overnight stays when conducting research into post-separation parenting.
Three key findings emerge from the above analysis.
First, according to resident parents’ reports, around a third (34 per cent) of children with a natural parent living else-where, who see that parent, never stay overnight with them.
Second, and not surprisingly, the more contact children have with a non-resident parent, the more likely they are to stay overnight. A similar pattern holds for child support in relation to the most common post-separation family type configuration – resident mothers, non-resident fathers: children in single-mother households that receive child support are more likely to stay overnight with their father than children in households that do not receive child support.
Third, overnight stays varied markedly by family type. Children in the care of a repartnered parent (mostly moth-ers) were the most likely to stay overnight with their other parent, while children in single-mother households were the least likely to do so. With one or two minor exceptions, this pattern held regardless of the age of children or the fre-quency of face-to-face contact between children and their non-resident parents.
This pattern is remarkably consistent, and quite strik-ing given the similarity in face-to-face contact reported by single mothers and fathers, and the somewhat less regular pattern of face-to-face contact for children in the care of a repartnered parent. Put simply, children in the care of repartnered parents are less likely to have regular contact with their non-resident parent, but when they do, this con-tact is likely to involve overnight stays with that parent. Two possibilities are that repartnered parents may want “adult” time with each other, or they may have two sets of children to care for.
A complex set of family dynamics is likely to underpin the above patterns, and thus there is a clear need for more detailed work that can unpack these dynamics. The deci-sion-making process around overnight stays also warrants examination.

Obvious data sources for this work are the two large-scale longitudinal datasets funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services – namely, the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, and the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). However, multi-wave longitudinal data are still some time away. In the mean time, the Institute’s own study of post-separation patterns of parenting also hopes to shed light on the night-day parenting distinction.

Notes
1 We recently analysed 292 empirical studies identified by several key meta-analytic and narrative reviews of the impact of divorce on chil-dren. Our question was: What domains of parent-child contact have been measured, and how? Only 36 per cent of these studies reported measuring contact and, of these, most focused on contact frequency.
2 This estimate was calculated after personal communication on 18 October 2002 with Nicole Watson, HILDA Survey Manager. This esti-mate increases to 56 per cent when children with no contact with their non-resident parent are included. Both estimates are based on the youngest child (aged 17 years or less) in a resident parent’s household, unlike data from the Family Characteristics Survey (ABS 1998) that are based on all natural children aged 0-17 in a resident parent’s household.
3 This estimate is derived from customised tables obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It is based on resident parents’ reports, and excludes children with a natural parent living elsewhere, who do not see that parent.
4 The Family Characteristics Survey was a supplement to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, and the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). However, multi-wave longitudinal data are still some time away. In the mean time, the Institute’s own study of post-separation patterns of parenting also hopes to shed light on the night-day parenting distinction.
5 By “little” contact, we mean that children have not seen their non-resident parent more than once in the last year. By “a sizeable number” of children, we note that the Family Characteristics Survey identified 102,800 children living with a natural parent but where no other parent was reported as living elsewhere. This represents almost 10 per cent of the total population of children living with only one natural parent.
6 All percentages have Relative Standard Errors (RSE) below 25 per cent, unless otherwise stated. All statistical differences are reported at the 95 per cent level of confidence.

References

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Families in Australia take many and varied forms – blended families, sole-parent families, families headed by same-sex couples, with children conceived from donor sperm... How is the law responding to accommodate diversity in relationships and family structure?

Relationship diversity and the law

Rapid social change in the developed world, with higher divorce rates, fewer marriages, greater acceptance of same-sex relationships, and advancements in reproductive and gender assignment technology, has resulted in an increasingly diverse range of family forms existing outside the traditional nuclear family model.

In the Australian context, the law’s response in redefining the construct of the “family” to accommodate relationships in all their diversity has been inconsistent in pace and approach, and lacking a coherent policy focus.

Over the last three years there has been an extraordinary degree of legislative activity at the state level, reforming the numerous laws in which the prescription of rights and responsibilities depends on the nature of one person’s relationship with another. The end result is a complex and fragmented system of laws straddling numerous jurisdictions, the applicability of which can depend on one’s sexual orientation, relationship and reproductive choices, and geographic location.

An analysis of all these laws is beyond the scope of this article. What follows then, is a broad overview of state and Commonwealth “family” law, in particular focusing on recent developments in laws relating to family relationship breakdown.

Social trends

The 1970s and 1980s saw a significant increase in the incidence of cohabitation outside marriage, either as a conscious life choice or as a prelude to marriage. The percentage of heterosexual de facto couples as a proportion of all married and de facto couples was 6 per cent in 1986, increased to 8 per cent in 1991 and by 2001 had reached 12.4 per cent (ABS 2000, 2002). The 1996 census data of registered marital status by relationship indicates that roughly three per 1,000 of all couples describe themselves as same-sex couples, rising to five per 1,000 in 2001 (ABS 1998, 2002; Fridae Magazine 2002). However, estimates remain unreliable given that it is likely that some same-sex couples may be less willing than heterosexual couples to reveal their relationship status.

Together with the rising incidence of different and less formalised relationships is the apparent increase in social acceptance of non-traditional family groupings. Significant social acceptability of family formation outside the institution of marriage was evident from the results of the Australian Family Values Survey conducted by de Vaus in 1995 (de Vaus and Wolcott 1997) with 62 per cent of those interviewed feeling that it was acceptable for a man and a woman to live together outside wedlock. However, only 45 per cent felt that it was “all right to have children without being married”.

The degree of social acceptance of same-sex unions and the raising of children within those households has yet to be tested by research in Australia. However, recent polls in the Netherlands, where same-sex marriage has been recognised since 1999, show a high level of support for homosexual marriage with 64 per cent of city residents approving of legal recognition of such unions (Hosek 1997).

Historical background

The history of the development of family law in Australia has been covered in depth in previous Family Matters articles (Nicholson 2000; Fogarty 2001) and does not need to be repeated at length here. However, a brief outline of the constitutional issues at play is essential to understand the state/Commonwealth and state/state divide that exists today.

In summary, the Constitution vested in the Commonwealth the power to legislate in relation to families only where the parties were or had been married. Other laws impacting on families, including child protection laws, remained the domain of the states. The most significant exercise of federal power in this area was the passing of...
the Family Law Act in 1975. The impact of this legisla-
tion was far-reaching, establishing as it did a specialist
federal court applying uniform and comprehensive laws
governing areas including divorce, children, property
and maintenance. The difficulty was that it did not apply
to a growing number of families who did not conform to
the model contemplated by the drafters of the Constitu-
tion at the end of the 19th century. Nor did it apply in
Western Australia which was alone amongst the states in
opting to establish its own family court system funded by
the federal government.

Ten years into its operation, measures were taken to
bring all children under the provisions of the Family
Law Act. This required agreement from the states to
refer their power to legislate on ex-nuptial children to
the Commonwealth. By the late 1980s all states (except
Western Australia) had done so. As a consequence, the
provisions of Part VII of the Family Law Act apply to all
children, regardless of their parents’ marital status.
Western Australia, the only state to retain jurisdiction
over ex-nuptial children, passed legislation similar to
provisions of the Commonwealth Family Law Act relating
to residence and contact.

While de facto couples have access to the Family
Court to resolve disputes in regard to their children,\(^2\)
they are still required to institute separate proceedings
in a different jurisdiction to settle their financial affairs.
Prior to the enactment of state de facto property legisla-
tion, disputing couples only had recourse to equitable
remedies\(^3\) such as constructive and resulting trusts and
promissory estoppel (that is, acting on the promise of
another and thereby suffering financial detriment), a
notoriously fraught area of law viable only where the
property in dispute warranted the high legal costs. From
1988, cross-vesting provisions allowed for de facto par-
ties with children’s matters before the Family Court to
also have property issues determined in the same forum.
This was the case for 11 years until the High Court deci-
sion of \textit{Wakim; ex parte McNally} (1999) HCA 27 found
the cross-vesting provisions to be unconstitutional.

Between 1984 and 1999 all states and territories
except Western Australia passed legislation allowing for
property adjustments and (in some cases) spousal
maintenance for de facto couples. New South Wales
took the lead in 1984 with the passage of the De Facto
Relationships Act, and all other states followed suit
with schemes which were largely modelled on that Act.
However, until the passage of the Australian Capital
Territory’s Domestic Relationships Act in 1994, none of
these legislative schemes was available to same-sex
couples or people in other domestic relationships.

Amendments to legislation in the Australian Capital
Territory (1994), Queensland and New South Wales
(1999), Victoria (2001), and Western Australia (2002),
bring to five the number of jurisdictions that include
same-sex couples under laws regulating financial inter-
est following separation. The Australian Capital
Territory and New South Wales legislation has gone fur-
ther in extending the operation of these laws to people in
non-sexual or “domestic relationships” that involve some
degree of personal commitment and domestic support.\(^4\)

While moves to broaden the application of such laws
have been applauded, doing so on a state by state basis
only adds to the anomalous situation that exists nation-
ally in the area of family law, with wide variation in the
legal status of relationships from one border to another.

For example, same-sex spouses in long-term, marriage-
like relationships in the Northern Territory can not apply
for a judicial resolution under a statutory scheme of a
financial dispute when their relationship breaks down.
However, a person living in the Australian Capital Terri-

tory who provides domestic support for a friend, even
while maintaining a separate residence, can use the same
laws as heterosexual de facto couples to settle property
in dispute and to seek financial support.

The unique position of Western Australia, unfettered
by constitutional restraints, is a study in paradox.
Amendments to the Family Court Act 1997 (WA),
assented to on 25 September this year and due to come
into operation in January 2003, include de facto cou-
ples under the jurisdiction of the state Family Court.
In one fell swoop, Western Australia, long considered the
aberrant state in the area of family law, will become the
first jurisdiction to establish uniform laws applying to
married, heterosexual and same-sex de facto couples
regarding property disputes (with the exception of
provisions for the “splitting” of superannuation entitle-
ments), spousal maintenance, children’s issues,
financial agreements, and injunctive powers. These
reforms, coupled with legislation passed on 20 Septem-
ber 2002 which amended a range of Acts containing a
definition of spouse or kin to include same-sex rela-
tionships, have catapulted the state from being arguably the most discriminative jurisdiction in terms of
sexual orientation to one of the most progressive.

\textbf{Current status of family law}

The following provides a snapshot of family law as it
currently applies in Australia. “Family law” in the con-
text of this article has a broader definition than just
matters arising under the Family Law Act and refers to
laws relating to relationship formation and rights and
duties following relationship dissolution.

\textbf{Marriage}

Same-sex couples cannot enter legally recognised
marriages in Australia as the Marriage Act 1961 (Com-
monwealth) defines marriage as a union between a
man and a woman.

The Netherlands has recognised civil marriage for
same-sex couples since 1999, and countries such as Den-
mark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden provide for
registration of partnerships as a form of legal recogni-
tion. The United States has moved in the other direction, with
34 states and the US Congress passing legislation or mak-
ing constitutional amendments to bar same-sex marriage.

\textbf{Children – residence/contact}

As outlined above, the provisions of the Commonwealth
Family Law Act relating to residence and contact of chil-
dren apply to all children including adopted children
and children who have been conceived by artificial
insemination. However, they do not apply equally to
those who may see themselves as parents (either in fact
or in function) of these children.
Under s.60H of the Family Law Act, the consenting male partner (married or de facto) of a woman who undergoes an artificial conception procedure is deemed to be a parent of the child. But this presumption does not operate in the case of the lesbian partner of a woman who conceives a child in the same way. Nor can she achieve legal recognition as a parent of the child by adoption as the definition of step-parent in s.60D of the Family Law Act requires that parties who seek to adopt their partner's children are or have been married.

The exception to the above is Western Australia. The more inclusive definition of de facto, contained in the Acts Amendment (Lesbian and Gay Law Reform) Act 2002 (WA), brings the legal status of lesbian parents in line with heterosexual couples. That is, where women in a same-sex relationship agree to conceive a child by way of artificial insemination, both are automatically considered to be the legal parents of the child, and both can be listed on the child's birth certificate. Where a woman with a child enters a “marriage-like” relationship with another woman, her new partner can achieve legal recognition as a parent of the child through step-parent or carer adoption. The Australian Capital Territory government has recently announced plans to enact similar reforms (McLennan 2002).

The parental status of sperm donors in contact cases was first considered by the Family Court in the recent case of Re Patrick (2002) FLC 93-096. In that case a child was born to a lesbian couple following privately arranged artificial insemination with donor sperm. The donor subsequently sought to establish greater involvement in the child's life, which the mother and her partner opposed. The court held that the donor would only be deemed a parent for the purposes of s.60H(3) of the Family Law Act if the relevant state or territory law conferred that status on sperm donors. This was not the case for the applicant as, at the time of the decision, there was no such prescribed law in Australia. Nonetheless, given the man's commitment to the conception process and the relationship he had established with the child, an order for contact was made. This case had a tragic postscript when the biological mother took her child's life and her own, several months after the decision.

As this case illustrates, while neither the man who provides the genetic material for the conception of a child nor the non-biological lesbian mother who raises a child with her same-sex partner is legally a “parent” for the purposes of the Family Law Act, both have standing to apply to the Family Court for orders in relation to the child as “any other person” concerned with the welfare of the child. Nonetheless, the legal confusion surrounding the status of the various players in “unorthodox” conception procedures such as in Patrick's case, and in disputes arising from surrogacy arrangements, from mismatched eggs and sperm in IVF clinics, and from conception procedures undertaken post mortem or after separation, is something the courts will be grappling with for years to come.

In determining issues concerning children under the Family Law Act, regardless of the circumstances of their birth, the best interests of the child will always be the paramount consideration for the court. There have been no known cases that have viewed a parent's homosexuality as a presumption of unfitness in itself in determining residency of or contact with a child. In past cases, however, conditions were sometimes attached prohibiting the display of affection between the parties in front of children. In line with the “best interest” principle, the real or anticipated discrimination faced by a child of gay or lesbian parents may be deemed a relevant factor in resolving a residence dispute.

Children – financial support

The obligation to provide for children financially, either under the old court-based regime or via the Child Support Agency, applies to all “parents”, including those who have never lived together. However, neither the Family Law Act nor the Child Support Assessment Act contains a comprehensive definition of “parent.” What then is the obligation, in the case of a child conceived by artificial means, of the non-biological lesbian parent, and – the other factor in the equation – the sperm donor?

In the case of Re B and J (1996) FLC 92-716, a man who had donated his sperm to a lesbian couple who subsequently gave birth to two children, sought a declaration from the Family Court that he was not liable to pay child support. The court held that the donor was not considered a parent for the purposes of the Child Support Assessment Act even though his name appeared on the birth certificate and the insemination process was unlawful (that is, not conducted by way of the proscribed medical procedure). The later case of Tobin v Tobin 1999 150 FLR 185 confirmed that the class of people who are parents for the purposes of the Child Support Assessment Act is restricted to legal parents (that is, biological, adoptive or presumptive parents by virtue of conception procedures).

As a result, alternative methods have been sought to secure financial support from partners for children conceived in these circumstances. In the New South Wales case of W v G 1996 20 FLR 49 the biological mother of two children, conceived by way of artificial insemination of donor sperm, sought a settlement from her ex-partner. The lesbian couple had been together for a total of eight years. The co-parent, who agreed to having children, and participated in the insemination process, was not recognised as a parent under the Child Support Assessment Act and therefore not required to pay child support. In proceedings for a property settlement the plaintiff also claimed “equitable compensation” for the cost of raising the children, arguing promissory estoppel (as defined earlier) She was awarded $150,000 “compensation” from her ex-partner's assets. It should be noted that since the 1999 reforms to the Property (Relationships) Act in New South Wales, the plaintiff in this case could apply for spousal maintenance, albeit limited in duration.

Heterosexual and same-sex de facto partners in all states except Western Australia cannot be held liable to provide financial support for step-children under s.66M of the Family Law Act as the section requires that the parties are or have been married. The recent amendments in Western Australia mean that lesbian parents have the same right as heterosexual parents to apply for child maintenance through the Family Court.

Adoption

The general requirement for adoptions outside the child's extended family (that is, “stranger” adoption) is that the application be made jointly by a “husband and wife.” In all states except Tasmania, Queensland and
the Northern Territory heterosexual de facto couples can adopt in limited circumstances. As of September 2002, Western Australia is the only state that allows for same-sex couples to adopt children, with the Australian Capital Territory recently expressing its intention to follow suit (McLennan 2002). Provisions in state legislation providing for “stranger” adoption by single people do not prevent lesbian women or gay men from applying to adopt a child.

When the amendments to the Family Court Act 1997 (WA) are proclaimed, Western Australia will be the first state to allow for those in same-sex relationships to adopt their partner’s children (that is, step-parent adoption), including children the couple agree to conceive by way of artificial means. In 1997 the New South Wales Law Reform Commission recommended that proposed amendments to the Adoption of Children Act NSW (1965) extend step-parent adoption to include same-sex relationships, but this recommendation was not implemented. Step-parent adoption is available to same-sex couples in some overseas countries, including Denmark, Iceland, Navarra (Spain), Norway and in some Canadian provinces.

**Property redistribution**

The passage of the first laws relating to the division of property of de facto spouses in New South Wales in 1984, although largely modelled on the provisions of the Family Law Act, in no way purported to replicate the rights although largely modelled on the provisions of the Family Law Act give the judge a greater ability to protect the interests of the more financially vulnerable party. In applying the new legislation, state judges reiterated this view and adopted a restrictive approach in its interpretation. Since the mid-1990s the interpretation of state legislation is now more in line with Family Court principles. However, differences continue to exist between the various state acts and, in a number of significant regards, fewer opportunities to seek financial redress following separation are afforded to de facto couples than their married counterparts.

First, de facto parties must generally satisfy a number of threshold criteria including the length and nature of their relationship, the presence of children, the extent of their common residence, and the amount of time spent in the state. The threshold criteria under the Family Law Act are that the parties are or were married and that there is property in existence to be divided.

Second, some state laws relating to de facto parties are more limited in scope than those applying to parties that have been married. In allowing for the future needs of the parties to be taken into account, the provisions of the Family Law Act give the judge a greater ability to protect the interests of the more financially vulnerable party. While state law also allows for recognition of the contributions made as homemaker, the degree to which this is valued can to a certain degree depend on the approach of the individual judge, and in four states

| State and territory law relating to de facto property and maintenance |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Kinds of relationships covered** | **Property adjustment** | **Provision for:** |
|  |  | Past contributions | Future needs | Enforceable cohabitation agreements | Spousal Maintenance |
| Heterosexual De facto | Same-sex de facto | Other Relationships |  |  |  |
| ACT Domestic Relationships Act 1994 | “Domestic relationships”- de facto marriages (irrespective of gender) and non-sexual relationships involving personal or financial commitment and domestic support. No requirement that parties live/d together. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | In limited circumstances |
| NSW Property (Relationships) Act 1984 | “Domestic relationships”- de facto relationships (irrespective of gender) and “close personal relationships” involving cohabitation, domestic support and personal care. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | In limited circumstances |
| NT De Facto Relationships Act 1991 | Heterosexual de facto relationships (live/d together on a bona fide domestic basis) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | In limited circumstances |
| SA De Facto Relationships Act 1996 | Heterosexual de facto relationships (live/d together on a genuine domestic basis) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| TAS De Facto Relationships Act 1999 | Heterosexual de facto relationships (live/d together on a genuine domestic basis) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | In limited circumstances |
| VIC Property Law Act 1958 | “Domestic relationships” includes de facto relationships (live/d together) irrespective of gender. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | In limited circumstances |
| WA Family Court Act 1997 | Amendments to the Family Court Act which come into effect in early 2003 will mean that provisions relating to property, maintenance and financial agreements applying to married couples will now apply to de facto couples, including same-sex couples (but not other domestic relationships). | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |

The threshold criteria under the Family Law Act are that the parties are or were married and that there is property in existence to be divided. When the amendments to the Family Court Act 1997 (WA) are proclaimed, Western Australia will be the first state to allow for those in same-sex relationships to adopt their partner’s children (that is, step-parent adoption), including children the couple agree to conceive by way of artificial means. In 1997 the New South Wales Law Reform Commission recommended that proposed amendments to the Adoption of Children Act NSW (1965) extend step-parent adoption to include same-sex relationships, but this recommendation was not implemented. Step-parent adoption is available to same-sex couples in some overseas countries, including Denmark, Iceland, Navarra (Spain), Norway and in some Canadian provinces.
the future needs of the parties are not specifically required to be taken into account.

In relation to the enforceability of “pre-cohabitation” agreements, state laws are in accord with the 2000 amendments to the Family Law Act, which allow for couples intending to marry to enter into legally binding pre-nuptial agreements. The increased prevalence of such agreements may reflect the changing nature of the family with partners in blended families in particular intending to keep assets acquired prior to the relationship separate, primarily to protect the interests of children from a previous relationship.

Until the recent amendments in Victoria, legislation in that state only allowed for the adjustment of interests in real property, leaving sometimes substantial assets – such as superannuation – out of the picture. The treatment of superannuation entitlements, which are in effect future interests rather than “property,” causes state judges as much difficulty as Family Court judges. However, amendments to the Family Law Act scheduled to come into operation in December 2002 will give the Family Court far greater powers to split the superannuation entitlements of married couples. The same powers will not be available to state judges in adjusting the property interests of de facto couples.

In addition to the differences in the substantive law, separating couples who have been married benefit from having access to a specialist court with excellent dispute resolution services, case management practices and established case law.

The accompanying Table 1 provides an overview of the variations between the states.

**Spousal maintenance**

Where parties are or have been married, the Family Law Act makes provision for financial support via spousal maintenance. The primary determinants in making an order for maintenance where parties have been married is the extent of one party’s need and the other party’s ability to pay. State law, with the exception of Queensland, South Australia and Victoria also allows for de facto spouses to be awarded maintenance in very limited circumstances. In New South Wales this is restricted to spouses who have the care and control of a child of the relationship who is under the age of 12 at the time of the application (or age 16 if the child has a disability). An application for maintenance under the Australian Capital Territory legislation does not require cohabitation as a prerequisite. 5 Western Australian de facto couples, including same-sex couples, will soon have recourse to the more generous provisions relating to spousal maintenance available to married couples.

As discussed earlier, biological mothers of children conceived in same-sex relationships cannot seek maintenance for the child under the Child Support Scheme. Indirect means to secure financial support for the child from their ex-partners – that is, by way of an award of spousal maintenance under state Acts – is only available in three of the eight jurisdictions, and are limited in scope in the rest.

Women who have a child to a man in the “old fashioned way” can apply for limited maintenance and the expenses related to childbirth under s. 67B of the Family Law Act. Western Australia will soon become the only state that also allows for women who conceive a child with their lesbian partner by way of artificial means to claim such expenses from their estranged partner.

**Other laws**

There is a plethora of other legislative provisions in which people’s marital status and sexual orientation affect their rights and responsibilities.

These include: criminal law governing sexual behaviour between consenting adults; protection from vilification on the basis of sexual orientation; age of consent; access to reproductive technology; the legal status of people who undergo gender assignation procedures; spousal immunity from giving evidence; superannuation benefits; intestacy; rights in coronial investigations; leave and other entitlements; medical decisions; accident and crimes compensation; tort claims; tax benefits; and exemption from payment of stamp duty.

The Victorian Statute Law Amendment (Relationships) Act 2001 amended more than 40 Acts to recognise the rights and obligations of partners in domestic relationships, irrespective of their gender. Legislative overhauls of varying degrees have also occurred in New South Wales and Western Australia. Up to 70 Acts and regulations in the Australian Capital Territory have been identified as containing potentially discriminatory provisions and the first of a two-phase amendment process to replace references to “spouse” with the new definition of “domestic partner” will be introduced in the autumn sittings (McLennan 2002). However, the application of a number of Commonwealth laws, in areas such as taxation, marriage, superannuation and social security, continue to apply to heterosexual couples only.

Some argue that, aside from moral reasons, it is essential that the remaining jurisdictions, including the Commonwealth, follow suit in adopting a more inclusive definition of “de facto”. Exclusion from the operation of particular laws is seen as discrimination by omission, which puts Australia in breach of its international human rights obligations – in particular, the provisions of two treaties to which Australia is a signatory (the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). Recourse under state and Commonwealth anti-discrimination legislation is one way to lobby for change in the law but has largely proved inadequate to achieve redress in individual cases of discrimination.

**Further reforms**

Notwithstanding the recent developments in some states, there still remains a lot to be done to remove the anomalies that exist between the legal status of married and non-married couples, between de facto parties living in different parts of the country, and between heterosexual and homosexual couples.

Policy considerations concerning the need to protect the institution of marriage have been substantially superseded by new concerns. These include the argument that wholesale regulation of all relationships robs people of the ability to make conscious life choices in the kinds of relationships they form. This is especially true in the gay and
lebian community where issues of privacy and perceived independence from the mainstream are important.

If uniformity of laws is the goal, one way of achieving it is to follow the Western Australian example and include all relationships under the Family Law Act. This would require either a Constitutional amendment to broaden the Commonwealth’s powers to legislate over non-marriage relationships, or a reference of powers from the states to do so. The Federal Attorney-General is keen to pursue the latter course. At a meeting of the Standing Committee of Attorney-Generals in July this year all state and territory Attorneys-General indicated their support for a referral of power to enable uniform family laws for de facto couples, on the condition that same-sex partnerships be included. The rejection of this condition indicates that such a proposal is not acceptable to the current Federal Government.

If the state-based system is retained, what model should be adopted by all states? Should these laws aim to mirror the provisions of the Family Law Act? Should the requirement for cohabitation be maintained in the definition of de facto? Should there be wholesale application of all legislative provisions to different kinds of relationships? Or should Australia consider implementing a relationship registration system to allow for formal recognition of unmarried couples? Such questions indicate that future reform should proceed from a considered and coherent policy basis.

Intimate human relationships are, for most of us, the vehicles in which we navigate the sometimes difficult terrain of life. As the structures within which personal meaning is sought, children are raised, and resources are pooled, they form the very foundation of society. The degree to which the legal system of any given society fosters the formation of relationships, supports people at the time of relationship breakdown, and extends civil, social and economic rights to individuals without discrimination, provides a window into its core values and degree to which the legal system of any given society fosters the formation of relationships, supports people at the time of relationship breakdown, and extends civil, social and economic rights to individuals without discrimination.

Notes

1. Note, however, that the Family Court has the power under s.67ZC of the Family Law Act to make orders regarding the welfare of a child. This power is generally exercised in decisions concerning medical procedures. For a discussion of the jurisdictional overlap in this area, see Feltham and Feltham (2002).
3. These common law remedies are still available where threshold issues under statutory regimes cannot be satisfied or by same-sex couples in states with a narrow definition of the fact of relationship. It has been the only recourse available to heterosexual de facto couples in Western Australia until amendments past on 25 September 2002 came into effect.
4. In the Australian Capital Territory there is no requirement that the parties even lived together.
5. This theoretically means that a “mistress” could claim spousal support from her married lover. A recent Canadian case may lead to clandestine lovers being recognised as common-law spouses for the purposes of claiming spousal maintenance. In that case, a woman who had an affair with a married man for more than 20 years was granted leave to appeal the decision striking out her claim for spousal support. Unbeknown to his wife, the man had paid child support for a child born of the relationship (Schmitz 2002).

References


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With cross-section data the only way this question can be broached is through identifying respondents who have separated recently and then collecting information about their past retrospectively. This is problematic because of recall problems and because of the likely contamination of response as a result of the separation. Objective analyses of the impact of marital separation require data collected pre- and post-separation, which in turn require longitudinal methods.

Second, the HILDA Survey involves interviews with all members of the household aged 15 years or over. This again marks the survey as distinctive. Information about household members is usually sought of one adult only responding on behalf of others in the household – a method that precludes asking subjective questions, and raises concerns about the accuracy of some of the data collected. For example, while it can be expected that one household member will know the employment status of all other household members, is it reasonable to expect them to know more specific details of their employment arrangements (such as hours of work)?

Survey design and sample selection

The broad objective of the HILDA Survey is to select a nation-wide sample of private households and then attempt to trace all of the individual members of these

n the first survey of its type in Australia, the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (commonly known as the HILDA Survey) will yield valuable insights into the dynamics of family relationships, parenting, housing arrangements, income, workforce involvement, and the health, wellbeing and attitudes of young people and adults in Australia.

Data from the first wave of the survey, undertaken in 2001, was released in October 2002. Information collected from almost 14,000 people aged from 15 years from 7,682 households across Australia over three years will provide the first ever opportunity in this country to examine a wide range of household characteristics over a period of time.

The article examines the potential for the new survey to contribute to research on families in Australia. It summarises the case for yet another survey; provides brief descriptions of the survey design and sample selection; outlines issues covered by the survey (box 1); and describes data collection procedures, wave one response rates, and characteristics of the sample (box 2). The second part of the paper discusses the sorts of family issues that could be explored with these data.

The need for household panel data

The question arises: Do we really need yet another survey? For at least two reasons, the answer to this question should be yes.

First, the HILDA Survey is distinctly different from most other surveys conducted in Australia in that it is a longitudinal, or panel, survey. Whereas most surveys are simple cross-sectional studies providing snapshots at single points in time, HILDA involves re-surveying the same people over time.

This distinction is critical for understanding any type of economic or social change. For example, a longitudinal survey is ideal for analysing the effects of marital separation.
households, including children, over time. Individuals would only drop out of the sample in the event of death, emigration from Australia, the onset of some disability that prevented further participation (such as the onset of dementia), and imprisonment.

The intention is to conduct survey waves annually, although funding beyond wave three (in 2003) has yet to be secured.

The survey involves more than just re-interviewing people interviewed in the previous wave. In line with the designs used in most of the household panel studies conducted overseas (such as the British Household Panel Survey, and the German Socio-Economic Panel), the sample is automatically extended over time by “following rules”. That is, any new children of members of the selected households (including both biological and adopted children), as well as any new household members resulting from changes in the composition of the original households, are added to the sample. This is a planned and important feature of the HILDA Survey design, and is expected to enhance greatly the power of research into questions concerning the influences on, and impact of, changing household structure. Furthermore, this indefinite life panel approach is clearly superior to other approaches in terms of addressing questions concerning the socio-economic links between generations.

The data collection unit is the household. The definition of a household applied in the HILDA Survey is very similar to that used by the ABS. That is, a household is a “group of people who usually reside and eat together”.

The initial sample of households was selected using a three-stage approach. First, a sample of 488 census collection districts were selected from across Australia (each of which consists of approximately 200 to 250 households). Second, within each of these districts, a sample of 22 to 34 dwellings were selected, depending on the expected response and occupancy rates of the area. This resulted in a total of 12,252 dwellings being selected. Selections were made after all dwellings within each of the districts were fully listed. Third, given that some dwellings contain more

The HILDA Survey was initiated, and is funded, by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. It is managed by a consortium led by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne. Other partners in the group are the Australian Council for Educational Research and the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
than one household, up to three households within a single dwelling were selected to be part of the sample. The intent was to select only occupied private dwellings, and hence dwellings that were subsequently discovered to be vacant, or businesses, were excluded from the sample.

Details about the questions asked and issues covered in the survey are outlined in box 1. Data collection procedures, response rates for wave one, and characteristics of the sample are discussed in box 2.

**HILDA’S POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO RESEARCH ON FAMILIES**

The HILDA Survey will provide rich data on families, including couple and sole-parent families, old and young families, the advantaged and disadvantaged, and those in rural and urban settings. The following is a discussion of some of the more important issues that could be examined with these data.

**Paid work and non-parental child care arrangements**

The survey derives detailed information on work-related non-parental child care arrangements, with wave two of the survey extending the focus by tapping arrangements set in place to meet parents’ non-work needs.

Work-related issues cover: parents’ thoughts about using different forms of child care; difficulties encountered, such as finding good quality child care, juggling multiple child care arrangements, finding child care during school holidays; and existing child care arrangements for pre-schoolers and for school-age children during school term as well as school holidays. For each child, the types of care used are ascertained (including self-care for school-age children and care by siblings for all children), along with the hours per week the child usually spends in each type of care, and its associated cost.

It will thus be possible to identify the circumstances of families linked with exclusive use of certain types of care, use of multiple forms of care per child or for different children, and placement of children in non-parental care for short or long periods, along with exclusive reliance on parental care.

Such information has important policy implications. For instance, previous research suggests that most mothers want to care for their infants full-time and to increase their hours of work as their child grows older (McDonald 2000), and that most people believe that mothers ought to remain at home to care for infants (Evans and Kelley 2002).

Given these general preferences and values, under what circumstances do parents place their very young children in long hours of non-parental care? How many parents do so despite feeling that this is not in the best interests of their child, and what factors appear to be involved in their decisions? Under what circumstances do parents rely on multiple forms of care for children, sibling care for very young children, or self-care for children in their early primary school years? The survey will help answer these questions.

In addition, the survey gathers information that may shed light on links between child care and paid work.
decisions, and between these arrangements and parental wellbeing. For example, HILDA not only looks at financial and labour market circumstances of families, but also parents’ perceptions of their financial wellbeing and of various aspects of their paid work (their job security, autonomy, access to family-friendly benefits), along with benefits and difficulties they experience in combining paid work and family life.

Information is also obtained about parents’ satisfaction with their relationship with their children, and (if living together, or if this was their most recent partnership) with each other; the stress they feel in relation to their parenting responsibilities; perceived fairness of their domestic and child care responsibilities; their sense of time pressure; their physical and emotional health; perceptions of social support; and health-related lifestyle patterns (physical exercise, alcohol consumption, and cigarette smoking).

Much further down the track, as young children mature, the significance of early child care and family life experiences for children’s developmental outcomes can be examined. All such research issues have important policy implications for helping parents balance work and family life, enjoy their parenting, and maximise their children’s chances of developing into well-adjusted and productive members of society.

**Marital status and wellbeing**

A number of studies have suggested that married people tend to be happier and healthier than others (particularly those who are separated or divorced), but the mechanisms linking marital status and wellbeing remain uncertain (Coombs 1991; de Vaus 2002; Stack and Eshleman 1998). Wave one of HILDA will shed some light on the importance of various objective and subjective factors linked with each partner in explaining these patterns.

However, a better understanding of the mechanisms linking marital status with personal wellbeing will be achieved over time as the survey waves accumulate. We will then be able to assess the extent to which differences in the wellbeing of people in different marital status groups result from “social selection” as opposed to “social causation”. Social selection applies if people who are happy and healthy are particularly likely to get married and stay married, while social causation applies if marriage is more likely than other marital statuses to promote health and happiness.

By controlling for social selection factors, we will gain greater insight into the strength and nature of social causation – that is, the benefits that marriage tends to confer on partners, and the stress they feel in relation to their parenting responsibilities; perceived fairness of their domestic and child care responsibilities; their sense of time pressure; their physical and emotional health; perceptions of social support; and health-related lifestyle patterns (physical exercise, alcohol consumption, and cigarette smoking).

Financial hardship and relationship breakdown

Consistent with Stack and Eshleman’s (1998) contention that the financial protection that is typically provided by marriage promotes personal wellbeing, a great deal of evidence has amassed suggesting the financial hardship increases the risks of relationship breakdown (White and Rogers 2000; Clarke and Berrington 1999; Kiernan and Mueller 1999). The detailed information provided by HILDA will throw light on the mechanisms underlying this link.

Ambert (1998) maintains that poverty threatens marital relationships indirectly, by generating depression, marital conflict, tension and in some cases, violence. However, she also refers to research suggesting that male unemployment is particularly problematic for couples. Why would this be so? According to Ambert, men are prone to feeling “diminished” by their unemployment and unsuccessful search for jobs, and may react negatively towards their wives, while wives may resent the associated financial difficulties or their need to shoulder the entire breadwinning responsibility. Other processes damaging to relationships may also be involved. For instance, Jorm (1996) and de Vaus (2002) conclude that men are more likely than women to express their distress through problematic behaviours, such as heavy drinking. Such behaviours may be especially damaging to relationships.

The HILDA data will provide important insights into processes through which objective financial hardship created by different circumstances may threaten relationship stability, including the role of physical and emotional problems in each partner, drinking patterns, interpretation of financial circumstances, and satisfaction with family relationships.

Another example of how relevant the HILDA Survey is for policy-driven research on families is its ability to shed light on the nature of links between family breakdown and financial hardship. Parental separation often creates an economic crisis since the money that supported an intact family is often insufficient to meet the costs of the two newly formed households, one of which includes the children. But as the survey waves accumulate and increasing numbers of couples in the sample separate, we will gain a much better understanding of the extent to which
post-separation financial difficulties can be explained by pre-existing financial hardship that may have contributed to relationship breakdown. This information is clearly important for the establishment of timely prevention and intervention strategies.

In exploring these issues through HILDA, researchers will be able to take into account many other factors known to threaten marital stability, such as early age at marriage, low education, non-traditional family values, emotional problems, and parental divorce during respondents’ childhood (see Wolcott and Hughes 1999). The ability to take into account characteristics of each partner, and thus characteristics of the couple relationship, will help researchers and policy makers understand the nature and relative contribution of factors that promote or threaten relationship wellbeing. The interconnections between factors linked with divorce appear to be very complex. For instance, in the United Kingdom, McAllister (1999) reports that, while divorce is more closely associated with age at marriage than with socio-economic status, those from disadvantaged

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**HILDA WAVE ONE**

This section describes the survey’s data collection procedures, response rates for wave one, and characteristics of the sample.

**Data collection**

The data collection task, at least for the first three waves, has been sub-contracted to ACNielsen, a private market research company. The majority of wave one data were collected through face-to-face interviews, which mostly took place between 24 August 2001 and 21 December 2001, with the workload spread across a total of 139 interviewers. After establishing contact with a member of the household, an interview lasting on average around ten minutes was conducted with at least one member of the household. Further interviews were then pursued with each household member aged 15 years and over, and averaged 34 minutes in length.

Once an individual completed this interview they were then provided with a Self-Completion Questionnaire (SCQ) to complete in private. The interviewer returned to the household at a later date to pick up the questionnaire. If it was not complete or could not be collected in person, instructions were left with the respondent to return it by mail.

In most cases, selected households were sent a primary approach letter and a brochure approximately one week prior to when the interviewer was scheduled to make contact with the household. To encourage response, a $50 cash incentive was offered to households where all eligible household members completed the Person Questionnaire. If this did not occur, a $20 payment was made if at least one interview was obtained.

**Response rates**

A summary of wave one response rates is provided in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 reveals that from the 11,693 households identified as in scope, interviews were completed with all eligible members of 6,872 households and with at least one eligible member of a further 810 households. The household response rate was therefore 66 per cent.

The person-level outcomes are provided in Table 2. Within the 7,682 households at which interviews were conducted, there were 19,917 people, resulting in an average of 2.6 people per household. Of these, 4790 were under 15 years of age on the preceding 30 June and hence ineligible for an interview in wave one. This provided a sample of 15,127 eligible people, 13,969 of whom completed the Person Questionnaire interview.

**Sample characteristics**

Table 3 provides a summary of selected characteristics of the sample of individual respondents. To assist in the assessment of how representative this sample is, comparative population data from the ABS (August and October 2001) Monthly Population Survey are also provided.

This table demonstrates that the HILDA sample is noticeably different from the broader population in a number of ways.

First, Sydney residents are under-represented in the HILDA sample. The first column in Table 3 indicates that, according to the ABS Monthly Population Survey for October 2001, people living in Sydney comprised 21.5 per cent of the Australian population aged 15 years and over. In contrast, Sydney residents make up only 16.9 per cent of the sample of persons completing a Person Questionnaire. This difference is likely to reflect the greater difficulties making contact with the occupants of selected dwellings in Sydney (as a result of the incidence of dwellings with locked gates, gatekeepers and other devices intended to

---

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HILDA wave one household outcomes</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample outcome</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addresses issued</td>
<td>12252</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less out-of-scene (vacant, non-residential, foreign)</td>
<td>- 804</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plus multi-households additional to sample</td>
<td>+ 245</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total in-scope households</strong></td>
<td><strong>11693</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusals to interviewer</td>
<td>2670</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusals to fieldwork company (via 1800 number or email)</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-response with contact</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-contact</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully responding households</td>
<td>6872</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partially responding households</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HILDA wave one person outcomes</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample outcome</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enumerated persons</td>
<td>19917</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less ineligible children (under 15)</td>
<td>- 4790</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eligible adults</strong></td>
<td><strong>15127</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusals to interviewer</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusals to fieldwork company (via 1800 number or email)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-response with contact</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-contact</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding individuals</td>
<td>13969</td>
<td>92.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
backgrounds are more likely to marry as teenagers and thus experience both financial difficulties and divorce.

**Stability of marriages preceded by cohabitation**

Premarital cohabitation is another factor that has commonly been linked with marital instability, despite the opportunities that cohabitation should provide for screening out unsuitable matches. Previous research suggests a number of social selection factors that contribute to this link – that is, couples who follow the different pathways to marriage vary systematically in ways that appear to affect the quality of their relationship (Clarke and Berrington 1999; Glezer, Edgar and Prolisko 1992; Teachman 2002).

However, since premarital cohabitation has increased dramatically and is now adopted by the majority of couples (72 per cent of those who married in 2001, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2002)), the link between mode of entry into marriage and marital stability may be weakening for more recent birth cohorts. On the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>HILDA wave one individual sample characteristics and ABS population compared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ABS Monthly Population Survey* %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area of usual residence</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of NSW</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of Victoria</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of Queensland</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of South Australia</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of Western Australia</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (years) at 30 September 2001</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 or over</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married (including de facto)</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indigenous status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-indigenous</td>
<td>98.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birthplace</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in Australia</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born outside Australia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- main English-speaking country</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- other country</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment status in main job (employed people only)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>86.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own account worker</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing family worker</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Labour force status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- full-time</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- part-time</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in the labour force</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *= and** denotes significantly different from the Monthly Population Survey estimate at the 99% and 95% confidence levels respectively. Standard errors have been adjusted to take account of both the stratified and clustered nature of the design employed in the HILDA Survey.

a With the exception of indigenous status and employment status, the MPS estimates come from the October 2001 survey. In the case of the two exceptions, data for August 2001 are used. With the exception of country of birth, the population that these estimates apply to is all civilians aged 15 years and over. The figures for country of birth exclude persons living in an institution.

b The HILDA estimates are also for people aged 15 years and over, but include defence force personnel and exclude people living in special dwellings. The HILDA estimates have also been adjusted to account for variability in the probability of selection across CDs.

c We vary from the usual ABS definition in defining full-time work solely on the basis of usual hours worked (rather than on a combination of usual hours and actual hours worked).

Source: ABS data are from Labour Force, Australia, Catalogue No. 6203.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, August 2001 and October 2001 issues.
other hand, those who marry at the outset may be more likely than the majority who initially cohabit to possess characteristics that promote the wellbeing or at least stability of marriage.

There remains, of course, the possibility that social selection factors do not fully account for the relationship between cohabitation and marital stability. For instance, some cohabiting couples may decide to marry in the hope of saving their troubled relationship, or the experience of cohabitation itself may change couples’ attitudes or behaviour in ways that threaten marital stability (see Andrews Report 1998; Axin and Thornton, 1992; Thomson and Colella 1992). While the first wave of HILDA will enable researchers to examine social selection factors that might influence the stability of relationships, it will be possible to examine the relevance of cohabiting experiences on marital stability after several years of data collection.

**Views about having children**

With the decline in the total fertility rate and consequent ageing of the population, there is a strong need to understand factors contributing to childlessness and small family sizes. Waves one and two of the HILDA Survey tap preferences and expectations about having a first or additional child and family size intentions, while in wave two the timing of any intended birth is ascertained. Preliminary findings from wave one suggest that men and women aged 18-24 years expect to have, on average, 1.8 and 2.0 children respectively, with 27 per cent of the men and 21 per cent of the women expecting to remain childless (Fisher 2002).

In wave one, it will be possible to examine the relative strength of links between fertility preferences and expectations and various objective circumstances (such as relationship status, age of each partner, income, career path, access to family-friendly work benefits), and psychological factors (such as job satisfaction and sense of job security, relationship satisfaction, values about parenthood and children’s needs). With later waves, it will be possible to explore ways in which preferences change, the circumstances underlying such changes, and outcomes when couples disagree about having children.

**Post-separation child support and contact**

The survey also collects information about non-resident parents’ financial support for, and contact with, their children. As Smyth (2002) points out, we currently know very little about the different patterns of child contact that take place, factors contributing to the different patterns, and their links with child support and children’s and parents’ wellbeing. Over time, it will be possible to examine relationships between child support and contact dynamics and life course trajectories of the children.

**Intergenerational transmission**

By providing data on family of origin as well as relationship history, wave one of the survey will enable researchers to examine the strength of so-called “intergenerational transmission” effects such as the experience of parental unemployment in childhood and labour force participation in adulthood, and the experience of parental divorce during childhood and relationship stability in adulthood. More importantly, the wealth of information provided by HILDA will provide insight into mechanisms that help explain any intergenerational transmission effects observed and factors that help protect individuals from such effects.

**Young people**

It also needs to be remembered that the survey includes interviews with young people aged 15 years or more. In wave one, it will be possible to identify those who appear to get along well or poorly with other family members and to explore reasons for these trends. In the future, it will be possible to examine life course trajectories for these different groups of young people, and for other groups, such as those who grow up in wealthy or poor families or in families whose economic fortunes change markedly, and those who have experienced multiple transitions in family life. Indeed, HILDA will enable researchers to explore patterns of leaving home – for example, the characteristics and circumstances of those who leave home early, later experiences that influence their remaining away from home or returning, and the impact that such arrangements have on parents and the young people themselves.

**The elderly**

The ageing of the population has led to calls for employers and workers to reverse the trend towards early retirement. But how will this affect their children and grandchildren? Currently, most people who are in their 60s and early 70s appear to be in good health and to provide more financial and practical support to their families than they receive (McDonald and Kippen 1999; Millward 1998). The support of the older generation to their families may be curtailed by their continuing work responsibilities.

According to McDonald and Kippen (1999), those aged 75 or more years tend to receive more support than they provide, with family members (especially female members) being by far the most significant sources of support (Walcott 1997). According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW 2000), spouses are the most common sources of support for the frail elderly, yet many Australians are entering old age without a spouse because they have divorced. Furthermore, divorced parents, along with those who have remarried, are less likely than other parents to receive any kind of support from their children – a trend that is particularly common for fathers (Millward 1998).

How do these people cope when living in private dwellings? What are the characteristics of elderly people living in private dwellings who believe they lack the social support they need? Are elderly people who are generally healthy and happy more likely to receive support – and if so, what is the causal direction (if any) between these variables? How do elderly parents fare when their adult children live with them for adverse reasons such as unemployment or divorce? What factors discriminate between elderly couples who appear to be enjoying their lives and those who are distressed? Where one partner is ill, what circumstances help the other to cope well in his or her caring role? Clearly, HILDA is going to be extremely valuable in throwing light on these issues, thereby suggesting important ways of supporting the growing number and proportion of elderly people in Australia.

**Conclusion**

The HILDA Survey has two key features that will enhance the power of research on family-related matters in Australia in the years ahead.

First is the survey’s longitudinal dimension. While it is often difficult to establish the existence, let alone direction, of causal connections in cross-sectional studies, the
temporal order of many events and circumstances will be revealed as the different waves of the HILDA Survey accumulate. The survey will thus enable researchers to distinguish between outcomes for families, couples, and individual family members and their causes – issues that are extremely important in the development of effective, well-targeted and timely policy strategies.

Second is the survey’s multi-level focus. HILDA provides detailed information pertaining to the living standards and functioning of households, families, and individual family members. In contrast, a great deal of family-related research is based on surveys of individuals only, rather than couples, or parents and children. Any information collected about other family members thus tends to be quite limited and to be based on the perspective of a single informant. This can be quite misleading. This survey overcomes these difficulties and will improve our understanding of the inter-connections between dynamics relating to financial resources, labour market activities, and families.

In conclusion, it needs to be recognised that ongoing funding for the survey has yet to be secured. Much of the power of the longitudinal design thus relies on funding continuing beyond HILDA’s first three waves.

References


Ruth Weston is a Principal Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and heads its Family and Marriage Program. She is a member of the Project Management Group for HILDA and coordinated the development of questions on family dynamics.

Mark Wooden is Professorial Fellow, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne. He is the Director of the HILDA Survey Project.
The Australian Institute of Family Studies domain name is now www.aifs.gov.au to reflect its status as a Commonwealth Government agency. However, its original name of www.aifs.org.au will continue to operate simultaneously for as long as is necessary for people and search engines/web pages to register the change. The same change applies to Institute email addresses.

**AIFS ADDRESS CHANGES FROM org TO gov**

Since its inception in 1980, the Australian Institute of Family Studies has enjoyed a long and fruitful association with the Family Law Council. The Family Law Council is a statutory authority established by the Family Law Act 1975 to advise and make recommendations to the Attorney-General concerning the workings of the Family Law Act and other legislation relating to family law. Participation in special purpose committees comprising Council members, observers, staff and outside experts are important aspects of this work. Four general meetings of members and observers are held in different localities each year, providing opportunities for local visitors to discuss regional issues relating to the family law system. Meetings for the year 2002 were held in Melbourne, Perth, Rockhampton and, most recently (21–22 November 200), in Canberra. The Institute’s current observer on the Family Law Council is Principal Research Fellow Ruth Weston, who heads up the Institute’s Family and Marriage program.

**AIFS/CPV LAUNCH**

Pictured at the launch are (from left): Judge Jennifer Coate, President of the Children’s Court of Victoria; Michael Bourne, CPV Acting Head; Ann Sanson, AIFS Deputy Director; Suzanne Vassallo, AIFS Research Officer; Inez Dussuyer, CPV Assistant Director (Research); and Diana Smart AIFS Research Fellow and ATP Manager.

The first report from the collaborative project between Crime Prevention Victoria and the Australian Institute of Family Studies was recently launched by the Hon. Andre Haermeyer, the Victorian Minister for Police and Emergency Services, during the international Youth and Family Judges and Magistrates Conference on 31 October 2002.

The report Patterns and Precursors of Adolescent Antisocial Behaviour, is based on data from the Institute’s longitudinal Australian Temperament Project, a study of development from infancy to adulthood. The report documents substantial differences between adolescents who engage in persistent antisocial behaviour and those who do not, which are evident from the early primary school years on, increase in strength and diversity over time, and peak in mid adolescence.

Copies of the Executive Summary and the full report are available from Crime Prevention Victoria, GPO Box 4356QO, Melbourne, Victoria 3001. Phone: (03) 9651 6933. Internet: www.crimeprevention.vic.gov.au

**AIFS LINKS WITH FLC**

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**AIFS SEMINARS**

**Immigrant mothers**

Associate Professor Pranee Liamputtong in the School of Public Health, La Trobe University, presented a seminar on the challenge of motherhood from an immigrant mother's perspective. The seminar was presented from a feminist perspective, and drew on evidence from the author's personal experience as a mother and migrant woman, as well as her current study on child bearing and child rearing among Thai immigrant mothers in Australia. Dr Liamputtong argued that immigrant mothers are twice a minority and hence twice marginalised within Australian society, and may benefit from social service intervention which attempts to reduce their marginality. 

(Seminar held at the Institute on 21 November 2002.)

**Life chances and policy outcomes**

Janet Taylor, Research Coordinator, and Alex Fraser, Research Assistant, with the Social Action and Research, Brotherhood of St Laurence, presented a seminar on preliminary data from the most recent (sixth) wave of the Life Chances Study – a longitudinal study commenced by the Brotherhood in 1990 to explore the impacts of low family income and disadvantage for children over time. The children in the study are now 11 and 12 years old, and many are making the transition to secondary school. Some of the difficulties faced by families with low incomes during this transition were discussed during the formal part of the presentation. After this a workshop style session was held with much interest in the study team’s experiences of conducting a longitudinal study involving children and their families over so many years. 

(Seminar held at the Institute on 17 October 2002.)

**Effects of time pressure on mothers’ health**

Dr Michael Bittman, Senior Research Fellow, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, presented a seminar on the effects of time pressure on mothers’ health. Making use of two Australian data sets, the 1997 Time Use Survey and the Women’s Health Australia Study (Australian Longitudinal Study on Women and Health), he put to empirical test the proposition that combined employment and family responsibilities lead to greater perceived time pressures and poorer health. 

(Seminar held at the Institute on 9 September 2002.)

**HILDA LAUNCHED**

Wave One data of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey was released by at the Melbourne Institute Public Economics Forum held at Parliament House on Tuesday 15 October 2002. The launch, by Senator the Hon. Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Family and Community Services, attracted around 150 people from various levels of government, universities and research organisations, and the private sector.

Speakers at the launch included the HILDA Survey Project Director, Professor Mark Wooden; Ms Kerry Flanagan, Executive Director, Strategic Framework and Coordination, Department of Family and Community Services; and Professor Bruce Chapman, Director, Centre for Economic Policy Research, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University.

Pictured at the HILDA launch are (from left): Mark Wooden, HILDA Survey Project Director and Professorial Fellow, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne; Ruth Weston, Principal Research Fellow heading the Family and Marriage Program at Australian Institute of Family Studies, and member of the HILDA Project Management Group; and Karen Wilson, Acting Assistant Secretary, Strategic Policy and Knowledge Branch (which manages the longitudinal data strategy) of the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services.

From left: Alex Fraser and Janet Taylor, presenters from the Brotherhood of St Laurence, with Ann Sanson, AIFS Deputy Director, and Christine Millward, AIFS Research Fellow.

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From left: Alex Fraser and Janet Taylor, presenters from the Brotherhood of St Laurence, with Ann Sanson, AIFS Deputy Director, and Christine Millward, AIFS Research Fellow.
CONNECTING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Around 120 people representing a range of organisations throughout Australia attended the “Connecting Families and Communities” conference in Darwin on 8–11 October 2002. This national conference was hosted by Family Services Australia, a National Industry Representative Body of providers of family relationships and other family support services.

Adam Tomison, Senior Research Fellow and Director of the National Child Protection Clearinghouse at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, presented a keynote address in which he discussed factors contributing to the significant demand for, and increases in, service provision and the need to work more strategically to ensure the best response for families and improved social health and wellbeing.

Mark Friedman, Director of the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, Santa Fe, USA, was the other keynote speaker. He discussed how community partners can work together to improve the wellbeing of children and families, and how managers can improve the performance of programs and agencies serving children and families. The development of appropriate performance measures was a central issue discussed.

The Hon. Darryl Williams, Federal Attorney-General, presented a paper on better connections for families, policy and service development, while Mark Sullivan, Secretary, Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, spoke about the relationship of family policy and service environment to the goals of government.

The conference included a number of workshops, covering a wide range of issues including: working with men, with children and adolescents, and with communities; innovation in culturally specific services; primary dispute resolution services; and research. In the latter workshop, David Stanton, Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and Ruth Weston, Principal Research Fellow at the Institute, presented a paper on changing patterns in the life course of families. This presentation was complemented by another on the health and welfare of Indigenous Australia by Janis Shaw, Director of the National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics (Northern Territory).

CHILD CARE FOR CHILDREN FROM DIFFERENT CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

The Australian Institute of Family Studies Child Care in Cultural Context study explores the child rearing goals, attitudes and behaviours of caregivers in home and child care settings, and how differences between them impact on child outcomes. The study collected information about children from Anglo-Australian, Vietnamese and Somali backgrounds. Children’s parents and their carers completed a detailed questionnaire about their approach to child rearing, and how they felt children were getting on in different areas of their lives.

A number of carers and parents were recruited for the study from family day care schemes within areas of inner-Melbourne with high proportions of Somali and Vietnamese residents.

There is a high proportion of Somali carers registered with the Banyule City Council’s family day care scheme to cater for the substantial number of Somali families with young children who have settled in the area. Somali carers were almost exclusively looking after Somali children, and were very helpful in providing information about their child care practices and a number of children in their care.

At the conclusion of the project in September 2002, the Institute and Banyule City Council jointly hosted an evening for the carers at the Banyule Council meeting room for halal food, conversation, and an informal presentation about the study and its findings.

The Somali facilitator attached to the project, Farhia Mohumed, expressed her thanks to the carers who gave their time to take part in the study, and accepted her into their homes to answer questions about things like toilet training, feeding and discipline practices.

Sarah Wise, a Principal Research Fellow heading the Institute’s Children and Parenting Program, thanked Ann Ball, advocate of the project and a driving force behind the family day care scheme at Banyule, and presented the carers with a certificate of appreciation from the Institute – a symbol of their commitment to continual improvement in their work as carers.

Sarah Wise said: “Researching culturally and linguistically diverse communities requires time, consultation, sensitivity and flexibility in approach, but the rewards are worth the effort. Not only do we know more about the outcomes of child care for children from different cultural backgrounds than before, it seems that everyone involved felt the satisfaction of working towards a common interest – the future of the next generation of Australians.”

Family day carers with Institute researchers Sarah Wise (youth from left), Farhia Mohumed (sixth from left), and (far right) Kelly Hand and Lisa Da Silva
In June 2001, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, in partnership with the Centre for Research in Education, Equity and Work, secured the contract to conduct a survey of relationship education services across the country for the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services.

The purpose of the Study of Australian Relationship Education Services was to identify the nature and range of relationship education programs, identify gaps in service provision, and develop a classification system to distinguish among the various types of programs available.

Recommendations made on the basis of the study pertain to various areas of service provision, including program design and development, and the implementation of evaluation frameworks.

The Parliamentary Secretary for Family and Community Services, Ross Cameron, MP, released the report at the Marriage and Relationship Education National Conference in Brisbane in September 2002.

NEW RESEARCH

Relationship education services

Couple relationships break down for a number of reasons: communication problems, physical and emotional abuse, financial/health/employment problems, infidelity (Wolcott and Hughes 1999), and disillusionment and disappointment (Kayser 1993).

Healthy marriages and relationships make an invaluable contribution to the wellbeing of individuals, children and communities. Successive governments, and in particular the current federal government, have significantly increased support for services aimed at providing formal opportunities for individuals and couples to learn about building healthy marriages and relationships that will strengthen families and decrease the prevalence of family breakdown and divorce. Successive policy developments, culminating in the Commonwealth government’s Stronger Families and Communities Strategy have resulted in government funding being allocated to an increasingly diverse range of services across the country.

This increased support has facilitated a substantial increase in the range of services available to the general public. In light of the growth in the number and type of programs it was considered timely to examine the types of relationship education service activities available.

The study aimed to clarify the kinds of activities that can be called “relationship education” and, via questionnaire, to obtain detailed information about as many programs as could be reasonably captured given the financial and time limitations attached to the study to use as the basis for a typology of programs. It also obtained a snapshot of the nature and extent of group- and inventory-based programs available across the country.

Over the period of the data collection (October–December 2001) 1,377 agencies or providers were contacted. Of the 228 agencies and organisations identified as conducting relationship education programs as defined for this project, 221 (97 per cent) agreed to participate. Of the 561 questionnaires issued, 250 were completed and returned. The final number of programs for which information was obtained was 220, an overall response rate of 39 per cent.

Outcomes

Contrary to popular belief, relationship education programs are not restricted to couples preparing for marriage, nor are they only run by religious groups. They are not restricted to programs specifically designated as “relationship education”, and indeed some programs may be more properly designated as lifeskills programs, designed to help any member of the community learn how to enhance their relationships with intimate partners, spouses, parents, children, siblings, colleagues or friends.

The wider field also encapsulates activities that are embedded within programs designed for other purposes such as parenting or rebuilding after separation or divorce, in which relationship issues are addressed and the same sort of information and skills is conveyed as occurs in a dedicated relationship education program. This phenomena of embedded programs highlights the potential for existing relationship education providers to expand their work by forming collaborative partnerships with organisations and groups working in related areas such as health and aged care.

Services are offered in a range of contexts. Any lifeskills or relationship education program, whether freestanding or embedded, can be offered as part of a range of social and welfare services offered by community-based health care facilities, hospitals, schools, adult and community education organisations, juvenile justice and corrections facilities, hospitals, youth services, religious and specific cultural groups. They are also available to the defence forces, in Employee Assistance Programs, maternal and child health centres, and neighbourhood and community centres.
Just as the contexts in which programs are offered vary widely, the range of relationship education service activities is extraordinarily diverse. Programs can be conceptualised as various forms of public education or primary health care, as a specific component of the school curriculum, a form of adult, liberal education or a form of education directed at social and moral development specifically within faith traditions or specific socio-cultural groups, and as one component of an integrated and holistic continuum of social services that extends from prevention and early intervention through to crisis intervention. Relationship education is available in the form of personal development or lifeskills programs that help individuals build self-awareness and self-esteem and provide a safe environment for participants to learn to improve how they relate to and communicate with others. Other programs for individuals are designed to deal with specific issues such as managing anger, communicating assertively, or managing stress.

Couples who are thinking about marrying, preparing to marry, or who are contemplating living together can access information and undertake skills development to enable them to anticipate and be equipped to deal with potential relationship difficulties. For already-married or cohabiting couples programs also exist that are designed to support and enhance their relationship, including programs specifically designed for couples in particular circumstances such as those in, or planning to form, stepfamilies or those where one partner has a chronic illness.

However, gaps in service provision do exist. There is evidence that these exist particularly in relation to services for: adolescents both outside and inside the school system who do not have the opportunity to benefit from existing opportunities to experience the school curriculum addressing relationship issues; older Australians; individuals and couples being married in civil ceremonies; persons from culturally and linguistically diverse groups; individuals and couples from specific community groups; individuals and couples with mental illnesses and intellectual disabilities; and indigenous Australians.

Just as the context, clients and content of relationship service activities vary widely, providers of programs are also a diverse group. Three primary types of providers can be identified: church-based (connected to a specific church or parish), church-affiliated (part of larger welfare organisations attached to mainstream faith traditions) and secular. The distinction between church-based and church-affiliated providers is significant as it highlights the range of approaches to service provision that exists in services connected with particular faith traditions. On the other hand, church-affiliated and secular programs share many similarities in relation to the structure, content and organisation of relationship education service activities, but these two groups of providers appear to have developed niche markets, servicing particular target groups and geographical locales.

Gaps in the provision of service activities specifically for committed, pre-marriage and married individuals and couples by secular service providers were identified.

The growth and diversity of relationship education service activities presents policy makers and other interested stakeholders with considerable challenges when they wish to group programs meaningfully for the purposes of comparing them on a range of characteristics including, most importantly, the outcomes they purport to deliver. A typology is a heuristic tool that enables groups of service activities of a like nature to be distinguished along a range of key characteristics. The characteristics that are most useful in distinguishing distinctive groups (or types) of relationship education

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**Recommendations**

**Study of Australian Relationship Education Services**

**RECOMMENDATION 1**

Gaps identified in the availability of relationship education service activities to specific target groups suggest the need to encourage and support the design and delivery of dedicated programs for:

- adolescents both outside and inside the school system;
- older Australians;
- persons from culturally and linguistically diverse groups;
- individuals and couples from specific community groups;
- individuals and couples with mental illnesses and intellectual disabilities; and
- indigenous Australians

with particular attention paid to providing these as resources for community organisations located in rural and regional areas that do not have the resources to set them up themselves.

**RECOMMENDATION 2**

Difficulties encountered by program providers in collating the information requested in the survey point to the need for systematic development and accurate and detailed documentation of services for accountability and research activities. It is recommended that best practice in relation to service development and documentation is promoted by:

- the development and wide dissemination of discussion papers outlining the processes used in the development and documentation of relationship education service activities;
- development of infrastructure to provide training and support in curriculum design, development and program evaluation; and
- examination of ways in which support for demonstration projects, action research or “good practice” projects in the implementation of comprehensive service delivery development and documentation processes (including the incorporation of client participating in program development processes) might be provided.
services are the types of participants addressed by the service activity (target groups), cost of provision, protective factors addressed in the service activity, content covered within the program, and number of teaching methods used in service delivery.

While a typology of services based on the above characteristics will provide significant assistance to those concerned with the evaluation of services, more rigorous evaluation practices will rest upon the promotion of systematic development and accurate and detailed documentation of services and focussed attention on the assessment of learning as an integral part of the overall evaluation of services.

While relationship education can be targeted at a wide range of clients, there are alternative ways to deliver relationship education services to couples. In addition to service activities based on the development and implementation of programs, there has also been a significant growth in the provision of relationship education services using inventories such as PREPARE (PRE marital Personal And Relationship Evaluation) and FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study). The use of inventories differs from structured programs largely in scale, and while at least two thirds of inventory users indicate that skills training is incorporated into sessions with couples, it would appear that the amount of skills training is rather limited in the majority of cases. This, along with issues relating to follow up and evaluation of inventory-based service activities, is an issue worthy of further attention.

Relationship education, as broadly defined here, has only become relatively well organised in the past decade or so. Programs have tended to develop in line with the orientation of providers, in environments that often lack the time and resources to allow for training in curriculum development and program evaluation. While evaluation of relationship service activities is concerned with the nature and impact of the service activity as delivered and experienced by clients, including some indication of the learning that has taken place for clients, assessment focuses on the process of learning and is concerned with the collection of data that inform judgements made as to the progress that clients (learners) have made towards the program objectives. In a climate where there is an expectation that service providers should be able to objectively and scientifically “prove” the outcomes of their programs, objective, experimental designs (sometimes also referred to as randomised control trials) are often considered to be the preferred methodology to achieve these goals.

There are, however, a range of factors that make such types of evaluation problematic for service providers operating “in the real world”. It is therefore important that a variety of evaluation processes be considered. The development of frameworks for evaluation that contain a number of different levels or purposes, that collectively provide detailed descriptive data on service delivery and measures for determining success are a priority if “greater pluralism” in evaluation practices are to be encouraged (Tomison 2000: 15).

Based on the outcomes of the Relationship Education Services project, five recommendations were made. These are shown in the box below.

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**Recommendation 3**

In the light of the issues canvassed in this report in relation to the evaluation of relationship education service activities, it is recommended that active steps are taken to engage service providers in discussion and debate with key academics and stakeholders in relation to ways in which systematic, developmental evaluation frameworks (covering input, process and outcome evaluations) might be implemented in cost effective and realistic ways within current service activity contexts.

**Recommendation 4**

Assessment and evaluation processes adopted by service providers are generally limited and occur only at the time of or immediately following the program. It is recommended that active steps be taken to build the capacity of service providers in these aspects of service provision using a range of strategies that could include:

- assessment of educators’ current levels of competence in relation to assessment and evaluation practices to identify and prioritise gaps; and
- the development of training and support materials to promote up-skilling in these areas of educators’ work.

**Recommendation 5**

Inventories are an important mechanism for delivering relationship education specifically to couples, and are uniquely placed to make immediate and lasting changes to couple relationships – whether they are marrying, cohabiting or re-marrying. It is recommended that active steps be taken to:

- examine ways in which service providers who use inventories as part of their relationship education service activities can be encouraged to evaluate the extent to which their services embrace and use current understandings relating to systematic relationship skills development as part of the inventory process; and
- encourage service providers to incorporate systematic evaluation and follow-up procedures as part of their service provision and assist the organisations responsible for overseeing the administration of inventories to provide the necessary training.

The above recommendations are for consideration of the sector. In the long term, providing the infrastructure to facilitate the delivery of the recommended training in program design, development and evaluation, in combination with the typology of available programs, will lead to a degree of structure within the field that will support future systematic development of programs that fill identified gaps in service provision and facilitate the evaluation of the effectiveness of programs.
BOOK NOTES

CAROLE JEAN

The following selection of books on family-related topics are recent additions to the Institute’s Family Information Centre. They are available through Libraries, through the Family Information Centre via the Inter Library Loan system, or for purchase from good book shops. Prices are given as and when supplied.


This book examines bullying in a wide social context. The author begins by attempting to define bullying, looking at issues of power imbalance, aggression, types of bullying, and individual and group bullying. Subsequent chapters focus on bullying in childhood and school settings. Non-school settings are also examined, including bullying in the workplace, within sport, prisons, and the home. The effect of bullying on the health of victims is discussed, looking at both physiological and psychological impacts. Characteristics of bullies and their victims are examined, and explanations of bullying behaviour, including the contributions of parenting and family life, personality and environmental influences and the role of gender, race and culture, are discussed. Ways of preventing bullying and different intervention strategies are also discussed. This book would make valuable reading for professionals who work in educational settings, or anyone who comes into contact with either bullies or their victims.


This book came out of the work undertaken by the Sibling Project based at the Women’s and Children’s Hospital in Adelaide. The aim of the project is to develop and coordinate services for families – in particular, brothers and sisters of children who have a disability or chronic illness. The author begins by telling her own story (of having an older sister with a disability), and how this impacted upon her life. The stories of a number of other siblings (of varying ages) of children with a disability are woven throughout the text. Chapters examine feelings of isolation felt by siblings; feelings of resentment and unfairness; inability to express emotions; grief; and the extra responsibility and caregiving roles that siblings may be expected to undertake. The author also discusses strategies that siblings, parents and service providers can use to counter any negative effects on children of growing up with a disabled sibling. A short list of written and web based resources is included. This book would make valuable reading for both family members whose family includes a child with special needs, as well professionals who come into contact with them.


This Australian publication aims to give practical advice to victims of stalking. Individual chapters cover: definitions of stalking; how common is stalking; character traits of stalkers (including an outline of the five broad categories of stalkers based on their probable motivation); the victims of stalkers and the impact it has on their lives; and treatment for stalkers. Individual chapters also outline the situation regarding stalkers in the United Kingdom and the United States. Advice is given as to the role of the legal system, and what services are available to victims. A short list of references is included, as is a resource list of organisations that can provide assistance/information to victims. Although aimed at a general readership, this book would also make important reading for professionals in areas such as health and law who may come into contact with victims of stalking.


This biennial publication of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports on the health status of Australians. Chapters analyse the overall health of Australians; determinants of health; population health; use of health services and resources; and health monitoring. Overall, the report concludes that while the health of most Australians is very good, there has been little improvement in the health of Indigenous Australians. The detailed nature of this report makes it essential reference material for anyone interested in any aspect of Australians and their health.
Women’s Refuge in Perth, and uses an as an example the Nardine away from their children. The who spend much of their time written for separated parents who spend much of their time away from their children. The booklet gives practical advice on how parents can maintain contact with their children after divorce/separation, covering issues such as keeping contact alive; when your child comes to stay; you and the child’s other parent; decision-making with the other parent; and parenting from a distance. A list of useful contact numbers and websites is included.


This book explores the dilemmas faced by many professional women with regard to career and family. Drawing on her own personal experience, plus those of many professional women who were interviewed for the book, the author argues that many high-achieving, professional women remain childless (and sometimes partnerless) not by choice, but because of the demands of their career. Part One of the book looks at the circumstances of these women, including the difficulties of finding a partner, and issues surrounding fertility. In Part Two, the author proposes a number of solutions, including young career-women taking control of their lives and looking at their personal life in the same strategic way that they plan their careers.


Written for both professionals and parents, this book argues that many behavioural difficulties of young children are related to changes in society that have impacted upon the development of individuals and families. They further argue that the diagnostic term ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) should be used to cover a wide range of symptoms with many underlying causes. Individual chapters look at a neurophysical approach to understanding ADHD; critiques of a solely medical model of treatment of ADHD; psychodynamic approaches to understanding child development and behaviour problems of children; the use of a public health approach to understand ADHD; and how to change the emphasis of services to include parents and children as stakeholders in finding solutions to their problems. The final chapter gives practical recommendations for professionals, parents and children. The book contains an extensive list of references and a glossary of technical terms.


Although published two years ago, this important work retains its relevance as the debate over work and family life continues. The author proposes a new theory (preference theory) to explain and predict current and future patterns of women’s choices between work and family. She argues that the social and economic changes that have affected women in prosperous societies (for example, contraception, equal opportunity in the workplace, the expansion of occupations that are attractive to women, and the rise of values and preferences which influence people’s lifestyle choices) have allowed them to make new choices relating to their participation in family work and/or market work. Extensive use is made of research evidence from various countries, especially the United States and Great Britain, but also Australia. Hakim’s work is important reading for anyone concerned with issues surrounding work and family.


Subtitled “Tips and hints to help you build on your relationship with your children after separation”, this booklet has been written for separated parents who spend much of their time away from their children. The booklet gives practical advice on how parents can maintain contact with their children after divorce/separation, covering issues such as keeping contact alive; when your child comes to stay; you and the child’s other parent; decision-making with the other parent; and parenting from a distance. A list of useful contact numbers and websites is included.


This work traces the responses to domestic violence within an Australian (specifically, a Western Australian) context. Taking a historical approach, the book begins by giving the background of the Western Australian women’s movement, followed by a discussion of the beginnings of the international movement against domestic violence. Throughout the text, the author uses an as an example the Nardine Women’s Refuge in Perth, and

Carole Jean is the Reference Librarian in the Institute’s Family Information Centre.


**CONFERENCES**

**BELINDA SNIDER**

If you wish forthcoming conferences, workshops or seminars to be listed in Family Matters and the Institute’s Internet pages, please send details to BELINDA SNIDER, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 300 Queen Street, Melbourne 3000 Victoria, Australia. Phone: (03) 9214 7864. Fax: (03) 9214 7839. Email: belinda@aifs.gov.au

New conferences are added to this conference listing each week on the Institute’s Internet site: www.aifs.gov.au/institute/conf/confmenu.html

**16–19 January 2003**

**Home Economics**

Adelaide, SA

Reflect and Revitalise is the theme of this conference, which will enable participants to consider and debate contemporary issues surrounding individuals and families in their everyday activities, and reflect on and revitalise their skills.

**Further information:** Christina Tassell, HEIA Conference Manager, 13 Baudin Avenue, Fairview Park SA 5126. Phone: (08) 8251 2404. Fax: (08) 8270 2550. Email: ctassell@oac.sa.edu.au.

**3–7 February 2003**

**Child and Family Maltreatment**

San Diego, California, US

The theme of the 17th Annual San Diego Conference on Child and Family Maltreatment is Partnerships in Action. The Chadwick Center strongly believes that effective community response requires intense collaboration among a wide range of professions and disciplines. The conference will focus on multi-disciplinary best-practice efforts to prevent, if possible, or otherwise to investigate, treat, and prosecute child and family maltreatment.

**Further information:** Chadwick Center, 3020 Children’s Way MC 5017, San Diego, California, 92123, USA. Email: gbeattie@chsd.org. Web: www.charityadvantage.com/chadwickcenter/2003conference.asp

**12–14 February 2003**

**Steps Forward for Families**

Melbourne, Vic

The 8th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, “Steps Forward for Families: Research, Practice and Policy”, will feature the presentation and discussion of findings of the Institute’s own studies, along with work from a wide range of researchers, government bodies, service providers, and community organisations.


**13–16 February 2003**

**Cultural Diversity**

Hawaii

Cultural Diversity in a Globalising World, the Third International Conference on Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations is being hosted by the Globalism Institute at RMIT, the Globalisation Research Centre at the University of Hawaii, and Common Ground, Melbourne.

**Further information:** Diversity Conference 2003, PO Box K481, Haymarket Sydney 2000. Phone: (02) 9519 0303. Web: www.Diversity-Conference.com

**19–21 February 2003**

**Helping Families Change**

Sydney, NSW

This conference will be hosted by the Parenting and Family Support Centre, and Triple P International. Papers will cover topics relating to community-based intervention; prevention and early intervention; risk and resilience in childhood; dissemination of child and family interventions; cross-cultural issues in parenting; problem behaviours of childhood; couple relationships and family outcome; and families with special needs.

**Further information:** Parenting and Family Support Centre, School of Psychology, University of Queensland, Brisbane Qld 4072. Email: hfc@triplep.net. Web: www.triplep.net/04_training/training.htm#HFC

**19–23 February 2003**

**Family Day Care**

Wellington, NZ

The New Zealand Family Day Care Association and the International Family Day Care Organisation are holding the 7th International Family Day Care Organisation Conference. The theme is Family Day Care: Choices, Challenges and Collaboration.

**Further information:** Lyn Foote, Dunedin College of Education, Private Bag, Dunedin NZ. Phone: +64 3 477 2289. Fax: +64 3 477 6573. Email: lyn.foote@dce.ac.nz

**20–21 February 2003**

**Single Mothers and Their Children**

Adelaide, SA

The theme of the annual conference of the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children will be the care, economy and cost of mutual obligation to families.

**Further information:** Yvonne Parry. Email: ncsmc@ncsmc.org.au

**21–23 February 2003**

**Youth Justice**

Bond University, Gold Coast, Qld

Hosted by Legal Aid Queensland, the Making the Youth Justice System Work Better conference will aim to identify “best practice” in youth justice, to present a young person’s perspective on the issues, and to focus on the high representation of Indigenous youth in the youth justice system. Key topics areas will include the place of education and familial networks in the lives of young people who are in, or at risk of entering, the youth justice system.

**Further information:** Jo McDon-ald, Legal Aid Queensland. Phone: (07) 3238 3024. Fax: (07) 3229 7067. Email: jmcdonal@legalaid.qld.gov.au.

**21–26 February 2003**

**Mental Health**

Melbourne, Vic

The World Federation for Mental Health Biennial Congress 2003 is hosted by the Mental Health Foundation of Australia. Its objective is to provide a forum for practitioners and researchers from around the world to communicate current developments and advancements in the field of mental health and psychiatry.

**Further information:** I CMS Pty Ltd, 84 Queensbridge Street,
## Contemporary issues in family research

In 2003, the Australian Institute of Family Studies is continuing its series of seminars presenting research on national and international issues related to family. The seminars are designed to promote a forum for discussion and debate, and are free and open to the public.

Seminars are held at 11.30 a.m. (usually on the third Thursday of each month) in the Seminar Room on the ground floor of the Institute, at 300 Queen Street, Melbourne 3000. They run from one to one-and-a-half hours.

Seminar coordinators for 2003 are Institute researchers Kelly Hand and Jennifer Clausen. People wishing to attend a particular seminar should phone Grace Soriano at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Phone (03) 9214 7888.

### Seminar Program

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<td>Childhood poverty and social exclusion: Developing a child-centred approach.</td>
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<td>Dr Tess Ridge, Research Officer</td>
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<td>17 April 2003</td>
<td>Why do only a minority of at-risk children become antisocial adolescents? The role of personal attributes and the family, peer and school environment</td>
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<td>Diana Smart, Research Fellow</td>
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<td>15 May 2003</td>
<td>Family harmony and relationships: a fresh look at Parent Effectiveness Training</td>
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<td>Christine Wood, Postgraduate</td>
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<td>19 June 2003</td>
<td>Title to be announced</td>
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<td>Professor Johanna Wyn, Director</td>
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### Further information

People wishing to attend a particular seminar should phone Grace Soriano.
31 March – 5 April 2003
Child Abuse and Neglect
St. Louis, Missouri

Gateways to Prevention: The 14th National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect is sponsored by the Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, US Department of Health and Human Services.
Further information: Irene Boccia, Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Department of Health and Human Services, 330 C Street, SW, Room 2423, Washington, DC 20447. Phone: 202-205-1723. Fax: 202-205-8221. Email: iboccia@acf.hhs.gov. Web: www.calib.com/NCCANCH/cb conference/californiaabstracts.cfm

6–8 April 2003
Homelessness
Brisbane, Qld

All people working to respond to and prevent homelessness, or who are interested in social policy issues, are encouraged to attend the 3rd National Homelessness Conference, which is being held under the auspices of the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations.
Further information: 3rd National Homelessness Conference, Conference Coordinators, PO Box 139, Calwell ACT 2905. Phone: (02) 6292 9000. Fax: (02) 6292 9002. Web: www.afho.org.au/

7–8 April 2003
Home and Community Care
Launceston, Tas

The theme of the Home and Community Care (HACC) Service Providers State Conference is “Dare to be Different.”
Further information: Community Options Service (North), 233B Charles Street, Launceston Tas. Email com.options@dhs.tas.gov.au

13–17 April 2003
Commonwealth Law
Melbourne, Vic

Hosted by the Law Institute of Victoria on behalf of the Law Council of Australia, the 13th Commonwealth Law Conference will address: Human rights and the rule of law; International commerce; The legal profession and its future; Family law and child protection; Litigation in the new millennium; Criminal law and practice; Technology and the law.
Further information: CLC 2003 Conference Secretariat, PO Box 7404, St Kilda Road, Melbourne 3004. Phone: (03) 9820 9115. Fax: (03) 9820 3581. Email: comlaw@mcigroup.com. Web: www.mci group.com/commonwealth law2003.htm

1–2 May 2003
Child Sexual Abuse
Adelaide, SA

Child Sexual Abuse: Justice Response or Alternative Resolution – this conference from the Australian Institute of Criminology seeks to provide a forum to discuss issues associated with child sexual abuse and the appropriate justice response and to identify best practice, share knowledge and develop strategies to address the relevant issues. The closing date for submissions is 31 January 2003.
Further information: Conference Coordinators, PO Box 139, Calwell ACT 2905. Phone: (02) 6292 9000. Fax: (02) 6292 9002. Email: comlaw@mcigroup.com. Web: www.aic.gov.au/conferences/2003-abuse/

1–4 May 2003
Early Childhood Conference
Adelaide, SA

An initiative of the Government of South Australia, “Our Children the Future 3: Early Childhood Conference” will bring together early childhood professionals involved in the care and education of children throughout South Australia, interstate and overseas. The conference theme – Respect Connect Reflect - embodies the ideals that will be reflected throughout the conference.
Further information: Secretariat, Department of Education, Training and Employment, GPO Box 1152, Adelaide SA 5000. Phone: (08) 8226 9548. Fax: (08) 8226 0099. Email octf@sa.gov.au. Web: www.octf.sa.gov.au

5–7 May 2003
Social Security
Brussels

Organised as part of the International Social Security Association’s research program, the 4th International Research Conference on Social Security will focus on the new challenges generated by a “long life society”, with special emphasis on new roles for families in a multi-generational and ageing society; on reassessing work and retirement in a long life society; on adapting social security schemes to the challenges of a long life society; and on the effects of migration in an ageing society.
Further information: International Social Security Association (ISSA), Case postale 1, CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland. Fax: +41 22 799 8509. Email: issaRC@ilo.org. Web: www.issa. int/engl/homeF.htm

22–25 May 2003
Traumatic Stress
Berlin, Germany

Amongst the main themes of the 8th European Conference on Traumatic Stress are refugees and trauma, clinical social work with trauma survivors, and child sexual abuse, maltreatment and neglect.
Further information: VIII ECOTS Berlin 2003, CPO HANSEF SERVICE GmbH, P.O. Box 33 03 16, D-14173 Berlin, Germany. Phone: +49-30-300 66 90. Fax: +49-30-305 73 91. Email: berlin@cpo-hanser.de. Web: www.trauma-conference-berlin.de/

26–28 May 2003
Drugs and Young People
Wellington, NZ

Key areas of interest at the 4th International Conference on Drugs and Young People will be: Drug use within youth populations; Workforce development; Legal issues – law enforcement, justice prevention, education, health promotion; Early intervention and treatment; Drug policy; Indigenous populations and groups; Culturally diverse communities; Parent roles; and Media impact.
Further information: Conference Secretariat, Australian Drug
There is increasing evidence of the importance of spirituality as central to holding some people to life. There is also evidence from therapy that surprising numbers of people have a spiritual belief that helps to provide meaning for their life. Suicide Prevention Australia’s 2003 annual national conference will examine the issue of spirituality and how it might be used to assist recovery from depression and suicidal behaviours. The conference will reflect on research, practice and belief. A major part of this conference will be to work with Indigenous people to help them assist our community Engagement is Charting Uncertainty: Capital, Community and Citizenship. Further information: Phone: Karen Joyce (07) 33811278. Email: cscenquiries@uq.edu.au

Further information: Country Children’s Services Association of NSW, PO Box 118, Katoomba NSW 2780. Phone: (02) 4782 1470. Fax: (02) 4782 4425. Email: conference@ccsa.nsw.asn.au. Web: www.ccsa.nsw.asn.au

21–26 June 2003 Family Violence Prague, Czech Republic

Organized by the International Network on Family Violence (INFV), the Second World Conference on Family Violence will have the theme: Protecting Every Generation: Sharing solutions that prevent child abuse, spouse/partner abuse, and elder abuse. Further information: INFV Secretariat, National Council on Child Abuse and Family Violence (NCCAPF), 1025 Connecticut Avenue NW - Suite 1012, Washington, DC 20036 USA. Email: WCFV@aol.com. Fax: 1-831-655-3930. Web: nccafv.org/

26–28 June 2003 Services: Children and Families Dunedin, New Zealand

The Fifth Child and Family Policy Conference from the Children’s Issues Centre, University of Otago will focus on Joined Up Services: Linking Together for Children and Families. Abstracts to be submitted by 14 February 2003. Further information: Children’s Issues Centre, University of Otago, PO Box 56, Dunedin NZ. Phone: +64 3 479 5038. Fax: +64 3 479 5039. Email: cic@otago.ac.nz. Web: www.otago.ac.nz/ CIC/CIC.html

1–4 July 2003 Human Rights and Diversity Byron Bay, NSW


3–5 July 2003 Higher Education and Community Engagement Ipswich Qld

The theme of the Second International InsideOut Conference on Higher Education and Community Engagement is Charting Uncertainty: Capital, Community and Citizenship. Further information: Phone: Karen Joyce (07) 33811278. Email: cscenquiries@uq.edu.au

Further information: Country Children’s Services Association of NSW, PO Box 118, Katoomba NSW 2780. Phone: (02) 4782 1470. Fax: (02) 4782 4425. Email: conference@ccsa.nsw.asn.au. Web: www.ccsa.nsw.asn.au

20–21 June 2003 Tresillian Family Care Centres Homebush Bay, Sydney, NSW

The Tresillian Family Care Centres Conference for health professionals working in child and family health will focus on the psycho-social issues for parenting and the health of young children and their families. Further information: Dr Catherine Fowler, Education and Research, Tresillian Family Care Centres, McKenzie Street, Belmore NSW 2192. Phone: (02) 9787 0869. Fax: (02) 9787 0880. Email: cathrine@cemail.cs.nsw.gov.au.

20–22 June 2003 Children’s Services Canberra, ACT

Each year the Country Children’s Services Association of New South Wales hosts a three-day conference for people involved with the delivery and management of children’s services across that State. The theme of the 2003 conference is Embracing Complexity and Risking Change.
9–11 July 2003
**Narrative Therapy and Community Work**
*University of Liverpool, UK*

This International Narrative Therapy and Community Work Conference is being organised by Dulwich Centre Publications and the Centre for Narrative Practice (Sheffield, UK).

*Further information:* Dulwich Centre Publications, Hutt St PO Box 7192, Adelaide SA 5000. Phone: (08) 8222 3396. Fax: (08) 8232 4441. Email: dulwich@senet.com.au. Web: www.dulwichcentre.com.au/ukconference.html

9–11 July 2003
**Social Policy**
*University of New South Wales*

The biennial Australian Social Policy Conference (formerly known as the National Social Policy Conference) run by the Social Policy Research Centre will involve a mix of plenary sessions, forum discussions and contributed papers in parallel sessions. The overarching theme for the 2003 Conference will be Social Inclusion.

*Further information:* Tony Eardley. Email: t.eardley@unsw.edu.au. Web: www.sprc.unsw.edu.au

10–12 July 2003
**Stress and Anxiety**
*Lisbon, Portugal*

The Stress and Anxiety Research Society (STAR) is a multidisciplinary, international organization of researchers who share an interest in problems of stress, coping, and anxiety. STAR international conferences provide a unique opportunity to learn about stress and anxiety.

*Further information:* Web: star2003.ulusofona.pt/default2.htm

10–13 July 2003
**Children: The Core of Society**
*Hobart, Tas*

The Australian Early Childhood Association Conference invites participation in the 2003 Biennial Conference, which promises the opportunity to debate, reflect and challenge practice and policy in order to support the theme that children are the core of society.

*Further information:* Conference Secretariat, Convention Wise, Mures building, Victoria Dock, Hobart Tas 7000. Phone: (03) 6234 1424. Fax: (03) 6231 5388. Email: mail@conventionwise.com.au

20–23 July 2003
**Child Abuse and Neglect**
*University of York, England*

The theme of the British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect 5th National Conference is “Child maltreatment: Strengthening the links between research, policy and practice: How effectively does research influence policy and enhance practice?”

*Further information:* BASPCAN National Office, 10 Priory Street, York, YO1 6EZ, UK. Phone: +44 (0) 1904 613605. Fax: +44 (0) 1904 642239. Email: congress@bspcan.org.uk. Web: www.bspcan.org.uk

29–31 August 2003
**Child Protection**
*Warsaw, Poland*

The main theme of the 9th ISPCAN Regional European Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect is “Promoting interdisciplinary approaches to child protection”. The conference will cover a wide range of issues dealing with child abuse and neglect, both general topics, such as interdisciplinary procedures and practices, legal aspects of child protection, and Prevention policies; and those focusing directly on children, including sexually abused children, street and abandoned children, interviewing children.


18–19 September 2003
**National Carers Conference**
*Canberra, ACT*

Advance notice of the 2003 National Carers Conference, to be held Rydges Lakeside, Canberra.

*Further information:* Carol Sweetapple, PO Box 73 Deakin West 2600. Phone: 02 6282 7885. Fax: 02 6282 7886. Email: csweetapple@carersaustralia.com.au. Web: www.carersaustralia.com.au/Carers_conference_2003.html

22–24 September 2003
**Action Research**
*Pretoria, South Africa*

Planned as a joint venture with the 10th Congress on Participatory Action Research, the “Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management” 6th World Conference has the theme “Learning partners in action”.


28 September – 3 October 2003
**Law and Mental Health**
*Sydney, NSW*

The 28th Congress of the International Academy of Law and Mental Health brings together international practitioners and scholars from many disciplines. The 2003 Theme is “Social justice within diversity.” A pre-conference meeting on the topic of “Medicine and industry: Changing paradigms for ethics, law and the health professions” will take place on 28–29 September.

*Further information:* Capital Conferences, PO Box 253, Church Point NSW 2105. Phone: +61 2 9999 6577. Telefax: +61 2 9999 5733. Email: sydney2003@ialmh.org. Web: www.ialmh.org/Sydney2003/main.htm

2–6 October 2003
**Development Through Diversity**
*Perth, WA*

The 38th Australian Psychologi- cal Society Conference Annual Conference will include a keynote address by Professor James Pennebaker of the University of Texas on “Coping with personal and cultural upheavals: hat September 11 has taught us”; and “Turning the gaze upon itself: Psychology as a site of social change in South Africa” by Associate Professor Cheryl de la Rey of the University of Cape Town.

*Further information:* Australian Psychological Society, Level 11, 257 Collins Street, Melbourne Vic 3000. Phone: (03) 8662 3300. Fax: (03) 9663 6177. Web: www.psychsocociety.com.au

24–27 November 2003
**Child Abuse and Neglect**
*Sydney, NSW*

The Ninth Australasian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect will be hosted by the New South Wales Department of Community Services. This special event brings together people from across Australia who work to strengthen communities and families to protect children and young people.

*Further information:* Jeanette Morgan, Conference Manager, Department of Community Services, New South Wales. Phone: (02) 9209 6229. Fax: (02) 9209 6233. Email: jeannette.morgan@community.nsw.gov.au

11–15 July, 2004
**ISSBD Meeting**
*Ghent, Belgium*

The 2004 meeting of the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development will be held in Ghent.

*Further information:* Department of Developmental and Personality Psychology, Ghent University, Henri Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Ghent Belgium. Fax: +32 (0)9 264686. Email: issbd@rug.ac.be.

September 2004
**Child Abuse and Neglect**
*Brisbane, Qld*

NACPAN will host the 15th International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect in partnership with ISPCAN (International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect).

*Further information:* National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, PO Box K241, Haymarket NSW 1240. Phone: (02) 9211 0224. Fax: +61 (02) 9211 5676. Email: napcanaus@aol.com. Web: www.napcan.org.au/News%20%20Events.shtml
The paper highlights the importance of differences in the context of increasing life expectancy – and thus an ageing population. Published by the Institute last year, this Briefing Paper remains a timely analysis of the implications of declining fertility, increased life expectancy and immigration on the age structure, cultural and regional diversity and sex ratios of the Australian population. These population trends have taken place amidst a number of interacting changes occurring within the family unit itself. The paper outlines some of the implications of these trends for the financial wellbeing of the elderly, their living arrangements, opportunities for familial support, and likely contributions from them.

Changing shape of Australia’s population:

Recent developments in policies towards lone parents in Australia have emphasised the role of employment in increasing income and self-sufficiency. The emphasis on employment is also the case in other OECD countries with a general trend towards welfare payments for lone parents being made dependent on participation in the labour market.

The United States of America has undertaken substantial reforms during the 1990s to the ways in which social assistance is provided to lone parents, including offering financial incentives, child care subsidies and strengthening of work requirements. Following the reforms there has been a dramatic fall in the number of lone-mother families in the United States receiving welfare payments and significant increases in employment.

This paper reviews the evidence on the impact of the United States welfare reforms on a wide range of outcomes for the wellbeing of mothers and children.

Implications of the United States experience of welfare reform for policy in Australia are considered. The paper highlights the importance of differences in Australian institutions, particularly the existing labour market and the current income support and labour market programs for lone mothers.


In the field of marriage and relationships research there has been a preoccupation with relationship breakdown and dissolution, which has tended to obscure the body of literature that explores the reasons why many marriages are enduring, satisfying and happy.

Drawing on this literature, Why marriages last discusses some of what is known about why many marriages last for very long periods and considers how knowledge of the ways in which marriages can be made to last can help young couples create and maintain their own enduring and rewarding marriages.

The paper is not intended to provide a critical analysis of the literature on long-lasting marriages. Rather, it aims to draw attention to the body of literature available on how enduring and rewarding marriages can be created and maintained.

Growing up in Australia

A major new study has commenced at the Institute. The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) will gather comprehensive, national Australian data on all the important domains of a child’s life.

Funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services as part of the Government’s Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, the study will follow two cohorts of children – 5000 children aged 0–1 year, and 5000 children aged 4–5 years.

Introducing LSAC, the first formal publication from this landmark study, provides the context and rationale for the study, a description of the organisational structure of the consortium that will implement it, and an outline of the study’s design and broad questions. It provides readers with an understanding of the potential of this study to make a unique contribution to research, policy and practice regarding young Australians and their families.


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