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Ann Sanson

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**Overview**
AIFS Conference 2003

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Meredith Michie

AIFS publications committee
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Contributors
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Conferences
Contact Belinda Snider at the Institute’s Family Information Centre to have conferences, seminars and workshops listed in the conference circuit columns.

Cover
Harold Greenhill, born Australia 1914
Summer holiday 1950
Oil on canvas on plywood 65.8 cms x 78.4 cms
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

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Following the resignation of David Stanton, I have been appointed as Acting Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies by the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator the Hon. Amanda Vanstone, pending the appointment of a permanent Director.

It is my pleasure to introduce this issue of Family Matters to readers. In contrast to the previous issue in which we explored one particular theme (fertility trends) in some depth, this edition covers a breadth of family-related topics. Two papers by Institute researchers address the changing patterns of relationship formation: David de Vaus, Lixia Qu and Ruth Weston report on important changes over the last 25 years in the way in which men and women form partnered relationships; and Lixia Qu explores the views of cohabiting couples towards marriage.

The latest paper from the Australian Temperament Project, by Institute researchers Diana Smart and Ann Sanson, throws light on development in young adulthood by examining patterns of social competence among young adults at 19-20 years of age, and how these relate to earlier characteristics. The Institute is a partner in a collaborative project on the impact of multiple and changeable child care, and Jennifer Bowes (Macquarie University), and colleagues from the Institute and elsewhere, report some early results from this longitudinal study.

Two papers discuss aspects of work and family. Institute researcher Jennifer Renda argues that the rapid growth in part-time employment has contributed to a growing polarisation of families into “work poor” and “work rich” categories, and emphasises the need to take part-time work into account when considering variability in families’ work status. Peter Butterworth (Australian National University) analyses sources of disadvantage among lone mothers receiving income support. We are also pleased to publish in this issue the keynote address presented at the Institute’s conference by Catherine Hakim (London School of Economics Department of Sociology) on the diversity of women’s preferences regarding work and family. Dr Hakim’s visit sparked considerable interest in the media, and she was in great demand with policy makers and researchers.

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, Growing Up in Australia, is a project of national significance, and an overview of its current state of development is provided in these pages. Katie Kovacs summarises a recent study conducted by the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, housed at the Institute, that examined the accessibility of child abuse prevention services to those in most need of them.

For our opinion pages this time, David Green and Alison McClelland (La Trobe University) have written a thought provoking piece examining the effects on families of a risk management approach taken by governments, which, they argue, increase the burden on families, especially the most vulnerable families, who are confronting the contemporary forces of change and uncertainty. And our regular Family Law column has a report by Paul Murphy and colleagues of a pilot project in the Family Court of Western Australia.

I am confident that these research articles, together with our regular columns of booknotes, conference listings, and reports on Institute seminars and research activities, will be of considerable interest and value to readers.

Institute hosts successful conference

A number of the papers in this issue are drawn from presentations at the highly successful Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, held in Melbourne on 12-14 February 2003. The timing of this eighth national conference was an experiment for the Institute, departing from the usual July date, and we were not certain if the timing would prove attractive to presenters and participants. In the event, we were delighted at the response. We had a record number of submissions of symposia, papers and workshops, and these were of a very high quality. An increase in the number of symposia, which allowed specific topics to be explored in some depth, was particularly pleasing. The close-to-record number of 450 registrants represented a rich diversity of research organisations, government bodies, service providers and community organisations.

Given her Parliamentary commitments, we were pleased that Minister Vanstone was able to open the conference by video. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, the Hon. Larry Anthony, alerted participants to some of the key family-related policy issues for government in his address to the conference. The two keynote presentations, by Dr Catherine Hakim (London School of Economics) and Professor Bob Gregory (Australian National University), were well attended, topical, and provocative enough to engender the sort of productive debate over meal breaks that marks a good conference.
Another innovation in this conference was the closing panel discussion, in which the facilitator, journalist Jill Singer, encouraged three leading researchers and commentators, Professor Peter McDonald, Professor Dorothy Scott and Professor Frank Oberklaid, to address the question, “How can government support families in bringing up their children?” This lively discussion ensured that participants left the conference with plenty of food for thought about the nexus of family-related research, policy and practice.

While every member of the Institute made a contribution to the conference, I want in particular to thank Institute researchers who together presented more than 20 papers, and Catherine Rosenbrock and Dianne Frey whose organisational efforts resulted in a very smooth-running three days. See pp. 62-69 for a more detailed report on the conference.

Clearinghouses at the Institute

Besides the conference, there have been a number of other major events and developments at the Institute this year. On 1-3 April 2003, the Stronger Families Learning Exchange team held a workshop on action research at theYWCA Conference Centre in Melbourne for the Stronger Family Fund projects and Department of Family and Community Services staff with whom they work. Approximately 100 people attended the workshop. This was quite an organisational feat, given that the projects come from all over Australia, including some very remote areas, and are very diverse in nature. By adopting a very interactive and creative approach to the workshop, the team catered well for this diversity, allowing each project to explore and develop skills in those aspects of action research most relevant for them.

A further development at the Institute has been the establishment of the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, which has been contracted to the Institute by the Office for the Status of Women. The Centre will establish a web-based clearinghouse of research and other information on sexual assault, which will complement our existing clearinghouses on child protection and stronger families. It will also have a significant research capacity, aiming to increase the knowledge base around an issue of significant concern for Australian families. The Centre will publish a number of issue papers and newsletters, as well as authoritative reviews. The Institute is currently recruiting staff for the Centre.

New Institute publications

The Institute has published three new Research Papers this year. “Family structure, child outcomes and environmental mediators: An overview of the Development in Diverse Families study”, by Sarah Wise, no. 30 in the Research Paper series, was published in January 2003. “Social capital at work: How family, friends and civic ties relate to labour market outcomes”, by Wendy Stone, Matthew Gray and Jody Hughes, no. 31; and “Family change and community life: Exploring the links”, by Jody Hughes and Wendy Stone, no. 32, were both released in May 2003. For more details of recent Institute publications, and how to order copies, see this issue pp. 95-96.

We invite readers’ views

We are keen to ensure that Family Matters continues to serve its readers well. Over recent years the journal has developed in a number of ways, becoming larger and better formatted, including more external research, as well as attaining the status of a fully refereed journal. It is therefore timely for us to seek your views on what works well and what could be improved. You will find a brief questionnaire on p. 75 of this issue – please take the time to complete it and return it to us. (If others are likely to read this copy of Family Matters, please photocopy the questionnaire.) We will also be sending more detailed survey forms to some subscribers at a future date. Readers’ responses will be used to help us plan for future issues of the journal.

Institute farewells David Stanton

I have left until last perhaps the most significant event at the Institute this year – namely, the departure of David Stanton as Director of the Institute, on 13 January 2003. After almost four years based in Melbourne, David decided to return full-time to his family in Canberra. Given the Institute’s work on family–work balance, we of course found it hard to criticise this choice, but we were nevertheless very sorry to see him go.

In her address at the opening of the Institute’s conference in February 2003, Minister Vanstone paid tribute to David’s valuable contribution during his years at the Institute. Over his term as Director, David provided wise leadership and good management – and a joke or an anecdote to fit every occasion! He led the Institute through a significant restructuring of its research activities, resulting in a clearer and more coherent focus to its research. The Institute also grew substantially over David’s term, largely through the winning of major contracts. He has thus left the Institute in a strong position.

Given the warm regard in which David is held, one farewell was not enough – an informal event at the Institute in January (see p. 69) was followed by another, more public farewell at the Institute’s conference dinner in February, at the Melbourne Aquarium. As a finale, an impromptu Institute choir serenaded David with songs written to fit occasion!

Institute staff and the Institute’s Board of Management join me in wishing David all the very best for the future.
Social competence in its nature and antecedents

Despite the challenges and problems that confront young people today, many find their lives to be satisfying, rich and full. This article discusses the nature and antecedents of a key attribute which fosters wellbeing and interpersonal relationships – social competence.

Social competence has been defined as “the ability to act wisely in human relations” (Thorndike 1920). More specifically, it has been described as “socially acceptable, learned ways of behaving that enable a person to interact effectively with other people” (Gresham and Elliott 1990), and refers to the individual’s repertoire of socially appropriate responses and behaviours. Some examples are sharing, helping, cooperating, initiating relationships, sensitively interacting with others, and handling conflict situations well.

Individuals who are socially competent are able to elicit positive responses from others and are skillful in forming close and supportive relationships. On the other hand, individuals with low levels of such skills tend to be less adroit socially and may more often experience adjustment difficulties. In short, social competence is a valuable individual skill and resource, and is an indicator of positive mental health.

A substantial amount of research has explored the factors which promote the development of social competence in childhood (Strain, Guralnick and Walker 1986). For example, in the Australian Temperament Project, temperament style, particularly low levels of “negative reactivity” (volatility, intensity and moodiness) and high levels of “persistence” (the ability to stay on task and see things through to completion), as well as high quality relationships with parents and peers, were powerful predictors of social competence in late childhood (Prior, Sanson, Smart and Oberklaid 2000).

The family environment may play a particularly important role in fostering children’s social competence, by guiding and modelling socially appropriate behaviour patterns. Children’s social competence has also been the target of numerous intervention efforts (see reviews by L’Abate and Milan 1985; and Schneider and Byrne 1985), in the belief that better developed social competence will enable youngsters to cope with and overcome adjustment difficulties.
Social competence could be expected to be an important contributor to wellbeing in many emerging arenas of young adult life, such as in the workplace and in forming intimate relationships. These new arenas also provide opportunities for the further development and refinement of these skills. However, in contrast to child research, much less attention has been given to the study of social competence at this developmental stage, and its contribution to wellbeing.

This paper reports on the use of a new measure of social competence developed for use with young adults to explore the connections between social competence and other forms of adjustment and wellbeing. Levels of social competence at 19-20 years of age, and gender differences, are described. As well, the paper reports the stability and antecedents of such skills from childhood to adulthood.

Australian Temperament Project

The data come from the Australian Temperament Project, now housed at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. This is a longitudinal community study of Australian children's development (Prior et al. 2000). The project began in 1983 with the recruitment of a representative sample of over 2400 infants and families from urban and rural areas of the state of Victoria. Families have been followed up twelve times by mail surveys every one to two years, beginning at four to eight months of age. The thirteenth data collection is currently underway at age 19-20 years.

Approximately two-thirds of the families are still participating in the study at this stage. While a number of families have dropped out over the years, and these include more from lower socio-economic or ethnic backgrounds, the remaining group of children closely resembles the original sample on all facets of infant functioning (see Prior et al. 2000 for further details). Hence, on the domains investigated in this study, sample attrition is unlikely to be a significant influence on the results.

Parents, teachers, maternal and child health nurses, and the young people themselves have provided information about the child's development across a wide range of domains, including child temperament, emotional and behavioural adjustment, school progress, health, social competence, relationships with parents and peers, parents' child-rearing practices, and the family's structural characteristics and experience of stress.

The data presented come from the 940 young people (41 per cent male and 59 per cent female) aged 19-20 years who have completed questionnaires in the thirteenth data collection of the study thus far. (It is estimated that this comprises 80 per cent of those who will eventually participate in this wave.) Among the questionnaires completed was an instrument developed by the research team to assess social competence. This measure was based on Gresham and Elliott's (1990) model of child and adolescent social competence, which

<table>
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<th>Model of child and adolescent social competence</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Assertion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Initiating behaviours, such as asking others for information, introducing oneself, and responding to the actions of others.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cooperation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Behaviours such as helping others, sharing materials, and complying with rules and requests.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empathy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Behaviours that show concern and respect for others’ feelings and viewpoints.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Behaviours that demonstrate ability to communicate with adults and regard for property or work.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-control</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Behaviours that emerge in conflict situations, such as responding appropriately to teasing, and in non-conflict situations that require taking turns and compromising.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gresham and Elliott 1990.
proposes that cooperation, assertion, self-control, responsibility and empathy together form a broad social competence dimension (see accompanying box).

As noted earlier, there is little information at present about the predictors of social competence at this age. However, drawing on the findings about the correlates of children's social competence, it was hypothesised that aspects of functioning such as temperament style and psychological adjustment, relationships with parents and peers, and aspects of the family environment such as parent–child relationships and parenting style would be influential antecedents. Data from the concurrent and earlier survey waves are used to explore the influence of these factors.

**Nature and correlates of social competence**

This section describes the characteristics and levels of social competence at 19-20 years of age. It looks at differences between young men and women, and connections between social competence and other forms of adjustment and wellbeing.

**Nature of social competence**

Regarding the components of social competence at 19–20 years of age, four clear factors emerged – assertion, self-control, responsibility and empathy. The items used to assess cooperation did not inter-relate, preventing the development of a cooperation scale. These items were dropped from subsequent analyses (although they are shown at the bottom of Table 1 for reader interest). Young people's perceptions of their skills on the four facets of social competence are shown in Table 1.

### Levels of social competence

Overall, most young people saw themselves as “often” or “always” possessing the attributes and behaviours measured, which suggests that levels of social competence were generally high. Young people's views of their responsibility and empathic skills tended to be a little more positive than their views of their self-control and assertiveness skills. Some behaviours – such as initiating conversations in groups, being considered a leader, being approached by others to share problems, being able to accept constructive criticism, and being able to negotiate and compromise in a conflict situation – were not as highly developed.

### Were the different aspects of social competence related?

The facets of social competence were significantly related, suggesting that scores on the four aspects could be combined to form an overall social competence score. This composite score can then be used as an indicator of the broad range of social skills possessed by an individual.

### Did young men and young women differ in social competence?

Young women were significantly higher than young men on all facets of social competence except self-control. There were powerful sex differences on empathy, and moderate sex differences on responsibility and overall social competence. Gender differences on assertiveness, while significant, were weak.

### Table 1  Young people's perceptions of their social competence at 19-20 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never %</th>
<th>Seldom %</th>
<th>Some times %</th>
<th>Often %</th>
<th>Always %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assertion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find it easy to make friends</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I invite others to join in social activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I initiate conversations in groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am considered to be a leader</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I express my wishes clearly, and give reasons for my actions and positions</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empathy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to understand how my friends feel when they are angry, upset or sad</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to be a kind and caring person</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People come to me to share their problems</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel sorry for others when bad things happen</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I show my concern for others when they experience difficulties</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I behave in a responsible way</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am punctual in meeting task deadlines set by others</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I fulfil my obligations</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can be relied on to do things right</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-control</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can assert my opinion without fighting or arguing</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I negotiate and compromise with people when we have disagreements</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I accept constructive criticism</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cooperation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I accept direction from people in charge</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am good at working in a team situation</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I put my own needs before the needs of others</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I show courtesy to others</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: These items did not show good internal consistency and are not treated as a scale in subsequent analyses.*

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**Family Matters No.64 Autumn 2003  Australian Institute of Family Studies**
**Was social competence related to other forms of adjustment?**

Young people with high social competence were slightly less likely than other young people to feel depressed, anxious or stressed. They were also somewhat less likely to have engaged in antisocial behaviour, and considerably more satisfied with the way their lives were progressing. Those who were highly socially competent had stronger ties to their parents, perceiving they received greater emotional and material support; they had better communication, were less alienated, and experienced slightly less conflict with parents. Likewise, they tended to have better quality friendships, feeling their friends gave them greater emotional and material support, that they communicated better with friends, and felt less alienated from them. Socially competent individuals also held slightly more positive attitudes towards society, such as trust in social institutions, and the justice system (trust in the courts, and trust in police) than less competent individuals.

In summary, it seemed that, as we might expect, social competence was most closely linked to interpersonal relationship experiences, with highly competent individuals tending to have more satisfying and supportive relationships. In addition, those with high social skills tended to be better adjusted and to have slightly more positive attitudes towards societal institutions. Those with poorer social skills tended to be faring less well on all these aspects.

**Stability of social competence from childhood to adulthood**

Similar measures of social competence had previously been obtained from the young people at the ages of 11-12 years, 12-13 years, and 13-14 years. The items used at the various time points were not identical, reflecting the evolution and development of these skills from childhood to adulthood. On the whole, there was modest to moderate continuity between earlier and later social competence (correlations ranged from .14 to .41).

Empathic skills were the most stable, and assertiveness and overall social competence were also moderately stable. The smaller the time interval, the stronger the stability, although there was still significant continuity over the longer time spans of seven and eight years.

The young people’s perceptions of their social competence at 19-20 years were moderately linked to parents’ and teachers’ earlier evaluations as well as their own earlier views of their social competence. Thus, these skills appeared to be reasonably stable, and it seemed that parents, teachers and the young people themselves could reliably report on them.

**Antecedents of young adult social competence**

Each wave of the Australian Temperament Project data set was examined in turn to explore the antecedents of social competence and to determine the age at which antecedents could first be identified (details of the multiple regression analyses are available from the authors). Variables were included if they predicted 1 per cent or more of the variance in social competence.

Table 2 shows the aspects of functioning which predicted later social competence, the strength of these predictors (that is, the amount of variance the set of measures accounted for), and the relative importance of the individual measures (listed in order from the most to the least powerful).

Some general trends are noticeable across these various time points.

First, some temperament and personality traits were consistent precursors of social competence, particularly sociability or outgoingness, persistence (the ability to stay on task), and conscientiousness (being careful, organised). There was even a weak trend for...
those who were less reactive or volatile toddlers to be more socially competent in young adulthood. Similarly, the ability to control emotions was the most powerful correlate at 20 years.

Second, externalising behaviour problems such as aggressiveness, oppositional behaviour, delinquency and hyperactivity during childhood and adolescence were associated with lower social competence in young adulthood. Connections between aggressiveness and later social competence were evident from as young as four years of age, although relatively weak over such a long time span.

Third, as might be expected, childhood and adolescent social competence were powerful precursors of social competence in young adulthood, suggesting a progressive development of these skills from childhood onwards.

Fourth, citizenship behaviours such as civic engagement at 20 years, and high political awareness at 18 years, were more characteristic of those with high social competence. Those with high social competence were more optimistic about the future and appeared readier for intimate relationships when they were 18 years of age.

Fifth and finally, interpersonal relationships appeared to be important building blocks for the development of social competence. For example, supportive and close peer relationships from 11-12 to 15-16 years were significant precursors. Likewise, high quality parent-child relationships at several time points (9-10 and 19-20 years) were associated with better developed social competence. Family socio-economic background during infancy also featured, although weakly.

Using the selected predictor measures, it was possible to predict young adult social competence from late childhood with some accuracy (14 per cent or more of variance), and more strongly from mid adolescence (30 per cent or more of variance). Even in very early childhood, some connections were shown between child and family characteristics and later social competence, although these were relatively weak.

**Young adults and social competence**

The facets of social competence which emerged were conceptually similar to the Gresham and Elliott model of childhood and adolescent social skills, with clearly defined factors of empathy, assertion, responsibility and self-control. However, a cooperation sub-scale was not identifiable, suggesting that the attributes selected (following directions, working in a team situation, being courteous, and being self-sacrificing) did not necessarily co-occur at this age, although they generally do among younger children. All but the last type of behaviour were quite common, but being high on one type of behaviour did not imply being high on another.

Regarding the four facets of social competence identified, it was found that competency in one aspect was related to competencies in others, leading to the development of a broad measure of social competence. This broad measure predicted other aspects of adjustment and functioning in expectable ways. Individuals with high social competence were less likely to experience depression or engage in antisocial behaviour, more likely to feel satisfied with their lives, and more likely to have closer and more satisfying relationships with parents and friends than those who were less socially skilled.

While there was considerable variability within each sex in levels of social competence, these skills tended to be more developed among young women than among young men, particularly empathic skills. These gender differences were evident from late childhood onwards (Prior et al. 2000), and continued to be apparent at 20 years of age. While it is beyond the scope of the study to explain these trends, there are several likely explanations.

Social norms and expectations for girls to be cooperative and responsible may foster the development of social competence among girls. Similarly, family socialisation processes and child-rearing practices may encourage girls’ emotional development and empathic capacities, while boys may be encouraged to be emotionally reserved. After a review of this research, Brody (1985: 102) concluded that “with development, boys increasingly inhibit the expression and attribution of most emotions, whereas girls increasingly inhibit the expression and recognition of socially unacceptable emotions, for example, anger”.

Peer relationships may also be important. For example, young girls’ friendships tend to be more intimate and supportive than those of young boys (Buhrmester and Pragner 1995). Girls’ peer interactions tend to be oriented to joint concerns and needs, which may facilitate the practice and development of self-disclosure and emotional support skills (Buhrmester 1996).

It is also possible that girls’ earlier developing language skills (Prior, Smart, Sanson and Oberklaid 1993) facilitate and strengthen the acquisition of socially skilled
behavioural styles. Some have also suggested that subtle biological and genetic gender differences (such as brain hemispheric functioning, neurological and hormonal processes) may have a powerful effect on children’s emotional development (see Brody 1985 for an overview).

Social competence was moderately stable across the eight years in which it was assessed. This time span crosses several developmental stages – childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. Thus, the roots of young adult competence could be seen in childhood. However, stability was far from absolute, suggesting most children fluctuated to some extent. The moderate stability found may be a result of maturational or life experience differences (for example, the timing of puberty or an early transition to working life), changes in the number and type of settings in which social competence is a critical attribute (for example, romantic relationships), or differences in the evolving nature of social competence itself as young people move through these developmental stages (reflected in changes in the items used at the different time points).

A range of individual, family and peer factors were important antecedents of social competence, and a number of these featured at several time points. Among these were temperament style, with more sociable, outgoing individuals, and individuals with good control of their emotions and attention, tending to be more socially competent later on. There was also a less powerful trend for young people who engaged in community work and were active participants in societal endeavours, as well as those with an interest in politics, to be more socially skilled.

Conversely, problematic behaviours, such as aggression, delinquency, and hyperactivity, even from very early childhood, were associated with lower social competence. The findings of links between earlier temperament, adjustment, citizenship behaviours, and later social competence have not, to our knowledge, been shown before, and extend our understanding of the developmental pathways involved.

High quality family and peer relationships emerged as important precursors, suggesting that these relationships play a critical role in the acquisition and ongoing development of an individual’s social skills. These findings are consistent with other research. For example, Bell, Avery, Jenkins, Feld and Schoenrock (1985) reported that emotional closeness to parents was related to high social competence among female, but not male, American college students. These gender-specific findings are intriguing and worthy of further exploration.

The connections between social competence and interpersonal relationships may also be bi-directional and reciprocal. For example, while social competence may have contributed to the development of positive relationships with others, earlier positive interpersonal relationships might in turn have promoted the further development of these skills.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the repertoire of social skills possessed by this group of young Australian men and women was shown to be an important resource that was related to their adjustment and wellbeing. Social competence appeared to have its developmental origins in childhood, and tended to be moderately stable from this time onwards. Both individual characteristics (for example, temperament style) and family and peer relationships were important antecedents.

Families can play a dual role in helping children to develop these capacities; by guiding the development of socially skilled behaviour patterns within the context of family life, and by arranging peer experiences and fostering friendships which enhance children’s emerging social skills.

**References**


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**Note:** The Australian Temperament Project is a collaborative project between the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the University of Melbourne, and Melbourne’s Royal Children’s Hospital. Other researchers involved in the study include Professor Frank Oberkladl, Professor Margot Prior, and Associate Professor John Toubourou.
Changing patterns of partnering

There have been important changes over the last 25 years in the way in which men and women form partnered relationships. However, a longer-term perspective provides a better understanding of these trends.

Within the last quarter century family structures and relationships have changed in significant ways. One of the most striking changes is in the area of partnering, perhaps the most obvious being the increasing tendency for people to live together without marrying (here called “cohabitation”) at some stage in their lives and the fall in first marriage and remarriage rates. But what do these trends suggest for the future of marriage? As will be seen in this article, those who focus on the last few decades may well draw markedly different conclusions from those who adopt a longer-term perspective.

The rise and fall of marriage

An appreciation of what is happening to marriage trends is best achieved through reference to different interacting processes, including changes in the prevalence of the married population, rates of first marriages and remarriages, and the timing of marriage in the life course. While marriage rates of previous years contribute to the prevalence of the married population at a later date, other factors are also important, including divorce rates, widowhood, and the sex ratio of the adult population.

This section first outlines changes in proportions of the adult population who are married, then focuses on the changing age at first marriage, and the rates of marriage and remarriage.

The rise and fall of the married population

According to the 2001 Australian census, just over half (52 per cent) of all people aged 15 years or over are married, down from nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) in 1971. As Figure 1 suggests, the fall in the marriage prevalence over this period has resulted in a return to circumstances apparent in much earlier times, for Australia was in the grip of a “marriage boom” from the post-war period until the early 1970s.

Indeed, marriage was slightly more prevalent in 2001 than 100 years earlier, partly because there was a greater overall sex imbalance in that earlier period (115 men for every 100 women at that time, compared with 96 in every 100 women in 2001), along with a gold rush in Western Australia which enticed more single men than women. Australia was also still feeling the effects of the severe economic depression of the 1890s, with economic prosperity not returning until the 1920s (ABS 2001; McDonald 1995). Further, there is evidence that, towards the beginning of the 20th century, the English middle class norm for couples to delay marriage until they could achieve a “respectable” standard of living was embraced and encouraged among working classes. These factors not only contributed to delays in marriage but also to a relatively high proportion of people not marrying at all (McDonald 1995).

Statistics on the prevalence of marriage provide snapshots in time that do not take into account all those who have embraced marriage at some stage in their life, including those whose marriages have ended in divorce or widowhood. Despite the declining married population in recent decades, most people do eventually marry, with 1997–1999 trends suggesting that this would apply to 72 per cent of men and 77 per cent of women. Nevertheless, these proportions are lower than those of just 12 years earlier, when 79 per cent of men and 86 per cent of women would marry (ABS 2001).

As noted above, the size of the married population at any point of time reflects the proportions of the population marrying in earlier years. Thus, the current size of the married population would be much lower were it not for the marriage boom of the 1940s to 1970s.

The rise and fall of first marriages

The marriage boom is reflected in both the high overall first marriage rates and the increasing tendency for individuals to marry at a relatively early age. Factors that appeared to facilitate and sustain this boom include the improved economic conditions prevailing after World War II, the emergence of a new era of familism which encouraged early and universal marriage, the continuing social disapproval of sex outside marriage and stigma attached to unmarried mothers, increased social acceptance of birth control in the 1950s, and the introduction of the contraceptive pill (in the 1960s) which enabled women to marry when young while avoiding having children (Gilding 2001; McDonald 1982, 1995).

Likewise the subsequent retreat from early marriage and overall decline in marriage rates was fuelled by a number of interacting factors. The 1980s saw a dramatic fall in the number of low skilled yet relatively well paid and secure jobs for early school leavers. The demand for a skilled workforce led to increasing numbers of young people completing high school and proceeding to tertiary education and decreasing numbers of early school...
leavers finding full time paid work – factors that discouraged early marriage. In addition, the contraceptive pill, which initially facilitated early marriage in a climate of social disapproval of sexual relationships outside marriage, eventually contributed to changing patterns of couple formation, including a rise in cohabitation and delays in marriage. In turn, social disapproval attached to cohabitation diminished considerably (McDonald 1995).

In 1970, just before the marriage boom ended, 78 in every 1000 bachelors married. This rate was substantially higher than in 1921 (53) but even higher than the rate in 2000 (32). For women, first marriage rates were 110 in 1970, and 68 and 40 in the earlier and later years respectively. Thus, in 2000, first marriage rates were not only significantly lower than those during the marriage boom but also before that unprecedented period.

Figure 2 shows first marriage rates per 1000 never married men and women in different age groups in 1921, 1970 and 2000. The greatest change in rates occurred among those under 30 years old, with the swing being particularly marked for men and women in their early twenties. For example, for every 1000 never married women aged 20-24 years, 290 married in 1970, compared with 128 in 1921, and only 47 in 2000. It is noteworthy that first marriage rates for the year 2000...
were lower than those in 1970 and 1921 across all age groups, and most particularly for young adults.

As mentioned above, one striking aspect of the marriage boom was the tendency for people to marry for the first time at quite young ages by historical standards. Figure 2 shows that in 1970 age 20-24 years was by far the most common time for women to enter their first marriage, while in 1921 marriage in the late 20s was marginally more common for women than marriage in the early 20s. On the other hand, in 2000 women most commonly married when aged 25-29 years. In 1921 and 1970, men most commonly married when they were 25-29 years, but in the year 2000 they were just as likely to marry when aged 30-34 years as when aged 25-29 years. Thus, marrying before the age of 25 is now relatively uncommon for both sexes.

The unusually young age at which people entered their first marriage during the marriage boom can be captured by reference to median age at marriage for different time periods. Figure 3 depicts changes in the median age at which men and women married for the first time since 1940. For both sexes, the median age fell until the mid-1970s and rose progressively thereafter reaching a higher age in 2000 than 60 years earlier. For men, the median age at first marriage was 26.4 in 1940, 23.3 in 1975, and 28.7 in 2000. For women, the median ages were 23.7, 21.1 and 26.7 respectively. To some extent, the delay in getting married in recent times has contributed to the overall lower proportion who are married in 2000 than some 25 years ago (as shown in Figure 1).

In short, trends in first marriage rates indicate that both men and women are not only deferring first marriage, but are less likely to marry now than they were not only 30 years ago during the marriage boom, but also earlier in the 20th century.

The rise and fall of remarriage

How true is the saying “Once bitten, twice shy” nowadays, compared with earlier times? At first glance, the different types of trends for remarriage may seem to provide conflicting answers to this question.

Remarriages may seem to be particularly popular these days. First, across all age groups, previously married men and women are more likely to marry than those who had never married (Figure 4). For example, while 71 per 1000 never married men in their late 20s and early 30s married in 2000, 103 to 104 per 1000 previously married men in these age groups remarried in 2000.

Second, remarriages have been markedly more prevalent since the late 1970s than in the first three quarters of the 20th century. For example, only 10 per cent of marriages involved remarriage for at least one partner in 1911, increasing to only 17 per cent by 1955. Over the last couple of decades, on the other hand, around one third of marriages each year have been remarriages for one or both partners. In 2000, 15 per cent of all marriages consisted of two previously married people and 19 per cent were the first marriage of just one of the partners (ABS 2001).

However, the increased prevalence of remarriage does not reflect a greater predisposition for previously married people to remarry since the late 1970s compared the rest of the 20th century. Rather, the greater prevalence of remarriage can be largely explained by the increased size of the divorced population since the Family Law Act 1975 came into operation. There are simply more people in the position to remarry in recent times. In addition, divorced people are more likely to remarry than those in 1970 and 1921 across all age groups, and most particularly for young adults. Remarriages have been markedly more prevalent since the late 1970s than in the first three quarters of the 20th century.
remarry than widowed people, and in the early part of the century, most previously married people were widowed rather than divorced (McDonald 1982).

In fact, while the proportion of marriages that were remarriages was much higher in the last 20 years than earlier in the 20th century, remarriage rates (defined as the proportion of the previously married population who remarried) rose then fell as did first marriage rates. In 1921, around 46 in every 1000 previously married men remarried (1921 Census and 1922 Year Book Australia). But in 1976, the rate was about twice as high (97 per 1000) but fell to 41 per 1000 in 2000. For women, the respective figures are 20, 32 and 19 per 1000 previously married women.

Consistent with trends apparent in Figure 4, age at which a person’s marriage ended is closely linked with the propensity for remarriage (McDonald 1982). Those whose marriage was terminated at younger ages are more likely to remarry compared with those whose marriage end at later ages. Furthermore, men are more likely than women to remarry following divorce, possibly reflecting women’s lower desire to remarry compared with men, or fewer opportunities to find a partner, particularly when they have children in their care. For instance, for those aged 45-59 years in 2000, remarriage rates in 2000 were 48 and 32 per 1000 previously married men and women. (ABS 2000).

**Changing nature of marriage formation**

What does the modern decline in marriage mean? Does it reflect a move away from forming living together unions, or are people just as inclined as in the past to form such relationships? This issue is examined in this section.

The rise of cohabitation

Paralleling the modern decline in marriages is the noticeable increase in cohabitation, from less than 1 per cent of all couples in 1971 to 12 per cent in 2001. However, the increase does not quite compensate for the fall in the prevalence of marriage. Figure 5 shows that between 1981 and 2001 the proportion of those aged 15 or over that were married fell by 8 percentage points (from 60 per cent to 52 per cent), while the proportion cohabiting increased by about 4 percentage points (from 3 per cent to 7 per cent). Thus, overall, the percentage of those aged 15 and over who were living as a couple fell from 63 per cent to 59 per cent over the last 20 years.

Younger couples are much more likely to cohabit than older couples, with the mid-20s representing a turning point. For instance, two-thirds of partnered men in their early 20s are cohabiting, while two-thirds of partnered men in their late 20s are married.

This greater tendency of younger than older couples to cohabit partly reflects the fact that the modern prevalence of cohabitation is quite recent and therefore would be more common among those who entered a relationship recently. The rise in cohabitation amongst younger groups also reflects the fact that cohabitation is often a stage in the relationship commitment process – a stage that often leads to marriage.

Indeed, one of the most important changes in partnership formation is the increasing tendency for couples to cohabit before they marry. Premarital cohabitation was virtually non-existent before the 1960s and applied to only 16 per cent of couples who married in 1975. In the late 1980s, around half of all marrying couples cohabited beforehand, while in 2001, 72 per cent of couples who married had lived together first. Thus, it is now unusual not to live together before marrying.

A marked turnaround in attitudes to cohabitation has accompanied these trends, both contributing to them and being fuelled by them. When cohabitation was virtually non-existent a strong stigma was attached to such behaviour and to sexual relationships outside marriage generally. Single women who became pregnant were pressured either to release their child for adoption or to marry. So-called “shot-gun” marriages were thus common – applying to about one-quarter of first-time brides during the late 1960s (McDonald 1995). Since this time, there has been a growing acceptance of cohabitation. By the late 1980s, a national survey suggested that the majority of people believed that
couples should live together before marrying (see McDonald 1995). More recently, cohabitation has become widely condoned not only as a stepping stone to marriage, but also as an alternative to it (de Vaus 1997).

As the proportion of marriages preceded by cohabitation has risen, the period of living together before marriage has also increased steadily. The first (2001) wave of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey suggests that, of couples who lived together before marrying, the proportions who married within six months of moving in together fell from 40 per cent in the 1960s and 1970s to 12 per cent by the late 1990s. Conversely, the proportions who lived together for at least three years before marrying increased from about 5 per cent in the 1960s and 1970s to more than 30 per cent by the late 1990s.

### Age at relationship formation

Given that men and women are living together for longer periods before they marry their partner, the growth of cohabitation is also linked with the increasing age at which men and women are marrying. But has there been any change in the age at which people partner?

Figure 6 shows that young people nowadays begin their first partnership – involving cohabitation or marriage – at ages similar to those born in the early part of the century. For example, of men born in the early 1970s, half of them formed their first relationship by the age 24 compared with age 25 for those born before 1932. However, those who were born right after World War II entered their first relationship at an earlier age – half of the men had partnered by the age of 23 years. A similar pattern applies to women, although the differences are smaller for women than for men. These changes relating to age of entry into first partnerships are considerably smaller than those relating to age of entry into first marriage.

### Living without a partner

So far, attention has been directed to partnership trends. They indicate that there are more adults living without a partner today than in the mid 1970s. Indeed, Birrell and Rapson (1998) found that, between 1986–1996, there was a sharp rise in the percentage of men and women who were not living with a partner. They attribute this trend, in part, to a mismatch between the types of men and women who are available to partner. They show that unpartnered women are particularly likely to be well-educated and have higher status occupations and higher incomes, while the opposite is the case for unpartnered men. Disproportionate numbers of unpartnered men have lower education levels and poor job prospects, with economic restructuring playing a major role in these developments.

Nevertheless, the proportions of men and women who were unpartnered changed little from 1996 to 2001 (Table 1) and by age 30–34, only a minority are unpartnered. Figure 7, which is based on 2001 census data, shows quite dramatic changes in the proportions who are unpartnered from their early 20s (80 per cent) to late 20s (50 per cent) and early 30s (34 per cent). The proportion without partners then levels out to just over one quarter for the five-year age groups between 35 and 59 years, increasing to 40 per cent for those 60 years or older, largely as a result of widowhood. (These trends are derived from Census figures which only identify people who have a partner living in the same household.)

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, those in their early 20s are more likely to be cohabiting than married, by their late 20s, those with partners are twice as likely to be married than cohabiting. By their early 30s, more than half are married and only 13 per cent are cohabiting, yet this group entered marriage at a time when cohabitation was already widely condoned as an alternative to marriage.

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**Figure 6** Age by which 50% of cohort had formed a live-in relationship

**Table 1** Changes in levels of being unpartnered, 1986-2001

**Figure 7** Social marital status by age group, 2001
(de Vaus 1997). Such trends highlight the continuing importance of marriage to couples in a context of a socially accepted alternative.

As noted earlier in relation to marriage, being without a partner at a given time does not imply having never partnered. While about half of those aged 25-29 years were unpartnered at the time of the 1996 census, data from the 1996 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (ABS 1997) suggest that only one-quarter in this age group had never lived with a partner. Part of the rise in the percentage of people without a partner observed by Birrell and Rapson (1998) probably reflects the decreasing stability of early relationships (Qu and Weston 2001). This issue will be explored further in the future.

Summary

There have been important changes in the way in which men and women form couple relationships. The proportion of the adult population that is married has declined since the period after World War II. Both men and women spend a considerable part of their adult life without being married, and are now older when they marry than they were some 25 years ago. However, the period from World War II until the 1970s was marked by a marriage boom, involving high marriage rates and a fall in age at marriage that was unprecedented. Since the Family Law Act 1975 came into operation, around one-third of marriages each year include at least one previously married person.

Formal marriage is no longer the only way in which people partner. Many people live in cohabitating relationships – at least for a while – and most marriages are now preceded by cohabitation. In addition, an increasing number of people are, at any given point of time, living without a partner at all.

However, it is easy to exaggerate the extent of change in partnering patterns. While important changes have taken place, there remains a great degree of continuity. As in the past, the vast majority of men and women form a relationship at some stage in their lives, and marriage remains by far the most common form of partnered relationship.

When the period of cohabitation is taken into account, men and women these days are entering into intimate live-in relationships at much the same age as they have for most of the last century, although the marriage boom period saw a fall in the age at which people began forming live-in relationships (almost exclusively via marriage). Although fewer people are now married, this has been partly compensated for by the increase in cohabitation. While more people are now unpartnered since the marriage boom, this is less a case of never finding a partner and more a case of having separated from a previous partner.

If the past is any guide to the future we will continue to see changes to the way in which people form relationships. These will be influenced by other changes in the wider society, including those relating to the economy, gender relations and social values, with values also being influenced by partnership formation trends. It is normal for changes to occur in the way men and women go about establishing families and relationships – change is an underlying theme in family history. The critical thing is to enable people to make good decisions in a time of change when old guidelines are not as helpful as they once were.

Formal marriage is no longer the only way in which people partner. Many people live in cohabitating relationships – at least for a while – and most marriages are now preceded by cohabitation.

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The Australian literature has generally defined work rich and work poor families in terms of whether parents are in paid employment. The literature has not, on the whole, differentiated between full-time and part-time employment. Rapid growth in part-time employment over recent years makes the differentiation between full-time and part-time employment increasingly important when considering the distribution of work across families. The proportion of all new jobs created which were part-time increased from 43 per cent in the 1980s to 75 per cent in the 1990s (Borland et al. 2001).

Burbidge and Sheehan (2001) carried out one of the few Australian studies which examined how part-time employment has affected the distribution of work across families. Burbidge and Sheehan examined the distribution of employment within couple families as well as the full-time and part-time employment rates for lone-parent families. They identified increases between 1981 and 2000 in the number of couple families with no job, or only one part-time job; they also identified increases for the same period, but particularly in the 1990s, in the number of families with one full-time and one part-time job.

This paper expands on Burbidge and Sheehan’s work by identifying the gender breakdown in changing patterns of full-time and part-time employment within couple families, and by examining how changes to lone mothers’ employment patterns contribute to changes in overall employment trends for families with dependent children. It explores the value of expanding the conventional definition of work poor families to include not only one of the major trends in the Australian labour market over recent years has been an increase in the number of families with children in which no parent is employed (“work poor” or “jobless” families) and families in which two parents are employed (“work rich” families) (Gregory 1999).

At one end of the spectrum, the proportion of dependent children living in families with no employed parent has risen from 11 per cent in 1979 to 18 per cent in 1998 (Gregory 1999), leading to Australia having one of the highest rates of joblessness in households with dependent children amongst OECD countries (Dawkins et al. 2001). At the other end of the spectrum, the proportion of families with dependent children who have two parents employed increased from 40 per cent in 1983 to 48 per cent in 2002 (ABS various years).

The rise in the number of work poor families in Australia is partly due to lone-parent families becoming an increasingly common family type. Lone mothers have lower rates of employment than do couple mothers, resulting in high jobless rates for lone-parent families.

Joblessness has also increased in couple families. This is primarily due to a rise in the rates of unemployment and withdrawal from the labour market by fathers (Gregory 1999). While it might be assumed that the increased employment rates for women would have counterbalanced the growing unemployment for men and kept family jobless rates low, this has not been the case. Gregory (1999) found that 91 per cent of employment growth for women in the last two decades can be accounted to those with employed partners.

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jobless families, but also those with only one employed parent working short part-time hours (that is, fewer than 15 hours per week). These families are not likely to be much better off than those who are jobless, and are also likely to be in receipt of income support payments. Therefore, by the conventional definition of work poor, the true number of families who are struggling in the Australian labour market may be understated.

The figures presented are derived from the Labour Force Survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The time period examined is 1983 to 2002. The analysis is restricted to families with dependent children.

**Employment trends by family type 1983-2002**

The analysis of employment within families is conducted for five categories of families: lone mothers; couple mothers with non-employed partners; couple fathers with non-employed partners; and couple fathers with employed partners. Couple families are broken into these categories to allow the employment status of both partners to be considered separately. Men and women need to be examined separately given the gender differences in labour force status. Lone fathers are not considered because the numbers are too small for the Labour Force Survey to produce reliable estimates.

For each family type, figures on part-time employment and full-time employment are presented. Full-time employment is defined as working 35 or more hours per week.

**Lone mothers**

There has been an increase in the proportion of lone mothers employed part-time has more than doubled, increasing from 11.8 per cent in 1983 to 26.8 per cent in 2002. Full-time employment for lone mothers appears to have been quite sensitive to the business cycle. The rate fell during the recession of the early 1980s, then increased to a maximum of 28.7 per cent in 1988, declined steadily to 20 per cent in 1998 before increasing slightly. The proportion of lone mothers in full-time employment in 1983 was very similar to the proportion in 2002, 20.3 per cent and 21.0 per cent respectively.

The proportion of lone mothers in full-time employment was greater than the proportion in part-time employment until 1998. The rapid growth in part-time employment and stability in rates of full-time employment meant that from 1998 onwards a higher proportion of lone mothers were in part-time employment.

**Couple mothers with non-employed partner**

The part-time employment rates for couple mothers whose partners were not employed rose from 8.0 per cent in 1983 to 16.9 per cent in 2002 (Figure 2). The proportion employed full-time also increased at a similar rate, from 8.4 per cent in 1983 to 16.7 per cent in 2002.

Regarding non-employment, 66.4 per cent of couple mothers with non-employed partners were not employed in 2002. This is higher than the average rate of joblessness for any other group of mothers with dependent children.

**Couple mothers with employed partners**

Couple mothers with employed partners showed high levels of full-time as well as part-time employment growth. As Figure 3 shows, between 1983 and 2002, the rate of full-time employment increased from 19.5 per cent to 26.5 per cent, and part-time employment grew from 25.6 per cent to 39.7 per cent.

A higher proportion of couple mothers with employed partners were in part-time employment than full-time employment for the whole period. The gap between part-time and full-time employment rates shows some evidence of increasing towards the end of the period.

**Couple fathers with non-employed partner**

Figure 4 shows that the part-time employment rate for couple fathers with non-employed partners increased between 1983 and 2002, from 2.2 per cent to 6.3 per cent. Full-time employment declined between 1983 and 1993, dropping from 82.5 per cent to 71.9 per cent, then rose a little to 74.3 per cent in 2002. This presumably indicates the effect of the recession in the early 1990s on employment for couple fathers with non-employed partners.

Overall employment for couple fathers with non-employed partners declined. In 1983, 15.2 per cent of couple fathers with non-employed partners were not employed themselves. This figure increased to 19.5 per cent in 2002.

**Couple fathers with employed partners**

As Figure 5 shows, the proportion of couple fathers with employed partners who were in full-time employment dropped from 93.3 per cent in 1983 to 87.6 per cent in 2002, and the proportion in part-time employment rose...
from 2.6 to 6.6 per cent over the same period. This means that the overall rate of employment fell by 1.7 percentage points.

**Differences between family types**

Part-time employment rates have increased between 1983 and 2002 for all five family categories, though the rate of change varied greatly. Lone mothers had the greatest rise in part-time employment, with an increase of 15 percentage points between 1983 and 2002.

For couple families, greater increases in part-time employment were experienced by women than men. Of couple mothers, those with employed partners experienced stronger growth in part-time employment than those with non-employed partners. Therefore, in terms of the polarisation of work, it appears that for couple mothers, growth in part-time employment resulted more in the creation of work rich families than in an increase in the proportion with low levels of employment. For couple fathers, the rate of growth in part-time employment was the same for both those with employed and non-employed partners.

The data presented in this paper do not provide any direct information on the reasons for these changes; however, a number of possibilities are canvassed below.

One possible explanation for the differing patterns for women from different family types relates to preferences for part-time versus full-time employment, and whether these preferences can be achieved. As outlined above, there was a majority of couple mothers with employed partners in part-time employment over the whole period. This is likely to reflect a preference for part-time employment due to the opportunity it provides for combining employment with child-rearing and household tasks.

For couple mothers with non-employed partners the rates of part-time and full-time employment fluctuated. Over some periods there was a higher rate of full-time than part-time and for others part-time was slightly higher than full-time. However, the rates of full-time and part-time employment were generally quite similar. In contrast, for lone mothers, while there was a higher proportion in full-time employment until 1998, strong growth in part-time employment, coupled with a decline in full-time employment, meant that from 1998 onwards part-time employment was more common.

Lone mothers and couple mothers with non-employed partners may also have preferred part-time work, but without the financial support of an employed partner, they may not have found it to be financially viable.

If this is the case, it appears that an increasing number of lone mothers have been able to actualise their preference for part-time work. This may be a result of changes to the welfare system which have made part-time work economically more viable for lone mothers. These changes have involved using earnings disregards and having a rate of withdrawal of benefits of substantially less than 100 per cent (Grey and Stanton 2002). Some support for this hypothesis is provided by the fact that the proportion of lone mothers who received both earnings and income support payments increased from 9 per cent in 1983 to 26.2 per cent in 2001 (FaCS 2001; Whiteford and Angénent 2001).

The increases in part-time employment may also have been the result of the availability of jobs. One of the most notable features of the Australian labour market is that a high and increasing proportion of new jobs created during the 1980s and 1990s were part-time (Borland, Gregory and Sheehan 2001).

Another feature of the trends was that overall employment growth was greatest for couple mothers with employed partners. This may indicate that those with links to the workforce provided by employed partners may be advantaged when competing in the labour market.

Alternatively, it may be related to partners having shared values about work, wealth and welfare receipt and thus both seeking similar levels of employment. Similarly, it may reflect the tendency for people to partner with those with comparable levels of educational
attainment and marketable skills to their own (Miller 1997). That is, women with human capital and other characteristics which make them more likely to be employed tend to partner with men who are also more likely to be employed (that is, assortative mating). Consistent with this is the much smaller drop in full-time employment rates and the lesser rise in the proportion not employed for couple males with employed partners. The lesser employment growth amongst both men and women with non-employed partners may also be due, in part, to the work disincentives generated by the income support and tax systems (Dawkins et al. 2001).

Re-defining work poor families

This section explores the effect of redefining “work poor families” to include not only jobless families, but also those with only one part-time employed parent. However, “part-time” is a broad category which incorporates all employed people who work fewer than 35 hours per week. This is potentially important for interpretation of the data. For example, a reduction in working hours from 36 to 34 hours per week would result in a change from full-time to part-time employment, but clearly makes very little difference to either income or other issues such as work-life balance. The aim of redefining work poor families is to identify families who are likely to be struggling in the labour market and receiving no or very low earnings. Therefore, only those working short part-time hours (1-15 hours per week) are considered.

In order to examine the working hours of part-time employees, information is presented in Table 1 on the proportion working “short part-time hours” (1-14 hours per week) and “long part-time hours” (15-34 hours per week). This is presented for lone mothers, couple mothers and couple fathers.

Table 1 shows that of the groups being examined, lone mothers had the highest proportion of part-time employees working short hours (44 per cent in 2002). Both lone and couple mothers experienced a modest increase in the proportion of part-time employees working longer part-time hours. For lone mothers this increase was from 50.7 per cent in 1983 to 56.0 per cent in 2002. For couple mothers the increase was from 54.8 per cent in 1983 to 58.7 per cent in 2002. In contrast, for part-time employed couple fathers, there was a sizeable decline in the proportion working longer hours, from 72.2 per cent in 1983 to 63.6 per cent in 2002.

Unfortunately the figures on hours of part-time work could not be broken down according to partner’s employment status since this information is not available in the published ABS data. Therefore, using the published data, the number of couple families who have only one employed partner working short part-time hours cannot be ascertained. However, there is sufficient information on lone mothers to allow an exploration of the effect of extending the definition of “work poor” to include those working short part-time hours.

Using the conventional definition, the proportion of families headed by lone mothers who were work poor decreased by 15.7 percentage points, from 67.9 per cent in 1983 to 52.2 per cent in 2002. The proportion considered to be work poor is substantially higher when those who work short part-time hours are included (63.1 per cent in 2002). Also, the decline in the proportion of families who are work poor is substantially reduced (to 8.3 per cent) when the definition is extended.

For couple fathers the likely effects of extending the definition of work poor can be deduced. Couple fathers with non-employed partners have experienced an increase in part-time employment. We also know that for all part-time employed couple fathers there has been a substantial increase in the proportion working short part-time hours. If this trend is consistent for both categories of fathers, not only would couple fathers with non-employed partners have experienced increasing rates of

| Table 1 | Distribution of number of hours work by gender and family type, part-time employees, 1983-2002 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Lone mothers | | | Couple mothers | | | |
| | 1-14 hours | 15-34 hours | 1-14 hours | 15-34 hours | 1-14 hours | 15-34 hours |
| | Per cent | | | | | | |
| 1983 | 49.3 | 50.7 | 45.2 | 54.8 | 27.8 | 72.2 |
| 1988 | 42.1 | 57.9 | 42.5 | 57.5 | 29.9 | 70.1 |
| 1993 | 45.9 | 54.1 | 37.9 | 62.1 | 33.6 | 66.4 |
| 1998 | 40.5 | 59.5 | 36.4 | 63.6 | 36.9 | 63.1 |
| 2002 | 44.0 | 56.0 | 41.3 | 58.7 | 36.4 | 63.6 |

Sources: ABS (various years), Labour force status and other characteristics of families, Australia, Catalogue 6224.0, ABS, Canberra, ABS (2001-2002), Data Cubes, June, Catalogue 6291.0.40.001, table fm1, ABS, Canberra.

Notes: The 2002 figures are categorised as those working 0-15 hours and 16-34 hours. Those working no part-time hours have been excluded.
family joblessness but we could assume that there have also been substantial increases in the proportion working short part-time hours. This means that by extending the definition of work poor, with reference to couple fathers, a much higher number of families would be considered to be work poor and the rate of increase in the number of work poor families would also be substantially higher.

This has important implications. By using the conventional definition of work poor and focusing primarily on jobless families, many researchers and policy makers are likely to be understating the rate of increase and the number of families who are losing out in the Australian labour market and who are likely to experience poverty and reliance on the income support system.

**Overview of family employment trends**

The picture with respect to the distribution of employment for different family types (above) is complex. It is therefore of value to construct a simple summary measure of changes to employment within families. This measure needs to distinguish between part-time and full-time employment, something which is rarely done in the existing literature.

A summary measure can be constructed by numerically representing the total amount of employment within families. Full-time jobs are given the value of 1, part-time jobs the value of 0.5, and non-employment the value of 0. This allows the amount of employment to be measured by summing the total number of jobs held by parents within the family.

To give an example, a couple consisting of a full-time employed father and a part-time employed mother, would have 1.5 jobs. Similarly, a couple family in which the father is employed part-time and the mother full-time would have 1.5 jobs. Couples with both parents employed part-time are represented with the number 1 and are not therefore distinguished from families with one parent in full-time work. It needs to be borne in mind that use of these measurements does not mean that part-time employees always work half the hours of full-time employees.

Initially, the focus is on employment in couple families, for whom a greater range of job values are possible. Figure 6 shows the summary measure of the number of jobs within couple families for the period 1983 to 2002. In 1983, 49.4 per cent of couples with dependent children had one job. In most cases this meant that the male was employed full-time and the female was not employed. However, by 2002 the proportion of couple families with one job fell to 31.7 per cent. This drop is mostly due to the increased employment rates of women, although an increase in joblessness also contributed somewhat. In other words, as previous studies have shown, employment has been polarised across families.

For those with both parents employed – that is, the work rich – it is more common to have one parent employed full-time and the other part-time than to have both parents employed full-time. The proportion of families with both parents employed full-time increased from 17.0 per cent to 21.9 per cent between 1983 and 2002. There was a greater increase for families with one parent employed full-time and the other part-time, from 22.6 per cent to 35.0 per cent. This is mainly the result of women taking on part-time positions while their partners are working full-time. By not considering part-time employment in definitions of work rich families, these different employment experiences and changing patterns of employment within those groups are overlooked.

The rate of joblessness in couple families appears to have been quite sensitive to the business cycle. The rate fell from 8.8 per cent in 1983 as the economy recovered after the recession of the early 1980s. Joblessness in couple families then increased again to a maximum rate of 10.8 in 1993 during the recession of the early 1990s before dropping back to 7.2 per cent in 2002. Only 2.1 per cent of couple families had only one parent employed part-time in 1983. This doubled to 4.2 per cent in 2002. Combined, families who were jobless or with only one parent employed part-time accounted for 10.9 per cent of couple families in 1983 and 11.4 per cent in 2002.

It seems that an overwhelming majority of couple families have increased rather than reduced their combined level of employment as a result of a greater availability of part-time work. There has been an increase in the number of couples with dependent children with only one part-time job between them, but these couples only represent a very small portion of the population and the increase is slight. Far more substantial is the increase in the number of families with one parent employed full-time and the other employed part-time.

In accordance with previous research, these analyses show that the number of jobless families increases substantially when lone parents are considered. Figure 7 is
similar to Figure 6 but includes lone mothers and lone fathers. As Figure 7 shows, in 1983, 16.2 per cent of families with dependent children had neither parent employed. After a decline, joblessness within families peaked again at 18.1 per cent in 1993. This is attributable to the severe recession in the early 1990s. However, with the inclusion of lone parents the rate of joblessness does not follow a downward trend from 1993 as it did for couple families. Instead it peaks again in 1998 at 18.5 per cent before dropping back to 16.9 per cent in 2002. Overall, the proportion of jobless families increased by only 0.7 percentage points between 1983 and 2002.

The proportion of families with only one part-time job increased steadily between 1983 and 2002. In 1983, 3.3 per cent of families had only one parent employed part-time compared to 8.9 per cent in 2002. The rate of increase is greater when lone parents are considered. This indicates that the increasing incidence of lone parent families not only plays a key role in the increasing rates of joblessness but also in the increasing number of families with low levels of employment.

Combining jobless families with those with only one part-time employee provides a somewhat concerning picture. In 1983, 19.5 per cent of families were either jobless or only had one parent employed part-time. This figure had increased to 25.8 per cent by 2002. That means that more than a quarter of Australian families with dependent children are either receiving no income from employment or only one part-time wage. This is particularly concerning when we consider that in 2002, 41 per cent of part-time employed parents worked less than 15 hours per week.

**Conclusion**

Part-time employment has grown rapidly over recent years. While many recent studies have focused on the polarisation of work across families, few have examined how part-time employment contributes to this polarisation. Findings from the above analysis indicate that increased take-up of part-time employment has contributed to a growth in both the number of work rich and work poor families in Australia.

Lone mothers, in particular, have contributed to the increased number of families with only one part-time job. Not only has there been an increase in the proportion of families which are headed by lone mothers, but of the family types examined, they experienced the highest rate of growth in part-time employment. Lone mothers also had the highest proportion of part-time employees working short hours. This highlights the importance of changes to the welfare system that have increased the amount of income support available to part-time employed lone mothers. Without the increasing generosity of earnings disregards and withdrawal rates of government benefits many lone parent families would be likely to have to rely on income from very few hours of work or be working more hours than they prefer.

Overall, couple families seemed to increase rather than decrease their combined level of employment by the uptake of part-time work. There was a much greater increase in the number of couple families with one part-time and one full-time job than in the number with only one part-time job between them. However, when couple families are considered according to each partner’s employment status, there is one group that appears to be falling behind. Couple fathers with non-employed partners have experienced increases in joblessness as well as in part-time employment. Looking at overall trends for couple fathers it also appears that the majority of the increase in part-time employment has been for those working less than 15 hours per week. This means that an increasing proportion of families consisting of a couple father with a non employed partner appear to be receiving either limited or no earnings.

Clear differences within the groups of families classified as work rich and work poor illustrate the necessity to differentiate between full-time and part-time employment in discussions of the polarisation of families according to work status.

**Note**

1. The validity of the comparison in labour force status over time depends upon consistent definitions being used in the data collection. The Labour Force Survey data presented in this paper is broadly comparable. The major definitional change is that prior to 1991, the lone mother category may have included a small number of mothers who were in a de facto relationship.

**References**


Jennifer Renda is a Research Officer at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, working in the Institute’s Family and Society Program. The author would like to thank Matthew Gray and Wendy Stone for their insights and comments on earlier drafts of this paper.
Multiple and severe disadvantage among lone mothers receiving income support

Efforts to improve the social and economic participation of lone mothers receiving welfare should be mindful of the obstacles experienced by many of these women, and recognise the need for appropriate support and services for those who require assistance.

PETER BUTTERWORTH

ince 1999, reform of the income support or welfare system has been a priority of the Australian Government. One of the key client groups targeted by the reforms and policy initiatives is lone parents, particularly lone mothers who comprise the vast majority of lone parents. The aim of this paper is to quantify the extent to which lone mothers experience personal circumstances – or barriers – that are likely to impede or make more difficult their transition into employment.

The paper outlines the key aspects of welfare reform in Australia, then discusses research examining barriers and obstacles to employment and workforce participation, and the prevalence and consequences of these factors for lone mothers. Drawing on data from the National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, it sets these issues in an Australian context.

The Australian experience of welfare reform

Although welfare reform is an international phenomenon, the Australian experience is unique in terms of the drivers of reform and the responses being implemented (FaCS 2002). An obvious impetus of welfare reform is concern about the growing number and percentage of people of working age receiving income support payments.

Some policy analysts question the sustainability of current welfare expenditure. Maximising workforce participation and productivity among people of working age will also be increasingly important in an environment in which, over the next 50 years, structural ageing will reduce the proportion of the Australian population of working age.

Analysts are also concerned that passive welfare promotes a culture of dependency and the development of attitudes and values inconsistent with work (Mead 2000). There is also concern about the number of children growing up in jobless families and the related issue of trans-generational welfare dependency (McCoull and Pech 2000).

Other drivers of welfare reform include: addressing the complexity of the current system; modernising the system to reflect current community views and family structures, and to match current labour market conditions; and addressing financial disincentives to work.
The central element of welfare reform is an emphasis on participation (involvement in work or work-like activities) as a prerequisite for receipt of payments rather than a passive income support system. Promoting involvement in economic and/or social activities is a strategy to promote or maintain welfare recipients’ self-sufficiency and independence. In Australia, mutual obligations and activity requirements are strategies used to promote active participation.

However, welfare reform in Australia has a broader focus. Participation requirements are designed to match each individual’s abilities and capacity (FaCS 2000). Welfare reform also involves targeted and individualised assistance. A range of services and programs (for example, Personal Support Program, Personal Advisers) have been implemented to support individuals to achieve these aims and provide assistance to those with substantial barriers to participation in the workforce.

Why lone mothers?
In Australia, 22 per cent of families with children aged under 15 are lone-parent families, and most of these (around 90 per cent) are headed by women. Around 20 per cent of Australian children live in lone-parent families (ABS 2002). Lone mothers are more likely to be income support recipients than partnered mothers, and they are also less likely to be working. There are particular concerns about the welfare of children in jobless families. The majority of jobless families are headed by unpartnered women (FaCS 2002).

Lone parents are one of the client groups targeted by the range of welfare reforms which are either being implemented or planned for the future. For example, those people receiving Parenting Payment (including lone mothers) with young children (aged 6–12 years) will be required to have annual participation interviews with a Personal Adviser, and those with older children will be required to undertake six hours of activity per week (FaCS 2000).

In United States welfare research, concerns have been expressed that a substantial minority of lone mothers have not benefited from the introduction of a more active welfare system and have had difficulty moving off welfare and into employment (Danziger, Corcoran et al. 2000; Jayakody, Danziger and Pollack 2000). As a result, there have been efforts to identify and understand the types of personal characteristics...
that may be an obstacle to employment. Recent Australian research examining longitudinal income support data has shown that many lone mothers spend a considerable period of time on welfare, both on Parenting Payment Single and other income support payments (Gregory and Klug 2001).

Thus, for a variety of reasons it is important to examine the types of barriers and obstacles that may limit these women’s opportunities to move into employment and cause them to spend longer periods of time on welfare.

**Examining different types of barriers**

Most research on the employment of welfare recipients examines the role of structural barriers such as access to child care, transport issues, job availability and financial disincentives (Jayakody and Stauffer 2000). This approach is inappropriate when the objective is to explain the variability in the outcomes achieved by lone mothers in similar circumstances. The research that has examined personal barriers to employment has concentrated on human-capital characteristics. Evidence shows that many lone parents on welfare have poor levels of education, do not have job-relevant skills, and lack workforce experience, and that these characteristics are associated with continued receipt of welfare and unemployment (Danziger, Corcoran et al. 2000; Kalil, Schweingruber, and Seefeldt 2001; Olson and Pavetti 1996).

Using Australian data, Gray, Qa, de Vaus and Millward (2002) demonstrated that human capital and other socio-demographic characteristics, such as level of educational attainment, number of children, regional location, and home ownership, are associated with employment for both partnered and lone mothers. Many social policy responses emphasise these human-capital aspects (for example, transition-to-work; Jobs, Education and Training program).

There is also growing recognition in international research and policy that psychological and personal characteristics such as poor mental health, substance use disorders, physical health problems, and domestic violence are more prevalent among welfare recipients and that these characteristics represent a substantial barrier to increased workforce participation, self-reliance and movement off welfare (Danziger, Corcoran et al. 2000; Danziger, Kalil and Anderson 2000; Horwitz and Kerker 2001; Jayakody et al. 2000; Jayakody and Stauffer 2000; Kalil et al. 2001; Salomon, Bas-suk and Brooks 1996; Tolman and Raphael 2000).

The available literature comes mainly from the United States. While there is limited local research

**Evidence shows that many lone parents on welfare have poor levels of education, do not have job-relevant skills, and lack workforce experience, and that these characteristics are associated with continued receipt of welfare and unemployment.**

**ABOUT THE MEASURES**

This section provides detail of the measures used to construct each of the five categories of barriers. Further information about the scales and scoring methods is available in Butterworth (2002).

- **Human capital barriers:** The survey collected socio-demographic information including labour force history (no labour force experience) and educational attainment (not completed secondary education). Individuals were considered to have a human capital barrier if they met either one of these criteria.

- **Mental health barrier:** The primary diagnostic component of the survey was based on a computerised version of the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI) Version 2.1. The CIDI is a fully structured standardised interview used to assess mental disorders in research settings and provide diagnoses according to standard and accepted definitions and criteria. This analysis used the International Classification of Diseases, 10th revision (ICD-10) classification to identify the presence of any anxiety disorder or any depressive disorder in the previous 12 months. The Kessler 10 scale of psychological distress identified respondents with a substantial level of psychological distress during the previous month (those with a score of 20 or greater). Psychosis screening questions identified respondents likely to have schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder. Individuals were considered to have a mental health barrier if they met criteria for any one of these disorders.

- **Substance use disorders:** The CIDI was also used to identify survey respondents meeting the ICD-10 criteria for harmful alcohol use or dependence, or harmful drug use or dependence in the previous 12 months.

- **Physical conditions and disability:** A 12-item scale was used to identify self-reported common chronic physical conditions. These included asthma, chronic bronchitis, anemia, high blood pressure, heart problems, arthritis, kidney disease, diabetes, cancer, stomach or duodenal ulcer, chronic gallbladder or liver problems and hernia or rupture. Respondents with a standardised scale score of below 40 on the physical-health summary scale of the SF-12 were cate-
examining these issues, the direction of welfare reform in Australia shows that the importance of these types of personal barriers has been recognised and that the issue is on the policy agenda. What is not known, however, is the extent and prevalence of these types of barriers among welfare recipients in Australia.

Mental disorders are the leading cause of non-fatal disease burden in Australia (Mathers, Vos and Stevenson 1999). That is, mental health problems are the cause of the greatest level of impairment, functional limitation and role restriction. Mental disorders significantly reduce workforce participation, hours able to be worked, and productivity at work (Kessler and Frank 1997).

Mental health problems are also an important predictor of welfare recipients’ continued reliance on welfare or movement into employment. The study of low-prevalence disorders conducted as part of the Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (Jablensky et al. 1999) found that 85 per cent of people with psychotic disorders rely on government payments. Common mental disorders, such as anxiety and depression, are much more prevalent than psychotic disorders, and are also associated with difficulty finding and maintaining employment, receipt of welfare, and low income (Danziger, Kalil et al. 2000; Jayakody and Stauffer 2000; Olson and Pavetti 1996). Given the well-documented relationship between mental health and socio-demographic factors such as unemployment, poverty and sole-parent status, it is not surprising that the prevalence of mental health problems is greater among lone mothers on welfare than in the general population (Butterworth 2002; Danziger, Kalil et al. 2000; Olson and Pavetti 1996).

Research on the association between alcohol and drug use and welfare receipt is less consistent, partly reflecting the use of many different types of measures in the research. International evidence shows that illegal drug use and drug dependence is more prevalent among welfare recipients, while alcohol use/dependence is not consistently shown to be more prevalent among welfare recipients (Danziger, Kalil et al. 2000; Jayakody et al. 2000; Olson and Pavetti 1996). Nonetheless, alcohol and drug use is commonly cited as a major impediment to employment (Jayakody et al. 2000).

Lone mothers on welfare also report greater levels of physical disability and poorer physical health than those not receiving welfare (Danziger, Kalil et al. 2000; Olson and Pavetti 1996). It was shown by Kalil et al. (2001) that lone mothers on welfare with chronic physical health problems were much less likely to be working than those without health problems. In a recent review, Baker and Tippin (2002) concluded that poor physical health was a barrier to employment for lone mothers on welfare.

Finally, this analysis also considers lone mothers’ experience of physical and sexual violence. There are several reasons for considering this issue. Experience of domestic violence has been identified as a barrier to employment, both indirectly through an association with poorer mental and physical health, and directly through an abusive (former) partner’s interference in the workplace, or with efforts to improve skills or education (Danziger, Corcoran et al. 2000; Tolman and Raphael 2000).

In research relevant to current concerns about long-term welfare receipt in Australia, Salomon et al. (1996) found that women who cycled on and off welfare reported much higher levels of violence and abuse than those with only a single episode on welfare. There was a strong association between long-term welfare receipt and experience of domestic violence. These measures of violence are also relevant as experience of significant trauma may be a barrier to help-seeking behaviours (Miranda and Green 1999). Childhood abuse is associated with increased risk of later relationship difficulties, divorce/separation, and lone-parent status (Bifulco, Brown and Adler 1991).

ABOUT THE ANALYSES

The percentage of women in each group with each of the individual conditions, traumatic experiences or characteristics, was calculated, as was the percentage identified with each type of barrier (Table 1). Logistic regression models confirmed that lone-mother recipients were more likely to experience each type of barrier than other mothers.

These analyses focus on odds – a common approach in medical and clinical research. Odds provide a measure of the risk that members of a group have a particular condition or experience. For example, the odds or the risk of lone-mother recipients having a mental health problem is the number of women with a mental health problem divided by the number who do not have a mental health problem. Odds ratios can be calculated by dividing the odds for one group (lone-mother recipients) by those for another group (all other mothers). The result provides a direct indication of the greater or lesser risk of having a particular condition for those in one group compared to another. For example, the odds (or risk) of a lone-mother recipient having a mental health problem are almost three times (2.97) that of other mothers. Odds ratios for each type of barrier are presented in the final column of Table 1.

Formal statistical analysis were also conducted to confirm the significance of the greater prevalence of multiple barriers among lone-mother recipients. One-way analysis of variance and poisson regression confirmed that lone-mother recipients experienced more barriers than other mothers.

Data were analysed using SPSS and STATA. Data were weighted to reflect the probability of selection within the population.
Finally, many researchers hypothesise that mental disorders and substance-use disorders are often a consequence of earlier traumatic experiences. It could be that welfare recipients have greater exposure to trauma across their lives (Turner, Wheaton and Lloyd 1995) or, alternatively, have fewer resources (financial, social support, resilience, coping skills) to adequately manage life's stressors (McLeod and Kessler 1990).

Multiple barriers

There is evidence that the co-occurrence of barriers is associated with more negative consequences than the presence of a single barrier. For example, Kessler and Frank (1997) found the level of work impairment experienced by workers with multiple common mental disorders was much greater than that of workers with only a single mental disorder. American research on welfare recipients indicates that the presence of multiple barriers, particularly where these barriers are from different domains (for example, a mental health problem together with physical disability) is much more limiting than a single barrier (Danziger, Corcoran et al. 2000; Danziger, Kalil et al. 2000; Olson and Pavetti 1996). Lone mothers on welfare who experience multiple obstacles have more difficulty finding and maintaining employment and are less likely to move off welfare.

The research discussed has been primarily conducted with welfare populations in the United States. It is important to examine these issues in an Australian context. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to estimate the prevalence of the individual types of barriers amongst Australian lone mothers receiving income support, as well as exploring the extent to which these barriers co-occur.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of barriers</th>
<th>Lone-mother recipients</th>
<th>Partnered-mother recipients</th>
<th>Non-recipient mothers</th>
<th>Odds ratios Comparison of risk for lone-mother recipients and all other mothers</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Individual conditions, traumas, characteristics</strong></td>
<td>a (%)</td>
<td>b (%)</td>
<td>c (%)</td>
<td>a vs (b &amp; c)</td>
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<td><strong>Human capital barrier</strong></td>
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<td>Not completed secondary education</td>
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<td>52</td>
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<td>Never worked</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantial psychological distress</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive to psychosis screeners</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Substance use barrier</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol use disorder/dependence</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other sub use disorder/dependence</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical condition or disability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate/severe physical disability</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common physical conditions</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical/sexual violence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually molestation</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious physical attack/assault</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatened with weapon or tortured</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Those without any work experience or who had not completed high-school were classified with a human-capital barrier. Women were considered to have a mental health barrier if they reported symptoms of an anxiety or depressive disorder, had a clinical level of psychological distress, or were identified by psychosis screening questions. Substance use barriers were based on the presence of alcohol or substance-use or dependence disorders. Women identified with a chronic physical condition or who reported substantial physical limitations were considered to have a physical health barrier. Women were classified as having experienced physical or sexual violence if they reported lifetime experience of rape, sexual molestation, serious physical attack or assault, being attacked with a weapon or being tortured.

**Results**

Table 1 shows the percentage of women in each group with each of the individual conditions, traumatic experiences or characteristics, and the percentage identified with each type of barrier. The table also presents odds ratios, which compare the risk of lone mother recipients having each type of barrier with the risk for all other mothers (see Box 1).

The data show that lone mothers receiving welfare were more likely than mothers in the other two groups to experience each type of barrier. Striking differences were observed in the prevalence of mental health problems, substance use disorders and lifetime experience of physical and sexual violence. In most instances, the partnered recipients were more similar to non-recipient mothers than to lone mothers receiving income support.

Most of the mothers had not completed secondary education, although the overwhelming majority had some form of labour force experience. Those who were receiving income support, and particularly lone mothers, were more likely than other mothers to have poor education. Those on welfare were less likely than the others to have previous work experience, with no marked difference between lone and partnered mothers. The odds ratios show that lone-mother recipients’ risk of having a human capital barrier was around two-and-a-half times that of other mothers (see Box 1).

Almost one-third of lone-mother recipients had experienced an anxiety disorder, and around 20 per cent reported symptoms indicative of a depressive disorder in the previous 12 months. These rates are considerably higher than the rates for both the partnered recipients and the non-recipient groups. A similar pattern is observed for the less prevalent psychotic disorders. Around 5 per cent of lone-mother recipients were identified by the psychosis screening questions compared to less than 1 per cent in each of the other two groups. Overall, the risk of lone-mother recipients having a mental health barrier was almost three times the risk of other mothers.

Substance-use disorders were much less common than most of the other types of barriers examined in this analysis, but lone-mother recipients were shown to be more likely to experience both alcohol and other drug use disorders than mothers in the other two groups. The risk of lone-mother recipients having a substance-use barrier was almost four times that of other mothers.

Lone mothers also reported higher rates of common physical conditions than mothers in both of the other groups. The results were similar for the measure of physical disability. The odds ratio shows lone mothers had almost twice the risk of having a physical health barrier than other mothers.

The data also confirm the increased prevalence of physical and sexual violence in the lives of Australian lone mothers receiving welfare. Around 20–25 per cent reported each of the traumas: rape, sexual molestation, being the victim of serious physical attack or assault, and being threatened with a weapon, tortured or terrorised. The prevalence rates for each of these individual traumas in the other two groups were consistently under 10 per cent. Overall, the risk of lone mothers having a trauma barrier were more than three times the risk of the other mothers.
It is important to recognize that the prevalence and odds ratios for the overall barriers underestimate the extent of the disadvantage experienced by lone-mother recipients. This group has greater co-occurrence of barriers within categories. For example, around 3 per cent of lone mothers on welfare had both an alcohol disorder and another drug-use or dependence disorder compared to only 1 per cent of mothers in the other groups. Similarly, 13 per cent of lone-mother recipients experienced both anxiety and depressive disorders compared to 4 per cent of other mothers. This greater overlap seems to reflect both the greater prevalence of the individual barriers and a more significant association between some of the measures.

Although the co-occurrence within barriers may be important (Kessler and Frank 1997), the current analysis of multiple barriers examines the prevalence of different types of barriers (for example, both mental and physical barriers). Figure 1 presents data on the number of types of barriers experienced by mothers in each of the three groups. The data shows that the majority of non-recipients have none or only a single type of barrier (around 65 per cent). This is similar to the results for partnered women on welfare, where about 55 per cent have one or none of the barriers examined in this study. For this group, around 5 per cent have four or more types of barriers.

The data for lone mothers receiving income support are very different. The majority (around 70 per cent) have two or more types of barrier. Further, almost 20 per cent have four or more types of barriers. It is clear that lone mothers on welfare have more barriers than other mothers.

**Discussion**

Research from the United States has shown that the majority of lone mothers in receipt of welfare have multiple personal barriers. This finding is critical as there is a strong association between the number of barriers a person experiences and their likelihood of employment (Danziger, Corcoran et al. 2000). The analysis here has confirmed these findings with Australian welfare recipients. Lone mothers receiving income support payments were more likely to experience each of the types of barriers and conditions examined in this analysis than partnered recipients and non-recipient mothers.

Lone mothers were more likely to: lack human capital skills (education and work experience); experience mental disorders and severe mental health problems; have physical health conditions and physical limitations; have an alcohol or other substance-use disorder; and have previously experienced physical and sexual violence.

Lone mothers receiving income support were also much more likely to experience multiple barriers than those in the other two groups. The data showed that there was a high co-occurrence or interconnection between the various measures of personal, psychological and social disadvantage among lone mothers. It is likely that this co-occurrence reflects the systemic and entrenched nature of their disadvantage. A substantial minority of women have multiple barriers including early childhood adversity, domestic violence or other forms of physical and sexual violence, relationship difficulties, physical and mental health problems, limited labour market skills or attachment, and poor educational achievement.

These factors, along with other characteristics such as poverty, hardship, and poor personal resources and coping abilities, can be considered indicators of the structural context of the lives of these women.

**Limitations**

There are many other variables that could have been considered in this analysis, but in many cases appropriate data items were not available in the National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing dataset. There was no detailed information on financial circumstances, which is an important predictor of mental health. The analysis could have considered other socio-economic measures. For example, lone-mother recipients were much more likely to be in rental housing in comparison to those in the other groups. This may be an indication of their poorer financial circumstances or the current instability in their lives. Similarly, lone mothers on welfare were much more likely to reside in the most disadvantaged socio-economic areas and in non-metropolitan areas. These residential circumstances are likely to make finding and maintaining employment more difficult. It is possible that some of the variability in measures such as mental health reflect the consequences (perhaps transitory) of relationship breakdown. Examining duration since separation/divorce would enable assessment of the contribution of this effect.

The fact that the survey is cross-sectional also limits interpretation. It is, for example, not possible to resolve whether receipt of welfare, poverty and unemployment are the cause of personal barriers such as poorer mental health, or whether the presence of a mental health problem is a factor leading to selection into unemployment, poverty and welfare dependence (see Turner et al. 1995).
However, for the purposes of this discussion these issues are not relevant. There is compelling evidence that the types of barriers examined in this paper do represent an obstacle to employment and self-sufficiency. Therefore, regardless of whether the cause of the barrier was unemployment itself, it behoves policy makers to consider ways to better address these issues to promote the achievement of positive outcomes.

Policy implications

In the context of welfare reform, evidence that lone mothers are very likely to experience substantial and multiple barriers to employment is not necessarily counter to the introduction of participation requirements. Rather, better understanding of the extent of the disadvantage experienced by many women within this group provides an incentive for action.

Efforts to improve engagement and participation will provide the opportunity to assist lone mothers to overcome their barriers and improve their social functioning and economic circumstances, and those of their children. However, it is also critical that appropriate support and services are available for those who require assistance.

These data support the types of policy directions adopted internationally, emphasising the identification of those with barriers to workforce participation (through screening and assessment processes); promoting knowledge and awareness of these barriers among service delivery staff; and policy consideration of how programs and services can better assist clients or link them with other services.

It is important to consider the rationale for examining the prevalence of these factors among welfare recipients. It is not an attempt to justify or explain away welfare dependence – for example, many women currently in employment also experience these barriers. Neither is the analysis of personal barriers seeking to condemn or lay blame on individuals for their current circumstances. Rather, the analysis is an attempt to increase understanding of important characteristics that are related to employment and self-reliance. This knowledge is crucial because, without it, the policy response could focus on options that may be ineffective for many of these women.

Finally, this analysis has identified a number of directions for future research. One early step is to explore the association between these different barriers and employment. Research is also needed to explore the causal pathways and mediators between these factors (for example, the effect of trauma and abuse mediated through mental health) and others not examined in this analysis (such as the moderating effect of coping skills and social support).

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Gregory, R. G. & King, E. (2001), Welfare Dependency and the Dynamics of Female Lone Parent Spells, Cited in FaCS Research News (No. 11), Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra.


Peter Butterworth is a researcher at the Centre for Mental Health Research at the Australian National University, where this project was independently conducted with funding from the National Health and Medical Research Council. He is also employed by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. The views expressed here do not necessarily represent those of the Department or the Commonwealth Government. The author wishes to thank Tony Jorm and Bryan Rodgers for comments on an earlier draft of this manuscript.

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Continuity of care in the early years?

Multiple and changeable child care arrangements in Australia

Continuity of care is seen as an important aspect of quality child care for children in the early years of life. Yet previous studies suggest that up to a third of Australian children in their first three years attend two or more care settings a week. A new study shows that use of multiple child care arrangements, and changes in care arrangements, are relatively common. What are the implications for the quality of care experienced by children?

This pattern tends to increase as children get older. In their longitudinal study of 145 children, Harrison and Ungerer (2000) recorded the number of changes of care that children experienced from birth to age six. Over this period a third of children had experienced highly changeable child care – an average of 12 different arrangements with a range of 9 to 15.

What is less clear from these studies are the reasons why parents use mixed child care arrangements, or change the care arrangements for their child. Goodfellow’s (1999) research suggested that the high cost of care and lack of available care were major factors in parents’ use of multiple arrangements. On the other hand, Ochiltree and Edgar (1995) reported that parents used varied settings because of changing family circumstances or wanting to maximise the quality of the child’s care. Harrison and Ungerer (1997, 2002) found that many mothers preferred to leave their infants with someone they felt comfortable with and could trust – such as their husband, grandparents, close relative or friend. As a result of this preference, and perhaps the limited availability of these alternative carers, babies received care from a number of different adults. Thus, it is not clear from existing research how much control parents feel they have over their choice of child care arrangements.

Although previous studies have alerted us to the possible negative outcomes of multiple and changeable child care, to date no Australian research has set out to investigate this specific phenomenon.

It is helpful, however, to summarise the existing indications of risk that have been associated with
multiple and changeable care. Negative outcomes for children have been reported in some studies. In Goodfellow’s (1999) study, 42 per cent of parents of children in multiple child care arrangements said that their children showed negative behaviour in child care. The children were reported as being confused or lost in the group, being tired or unhappy, and as having difficulty forming relationships. It should be noted, however, that this information was derived only from parents’ reports, which may have involved some bias. Similarly, the American-based NICIID Early Child Care Research Network (1998), which used objective indicators of children’s outcomes, reported that children who had experienced a number of different day care arrangements in the first two years exhibited more problem behaviours than children who had been in fewer day care arrangements.

Some research indicates that multiple child care arrangements may also be associated with problem outcomes for children. For example, studies have found that multiple and changeable child care is associated with lower intelligence scores (Whitebook, Howes and Phillips 1990), poorer social relationships (Howe and Stewart 1987), and more insecure attachment with mothers (Harrison and Ungerer 1997). Harrison and Ungerer (2000) also noted that when there was a pattern of changeable care across the first six years of life, children were rated as having more behavioural problems in their first year of school.

**Child Care Choices study**

These questions about the impact of multiple and changeable child care on children’s development are the subject of a three-year investigation conducted by a team of researchers from Macquarie University, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and Charles Sturt University. The study is funded by the Australian Research Council and the New South Wales Department of Community Services under an ARC Linkage grant.

Data from the first year of the study allow us to report on the extent of multiple and changeable child care arrangements in the current sample of 363 parents from urban and rural New South Wales, the reasons parents have given for their choice of child care arrangements for their children, and their satisfaction with current care arrangements.

For the purpose of the study, multiple child care arrangements were defined as arrangements involving two or more concurrent non-maternal child care arrangements on a regular basis across seven days.
Location of sample

It was expected that the issues surrounding multiple and changeable care were likely to be context-specific. In particular, there were indications from existing studies (for example, Goodfellow 1999) that availability of care was more problematic for families living in regional and rural areas, compared to metropolitan areas. On the other hand, some regional centres offer a coordinated, multi-purpose approach to child care, compared to city services which tend to be single purpose.

It was unclear whether these differing conditions might be associated with different patterns of multiple or changeable child care arrangements. Thus, to shed light on these potential differences, an important aim of the research was to include a range of child care services, across urban and rural locations.

Description of sample

At the time of writing, 42 centres (22 urban, 20 rural) and seven family day care schemes (three urban, four rural) have agreed to participate in the study. A total of 363 parents (167 urban, 196 rural) recruited through the centres and the schemes have completed a CATI telephone interview. The main parental carer of the study child participated in the telephone interview. Over 90 per cent of respondents were mothers of the children concerned.

Of the parents, the majority of mothers (78 per cent) and fathers (79 per cent) were Australian born. Of those who were born outside Australia, 13 per cent of mothers and 12 per cent of fathers were from English-speaking countries (Great Britain, Canada, America, New Zealand), 5 per cent of mothers and 4 per cent of fathers were from Asia, 1 per cent of mothers and 1 per cent of fathers were from South America, and 1 per cent of mothers and 3 per cent of fathers were from Europe. There was thus some under-representation of immigrants.

Mothers represented a varied group in terms of age (mean age 33.6 years) and education (35 per cent had completed secondary school to Year 9, 10 or 12; 25 per cent had a tertiary diploma or trade qualification; and 39 per cent had a university or post-graduate degree). Fathers tended to be several years older than mothers and had similar levels of education. This was thus, on average, a fairly highly educated sample.

The families came from a range of household income levels with about half of the sample earning gross annual household incomes of $70,000 and over. Most of the parents were in paid work (78 per cent of mothers and 97 per cent of fathers). There was thus, on average, a fairly high socio-economic status among families.

Differences were noted between urban and rural parents on several demographic measures. Rural mothers were on average younger than urban mothers (mean age 32.1 years for rural mothers and 35.4 years for urban mothers), were more likely to have been born in Australia (94.2 per cent rural mothers compared to 62.3 per cent of urban mothers), and were less well educated (23.2 per cent of rural mothers with university degrees compared to 34.9 per cent of urban mothers). Similar differences in characteristics were evident for fathers from rural and urban areas.

Mothers and fathers in rural areas worked a similar number of hours in paid work as their urban counterparts, with mothers working an average of 30.3 hours a week and fathers working an average of 47.0 hours per week. There were significant differences between urban and rural families in annual gross household income although there was an extremely wide variation in reported income in each location (mean income of $61,622 for rural families, and $101,710 for urban families). Family size ranged from one to five children. Forty per cent of the children were only children in the family and 53 per cent were first-borns. Rural families tended to be larger than urban families, with 28 per cent of rural families having three or more children compared to 7 per cent of urban families.

The focus of this study was on children aged three years and under. Of the 363 children (183 boys, 180 girls), 23 (6 per cent) were aged under less than 12 months old, 113 (31 per cent) were aged one to two years, and 209 (58 per cent) were aged two to three years. A further 18 children were aged three years or older. Information regarding these children are included in the total group analyses.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of care settings</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of arrangements</th>
<th>Children aged 0-1</th>
<th>Children aged 1-2</th>
<th>Children aged 2-3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of care</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long day care only</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family day care only</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 1 formal</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal + father</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal + informal</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal + informal + father</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Formal care refers to long day care and family day care. Informal care refers to care by non-parental family, friends and paid babysitters or nannies.
Procedures
Recruitment occurred through child care centres and family day care schemes. After gaining approval from management, research assistants approached parents as they collected their children and invited them to participate in the study. Interested parents completed a one-page “Expression of Interest” form, listing their child’s weekly child care arrangements. Selection of participants was based on achieving similar numbers of children in each of the three age groups (0-1, 1-2 and 2-3 years), equally distributed across urban and rural settings.

Selected families were followed up with a CATI telephone interview about the family and the child care history of the child, including changes of care. Parents were asked about their satisfaction with current child care arrangements and their reasons for using multiple care settings or for changing care arrangements. (Extensive data on child and child care settings were also collected, but will be the subject of later publications.)

Results
The results from the telephone interview with parents are presented first for incidence of multiple child care arrangements. This is followed by an analysis of parents’ reasons for using multiple child care arrangements and their satisfaction with current arrangements. The incidence of changeable care in the sample is presented next along with an analysis of parents’ reasons for changing child care arrangements over the previous 12-month period.

Incidence of multiple child care arrangements
Results show that 45 per cent of the families were using two or more regular weekly child care arrangements for their children. The range was one to five settings but most multiple care use involved two settings (see Table 1). The proportion of children experiencing multiple child care arrangements was similar for urban (44 per cent) and rural children (45 per cent).

Multiple child care arrangements were common at all ages with some increase in use according to the age of the child. The current care arrangements of children in the sample shown in Table 2 indicate that, on average, 26.1 per cent of children were in multiple care arrangements when they were under 12 months old, with less than 10 per cent reported as being in three or more child care settings a week at this age.

Because these data were based on only 23 children, retrospective reports were examined about the care history of the one to two year-olds and the two to three year-olds in the sample during their first year. Similar results were found: 31 per cent of the 271 children had experienced multiple child care arrangements in their first year, with 7.7 per cent having experienced three or more settings.

For children currently in their second year, 43.2 per cent were in multiple care arrangements, with 7.2 per cent in three or more arrangements. The percentages of children in multiple care arrangements were very similar in the third year with 45.3 per cent in multiple care arrangements and 13.2 per cent in three or more care settings a week (see Table 2).

Parents reported that, in addition to the main long day care or family day care setting, most used the child’s father, grandparents or relatives, friends, babysitters, or nannies as regular care providers.

Table 3 shows the different patterns of care arrangements used by families in urban and rural areas. No differences were found between care use in the two locations. In both locations, the largest percentages of children were in formal care only, reflecting the recruitment of the sample from long day care and family day care (approximately 55 per cent in both urban and rural areas).

Combinations of formal and informal care were more common than one form of formal care for the children under three years of age (20 per

Table 4
Means and standard deviations of parent ratings of reasons for making multiple child care arrangements
(on a scale from 1= does not apply, to 5 = definitely applies) (n = 163)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>(SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It is good for my child to experience a centre environment and a</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>(1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I like my child to be able to interact with different adults and</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>(1.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The arrangements are convenient for me</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>(1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I want my child to spend some time with his/her family members</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>(1.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I want my child to have a range of experiences so he/she will learn</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>(1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I don’t think it is good for my child to be in formal care only</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>(1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I don’t think it is good for my child to stay in one type of care</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>(1.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all the time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My child will not get the stimulation he/she needs in one type of</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>(1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>child care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. It is hard to find child care available during the times I need it</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>(1.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. My preferred child care arrangement is not consistently available</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>(1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I cannot afford to use my preferred child care arrangement all</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>(1.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I can’t access enough hours of care in my preferred child care</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>(1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arrangement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The family keeps moving and I am unable to keep my child in a</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>(0.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stable routine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many of the multiple child care arrangements are made through parental choice, commonly because parents believe that their decisions are in the best interests of their child.

Parents were given six possible reasons for making changes in care arrangements, and asked to rate on a 5-point scale the extent to which the reasons applied to them and the extent to which they felt they had control over several kinds of change in care arrangements.

Table 5 shows the four most common reasons for changing care were to move to a more convenient location, because a previous arrangement was unavailable, problems with the service, and to obtain better quality care. Affordability of care was not a common reason for making a change.

Parents reported that most changes (changes in place and increases or decreases in the number of care arrangements, or hours of care) were definitely a result of their choice. The only change that parents reported...
as out of their control was a change in caregiver, usually a result of changes or staff turnover in a service.

Conclusions

This paper reports preliminary findings on 363 families from the longitudinal Child Care Choices Study that examines the effects of multiple and changeable child care arrangements on the development of young children.

This sample is somewhat advantaged (on average), but analyses suggested that socio-economic factors were not critical determinants of reasons for use of multiple and changeable child care. Nevertheless, sample characteristics mean we should not generalise these findings to the broader population. Since the key interest of the study is in child outcomes in relation to care experiences, the socio-economic issues are less critical than for a straightforward “prevalence” study.

Results from the first year of data collection indicate that use of multiple care arrangements is relatively common, with 45 per cent of respondents reporting weekly use of two or more care settings. Parents also reported a reasonably high rate of changes in child care arrangements over the previous 12 months, with 26 per cent reporting one or more changes in care for their child. The incidence of multiple and changeable child care arrangements was similar for urban and rural samples despite differences between the two locations in family characteristics, notably income.

The high level of satisfaction reported by parents with their child’s care is consistent with the results of other studies on child care satisfaction in Australia (Greenblatt and Ochiltree 1993) and internationally (Pungello and Kurt-Costes 1999; Peyton, Jacobs, O’Brien and Roy 2001). It was notable that parents reported that the changes in care over the previous year were, with the exception of changes in carer, the result of their own choice and felt to be within their control.

The reasons parents gave for the particular mix of care arrangements they had for their child indicated that arrangements were usually made according to what parents felt was best for their child. These findings are contrary to the suggestion made in the Goodfellow (1999) report that multiple care arrangements were largely the result of factors beyond the control of parents (such as the availability and accessibility of child care). These latter factors, however, were the main reasons given for changes in child care arrangements. According to these parents, changes were more likely to change the place they went to child care because the new arrangement was more convenient for parents or because the previous arrangement became unavailable. Changes in carer were likely to be the result of staff turnover in children’s services.

If continuity of care is seen to be an important part of quality care for children and an essential base for further learning and development, there may be a cause for concern in these findings. In the crucial first three years of life, nearly half of the children in Child Care Choices Study are having the experience on a weekly basis of two or more caregivers in addition to the care of the parent who is their main caregiver at home. A quarter of children have also experienced at least one change in care over the previous year. The findings suggest that while many of the multiple child care arrangements are made through parental choice, commonly because parents believe that their decisions are in the best interests of their child, the changes made to care arrangements are due largely to factors outside parental control.

Whether or not these threats to continuity of care do make any difference to children’s development is an issue still open to investigation. It is a key question for this study as it follows the children, their families and caregivers over the next two years.

References


Authors: Jennifer Bowes, Macquarie University; Sarah Wise, Australian Institute of Family Studies; Linda Harrison, Charles Sturt University; Ann Sanson, Australian Institute of Family Studies; Judy Ungerer, Macquarie University; Johanna Watson, Macquarie University; Tracey Simpson, Charles Sturt University. The authors thank Jenny Cohen for assistance with data analysis.
As in other developed countries, dramatic changes in family formation patterns have occurred in Australia during the last few decades. While the vast majority of people still marry, marriage rates have fallen and the proportion who never marry has increased sharply among the younger generations.

Of the total population eligible to marry, the proportions who did so each year fell from 6 per cent in 1976 to 3 per cent in 2000 for both men and women. The proportion of the never married population aged 25-29 years increased from 27 per cent to 67 per cent for men, and from 13 per cent to 53 per cent for women. This latter trend partly reflects the fact that people are marrying later in life. During the same period (1976–2000), the median age at first marriage has increased from 24 to 29 years for men and from 21 to 27 years for women (ABS 2001).

A marked surge in cohabitation (de facto relationships) has accompanied these trends. For example, the proportions of all couples who were cohabiting rather than married increased from 5 per cent in 1982 to around 12 per cent in 2001 (ABS 1995; de Vaus, Qu and Weston in this edition), with cohabitation now being the common pathway to marriage: 72 per cent of marriages registered in 2001 were preceded by cohabitation (ABS 2002).

As cohabitation has become more prevalent and marriage rates fallen, cohabitation is now widely accepted by both the law and the general population (Glezer 1993). In a national survey conducted in 1995, only one-third of all respondents (and 16 per cent of those aged in their 20s) disapproved of a man and woman living together without planning marriage (de Vaus 1997). While cohabitation was largely a stepping stone to marriage for earlier generations, more recent generations of cohabiters are less likely to marry and more likely to separate than cohabiters of earlier generations. Furthermore, more recent generations are more likely than earlier generations to have started a family while cohabiting (Qu and Weston 2001).

What do these trends suggest for the future of marriage? While most couples who marry do so after cohabiting, are cohabiting couples in general becoming less committed to the notion of “tying the knot”? While expectations of marriage cannot be interpreted as indicators that marriage will take place, apparently they are an important step towards marriage. In the United States, McGinnis (2003) observed that expectations of marriage were strong predictors of subsequent marriage.

So what are cohabiters’ expectations about marriage, and to what extent do people have marriage in sight when they are cohabiting? Does the perceived prospect of marrying vary according to the length of time people have been cohabiting, or to the cohabiters’ gender, age or previous marital status? To what extent do partners agree on their marriage prospects?

These questions are examined using the data from the first wave of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. The survey, which included face-to-face interviews with nearly 14000 respondents aged 15 or more years from nearly 7700 households, has been described in detail by Watson and Wooden (2002). Overall, 640 men and 708 women who were cohabiting reported whether or not they expected to marry their current partner. Of these, 596 represented couples in which each partner participated in the survey. Respondents who were cohabiting were asked to indicate their expectations about marrying their current partner by selecting one the following options: “very likely”, “likely”, “not sure”, “unlikely”, or “very unlikely”.

This paper first examines links between the expectations of marriage of cohabiting men and women and their previous marital status, their age, and the length of their cohabiting relationship. It then looks at the extent to which both partners share the same or similar view on their prospects of marrying each other.

**Expectations of marriage among cohabiting people**

Overall, cohabiting respondents most commonly expected to marry: more than half felt they were likely or very likely to marry their current partner (57 per cent of men and 52 per cent of women respectively), while roughly one quarter felt this to be unlikely or very unlikely (21 per cent of men and 27 per cent of women), and the remainder expressed uncertainty (22 per cent of men and 21 per cent of women) (Figure 1). While Fisher’s (2002) analysis suggests that men are slightly more likely than women to shy away from having a
family, cohabiting men and women had similar expectations that they would marry their partner.

Expectations about marriage were linked with previous marital status. Those who had never married were more likely to expect marriage than those who had been previously married – 60 and 61 per cent of never married men and women respectively compared with 51 and 35 per cent of ever married men and women (Figure 2).

Compared with never married cohabiters, those who had been married tended to be older and were more likely to have a child from the previous relationship. Some of these previously married respondents may consider marriage unnecessary unless they intend having another child. On the other hand, the experiences of marriage breakdown possibly led many of the previously married group to think twice about committing to marriage again, particularly now that cohabitation has become a socially accepted arrangement. Nevertheless, previously married men (51 per cent) were more likely than previously married women (35 per cent) to expect to marry their partner.

Never married cohabiters: expectations of marriage

This section focuses on cohabitating men and women who had never been married (69 per cent and 66 per cent of all cohabiters) and examines expectations of marriage according to age and length of the cohabiting relationship.

For the first analysis, respondents were subdivided into four age groups – under 25 years, 25-29 years, 30-39 years, and 40 years or older (Figure 3). While nearly three quarters of never married men and women in the two younger age groups considered marriage to be likely or very likely, only 56 per cent of never married men and 49 per cent of never married women aged 30-39 years held such views. The never married men and women in the oldest age group were the least likely to expect to marry (37 per cent of men and 19 per cent of women).

It appears that older never married cohabiters were more likely than younger counterparts to have lived with someone else beforehand (about 50 per cent compared with 27 per cent). As the adage “once bitten, twice shy” implies, previous experience of relationship breakdown may increase wariness of marriage. In addition, older never married cohabiters tended to have lived with their current partner for a longer period than younger couples, and expectations of marriage appear to vary according to length of the relationship.

While expectations of marriage cannot be interpreted as indicators that marriage will take place, apparently they are an important step towards marriage.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All couples: expectations to marry each other reported by both partners</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both partners: likely/very likely</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both partners: unlikely/very unlikely</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both partners: unsure</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One partner unsure, the other likely/very likely/unlikely/very unlikely</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One partner likely/very likely, the other partner unlikely/very unlikely</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of cases</td>
<td>592</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3

Never married cohabitors: expectations to marry current partner by age and gender

Age

| Men | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 40+ | | | | | |
| 30-39 | | | | | |
| 25-29 | | | | | |
| <25 | | | | | |
| Women | | | | | |
| N=68 | N=145 | N=136 | N=91 |

| Women | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 40+ | | | | |
| 30-39 | | | | |
| 25-29 | | | | |
| <25 | | | | |
| N=37 | N=142 | N=126 | N=164 |

Figure 4

Never married cohabitors: expectations to marry current partner by duration of relationship and gender

Duration of relationship

| Men | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5+ years | | | | | |
| 2-4 years | | | | | |
| 0-1 year | | | | | |
| N=146 | N=131 | N=169 |

| Women | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5+ years | | | | | |
| 2-4 years | | | | | |
| 0-1 year | | | | | |
| N=198 | N=144 | N=177 |

Figure 4 shows the expectations of marriage reported by never married male and female cohabitors by length of their relationship (less than two years, two to four years, or five or more years). The figure suggests that a disproportionate number of “long-time cohabitors” may view cohabitation as a replacement for marriage. While this assertion could not be tested directly, it is consistent with the fact that those who had been living together for five or more years were less likely to expect to marry than those who had lived together for a shorter period of time. Less than half in this group (42 and 45 per cent of men and women) said that they were likely or very likely to marry, compared with nearly two-thirds (64 per cent of both men and women) who had been cohabiting for less than two years, and nearly three quarters (73 and 74 per cent) who had been cohabiting for two to four years. As time progresses, relationships that continue for five years or more are increasingly likely to include an over-representation of people who consider marriage to be redundant.

Figure 4 also shows that uncertainty about getting married was more likely to be expressed by those who had been living together for the shortest and the longest of the three periods – 25 and 22 per cent of men and women cohabiting for less than two years, and 27 and 22 per cent for more than five years, compared with 16 and 17 per cent of men and women who had been cohabiting for two to four years.

The reasons for feeling uncertain about the prospect of marrying may be different for the two groups. For the “new cohabitators” group, the feeling of uncertainty may be due to the fact that they were still getting to know each other. For the “long-time cohabitors” group, it might be that they were questioning the need to marry when they were happy the way they were and were more inclined to the idea that marriage was “just a piece of paper”. On the other hand, some “long-time cohabitors” might have postponed marriage because they were experiencing difficulties in their relationship.

Agreement between partners in reporting the likelihood of marrying

One of advantages of the HILDA survey is that, for a sizeable number of cases, data were collected from each cohabiting partner. It is thus possible to examine the extent to which couples held similar views about their prospects of marrying. Whereas marriage is a public commitment made by each spouse to a life-long relationship, cohabitation may have a variety of meanings over which partners may not necessarily agree.

Overall, there was a fairly high level of agreement between partners. Table 1 shows that nearly three quarters of couples held very similar views on their marriage prospect. In 47 per cent of couples both partners expected to marry each other, in 15 per cent of couples neither partner had any expectation of marrying each other, and in 11 per cent of couples both partners reported uncertainty about marrying each other. For the remaining 27 per cent of couples, partners disagreed on the prospect of marrying one another.

For couples where partners indicated divergent views, one of these partners was more likely to express uncertainty than to report a view opposing that of their partner. In the future, as the couples are followed up, it will be interesting to see how level of agreement between partners on their marriage prospects affects their relationship.

While level of agreement between partners was high regardless of whether or not one or both partners had been previously married, the nature of their agreement appears to differ according to their previous marital status. Couples where both partners were never married (“never married couples”) tended to agree that they were likely to marry each other while couples where both partners had...
previously been married (“ever married couples”) tended to agree that they were unlikely to marry. For example, partners in 56 per cent of “never married couples” and 33 per cent of “ever married couples” agreed that they were likely to marry each other. On the other hand, partners in 8 per cent of “never married couples” and 32 per cent of “ever married couples” agreed that they did not expect to marry each other.

Finally, level of agreement between partners did not vary much according to the length of relationship. However, couples who had lived together for five years or more were more likely to agree on not marrying each other (27 per cent) than couples who had lived together for a shorter duration (6 and 10 per cent for couples who lived together for less than two years and two to four years respectively).

**Discussion**

Over the decades cohabitation has changed from a deviant act in the 1950s and 1960s (Glezer et al. 1992) to a common practice, particularly as a prelude to marriage. The growing social acceptance of cohabitation appears to have been accompanied by reduced pressure on cohabiting couples to marry. Nevertheless, the results suggest that most couples who cohabit expect to marry. In other words, cohabitation is not generally viewed as either a replacement for marriage or as a relationship involving minimal commitment. More than half the cohabiting men and women indicated that they expected to marry their partner, and nearly half of the couples agreed with their partner’s view.

However, expectations of marriage varied with previous marital experience, age, and duration of the relationship. Never married cohabiters were more likely to expect to marry their partner compared with ever married cohabiters, and older never married cohabiters were less likely to expect marriage than their younger counterparts. Perhaps older cohabiters were more cautious about marrying, for they were also more likely to have lived with a partner previously and thus experienced separation. Older cohabiters had also lived with their current partner for a relatively longer period of time compared with their younger counterparts.

While expectations of marriage were relatively high in the first few years of the cohabiting relationship, they were lower for those who had been living together for a longer period. Disproportionate numbers of these long-time cohabiters may see no need to marry because they interpret marriage to be redundant, or because they perceive problems in their relationship. Consistent with the second interpretation, research in the United States by Brown (1999) suggests that, like marriage, the perceived quality of cohabiting relationship tends to decline over time. Furthermore, Brown observed that this decline is greater for cohabiting couples than for married couples.

However, the direction of any causal link between duration of cohabitation and marriage expectations remains unclear. On the one hand, declines in the quality of the relationship over time may lower marriage expectations; on the other hand, many of those who were expecting to marry at the outset would have done so earlier, in the first few years of cohabitation.

Overall, the level of agreement between partners on their marriage prospects was very high, particularly where neither partner had been married previously and where the couple had been living together for a relatively short period. This suggests that many young cohabiting couples see their relationship as a prelude to marriage instead of a substitute for marriage or an indefinite cohabiting relationship. Future waves of HILDA will enable us to identify the extent to which expectations are fulfilled or change with time.

In summary, the HILDA survey data suggest that, despite the growing trend in cohabitation, cohabitation is largely perceived as a stepping stone to marriage. Many people who are cohabiting are still hoping to “tie the knot”. Marriage remains the preferred family form.

**References**


Glezer, H. (1993), “Pathways to family formation: To tie or not to tie the knot?”, Family Matters, no. 34, pp. 16-20.


Lixia Qu is a Research Fellow and demographic trends analyst at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
The first rests on developments in research and understanding about child development, and the need for policy to be informed by a strong evidence base. In recent years there has been growing awareness of the following six issues.

- **The critical importance of the early years for later outcomes**
  Existing longitudinal studies tracking children’s development over time have contributed to an increasing recognition that the early years of life have a substantial impact on children’s later social, emotional, physical and cognitive development and wellbeing, as well as their physical development (Prior, Sanson, Smart and Oberklaid 2000; Sanson 2002; Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). Furthermore, these different facets of development are closely interlinked.

- **The social determinants of health and wellbeing**
  It is now well established that aspects of children’s social environment – from socio-economic factors like poverty, through to community factors like violence and social cohesion, to family factors like parenting styles and intrafamily conflict – are vital determinants of children’s future health and wellbeing (Keating and Hertzman 1999). Since social environments differ substantially across nations, it is not viable to rely upon overseas data to inform Australian policy and practice.

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (*Growing Up in Australia*) is a large-scale national study tracking the development of Australian children over the early years of life. In March 2002, the Australian Institute of Family Studies signed the contract with the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) to implement the study as one of the major initiatives in the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. The Institute is the lead agency in a large national consortium of nine research institutions.

This paper discusses the rationale for conducting such a study in Australia today. It outlines various overseas and past Australasian studies in order to highlight some of the key issues to be considered, and it provides a broad overview of the study, including the conceptual model on which it is grounded and some of its key design features. It discusses progress made in the 12 months since the contract was signed and the study’s future plans and timelines.

The overall intent of the paper is to give readers a sense of the unique contribution that the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) will make, and what the study will offer to policy makers, researchers and service providers.

**Need for the study**
Why bother to undertake such a project? From both research and policy perspectives, there are two parts to the answer to this question.

ANN SANSON reports on what the new Longitudinal Study of Australian Children will offer to policy makers, researchers and service providers.
The “new morbidities” such as asthma, depression, obesity

Despite our relative prosperity as a nation, it has become clear that rates of childhood disorders remain high, and in some cases appear to be on the rise. These disorders include health conditions, emotional distress, antisocial behaviour and school failure, and together they are enormously costly for the individuals concerned as well as the broader society (Stanley, Sanson and McMichael 2002).

The effectiveness of prevention and early intervention

While there is still a dearth of carefully evaluated interventions in the Australian context, overseas studies have shown that well-founded and well-implemented interventions, starting early in life and either universal or targeted, can be effective in reducing the rate of poor developmental outcomes, and can more than pay for themselves in terms of reducing the need for later services (Vimpani, Patton and Hayes 2002).

The need for a strong evidence base

The need for a strong evidence base is critical given the concerns about children’s wellbeing, and the crucial role that prevention and early intervention can play. We need to fully understand the various influences on the development of children in the current social context so as to ensure that policies and interventions are evidence based and appropriately targeted.

The value of longitudinal data

Given that children’s development is a dynamic and interactive process, cross-sectional studies are limited in their information value. Longitudinal studies provide the strongest data for understanding the complex interplay of factors which contribute to children’s development. Following children over time enables researchers to track the developmental pathways of children, identify factors which lead to positive and problematic developmental outcomes and identify major transition points which could provide potential opportunities for shifting from problematic to positive pathways.

The second part of the answer to the question of “why do it?” is more straightforward: there is no available Australian study which can provide the required data. To provide reliable data to guide Australian policy around children, the following criteria need to be met: the study needs to be broadly focused in order to comprehensively examine the interconnections between the different aspects of children’s development and how these interact with the various facets of the social environment; a large-scale nationally representative sample is needed; and the study needs to be longitudinal in order to provide an understanding of the developmental process that will shed light on opportunities for early intervention.

There have been valuable cross-sectional studies such as the National Mental Health Survey of Children.
The study seeks to identify developmental pathways to a wide range of outcomes, and child, family and environmental markers predicting these pathways; indicators of risk, and of resilience; and vital transition points in the lives of Australian children.

Children to inform government policy on early childhood. Being part of the Government’s Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, the study is designed to identify policy opportunities for early intervention and prevention strategies.

To provide a context for the study, it is useful to review a selection of the more influential recent longitudinal studies overseas, as well as look at existing Australian and New Zealand studies (see accompanying box). These and other studies are also reviewed in Nicholson et al. (2002).

EXISTING LONGITUDINAL STUDIES OF CHILDHOOD

National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth

Canada’s National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth (NLSCY) began in 1994, with an initial sample of 22,861 children aged 0–11 years (Statistics Canada 1996). Up to four children per family were recruited, so approximately 13,000 families are involved. Despite the large overall sample, the numbers of children at any one age at any one time are relatively small because of the wide spread of ages. As a supplement to the main study, new cohorts of 0–1 year old children are recruited every two years and followed until they are four years of age.

The initial sample was nationally representative (excluding only those children living on Aboriginal reserves), and was not stratified geographically. However, in response to the finding that community-level effects were quite powerful influences on children’s development, another, smaller community-based study was initiated and is run in parallel.

The study is funded and directed by the Canadian Human Resources Development Department, with Statistics Canada being responsible for the data collection. The department seeks expert input from five multidisciplinary groups of academic researchers across Canada.

The research issues which this Canadian study is designed to address reflect the broad policy interests of the Human Resources Development Department, and hence the measures span a range of child, family and community variables. Child outcomes of interest include children’s physical and mental health, cognitive development and school achievement, and key determinants of these which are being examined include parental health, parenting, family functioning, socio-demographic and neighbourhood factors.

Early Childhood Longitudinal Study

The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS), conducted in the United States, has two sub-studies: ECLS-B involves a birth cohort of 13,500 infants born in 2001, followed from nine months to first grade; ECLS-K is following 22,000 children who were in kindergarten in 1998–1999 to fifth grade (see website address in reference section). Both samples are nationally representative but chosen to over-sample some disadvantaged groups (for example, some ethnic groups, and low birthweight children) where rates of problematic outcomes are known to be higher, as well as twins who are of interest scientifically because they allow investigation of genetic effects and gene-environment interactions.

While being quite broadly focused, the studies have a particular interest in educational contexts and outcomes. The key child outcomes of interest include children’s cognitive, social and emotional development, and health (for ECLS-B), with the additional interests in early learning and performance at school (for ECLS-K). Key determinants being assessed include the home environment (including educational practices), early care experiences, and the school and classroom environment.

The study receives fairly broadly-based government funding through various health, education and human services agencies, and is run by the National Centre for Educational Statistics (Department of Education) in conjunction with a government consortium.
Background

Funding for the study was announced in April 2000 by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). It was intended that the study will provide a major evidence base for policy and intervention initiatives under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, by examining the impact of Australia’s unique social, economic and cultural environment on the next generation.

Throughout the project scoping phase, FaCS undertook extensive consultation. This resulted in the specification of the conceptual framework and research questions for the study. A holistic approach to child development which is grounded in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) socio-ecological model was adopted. As a result, the study is predicated on collection of data on the whole gamut of children’s developmental outcomes (a whole-of-child perspective which acknowledges that children’s social, emotional, cognitive and physical functioning are all important and interdependent), and a broad range of determinants of these aspects of functioning.

The study seeks to identify developmental pathways to a wide range of outcomes, and child, family and environmental markers predicting these pathways; indicators of risk, and of resilience; and vital transition points in the lives of Australian children. While the breadth of the study is one of its key strengths, it also poses the challenge of collecting sufficiently rich data across a wide spectrum.

The broad research questions which LSAC is to address are shown in Table 1. The more specific questions are grouped into four areas – family functioning, health, child care and education – as well as a question addressing their interrelationships. The ways in which these questions are being addressed is described in the study’s first discussion paper, Introducing the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (2002) (available from the Australian Institute of Family Studies).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LSAC: broad research questions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How well are Australian children progressing on a number of key developmental outcomes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are the pathway markers, early indicators, or constellations of behaviours that are related to different child outcomes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How are child outcomes interlinked with their wider circumstances and environment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. In what ways do features of children’s environment (such as families, communities and institutions) impact on child outcomes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What helps maintain an effective pathway, or change one that is not promising?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How is a child’s potential maximised to achieve positive outcomes for children, their families and society?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What role can the government play in achieving these outcomes?</td>
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</table>

Avon Longitudinal Study of Pregnancy and Childbirth

The Avon Longitudinal Study of Pregnancy and Childbirth (later renamed Parenting and Children) (ALSPAC) started in 1991 (Golding 1990). In contrast to the national studies above, it has a regional sample, with over 14,000 mothers recruited during pregnancy from the Avon region in the United Kingdom (Bristol being the regional city). The focus of the study was initially on children’s health, but broadened over time to consider other aspects of development. Biological and genetic factors are key determinants of interest, but a broader range of psychological and social factors are also assessed. Unlike the studies above, ALSPAC has been supported mainly by competitive research grants funds, and its research agenda revolves around current scientific issues rather than policy issues.

Around 13 European studies (collectively known as ELSPAC) have been granted approval to use the methods and measures of ALSPAC, allowing direct comparisons to be made across countries. Their cohort sizes vary from 1,300 to 14,000. They are conducted under the umbrella of the World Health Organisation, and coordinated from Bristol.

Millennium Cohort Study

The Millennium Cohort Study (“Child of the new century”) in the United Kingdom recruited a sample of 18,700 infants over 2001 and 2002, drawn from an administrative dataset (the Child Benefits register) (see website address in reference section). Particular electoral wards were selected, oversampling the smaller countries of the UK (Wales and Northern Ireland), and also areas at most risk (disadvantaged and high-ethnic wards).

The study focuses on the first year of a child’s life, with a strong interest in the impacts of economic and social deprivation and community-level factors on children’s health and development. Unlike most studies, it is collecting data from both mothers and fathers, on a biennial basis.

The study was tendered by the UK Government through the Economic and Social Research Council, and involves a consortium headed by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at the University of London.

Three Scandinavian studies

There are three substantial Scandinavian studies for which planning began in the early 1990s and which are at various stages of implementation.

- **The Norwegian Mother and Child Cohort Study** has a proposed sample of 100,000. Taking advantage of the universal public health coverage in Norway, mothers are recruited at the time of having an ultrasound in the 17th week of pregnancy, and a number of biological samples are obtained from the mother, father and child. To date, there are 20,000 families in the study, with recruitment due to be complete by 2005. The focus is on biological, genetic and environmental determinants of health, including low-incidence disorders such as autism. Despite the emphasis on physical health, parental lifestyle measures and some psychosocial outcomes are also being assessed.

- The **Danish Birth Cohort** is similarly aiming for a sample of 100,000 families recruited when women are 12 weeks pregnant.

- The **Swedish Olive Tree Project** is a smaller matching study which is currently getting underway.
as much as possible while still ensuring that children born in each month of the year are included and that the data are collected over a relatively short period of time.

**Sampling frame**

The Health Insurance Commission has agreed to the use of Medicare enrolments as the sampling frame, ensuring that almost all Australian children will have a chance of being included in the sample. This provides the study with a much stronger sampling frame than any other available administrative dataset or cold-calling contact methods.

Children with a Medicare card who have Australian citizenship, permanent residency or application for

### Australasian studies

There are a number of longitudinal studies in Australia and New Zealand which began during the 1980s (with most of them still continuing) which have been very influential and informative.

Studies include the Dunedin (NZ) Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study; the Christchurch (NZ) Health and Development Study; the Australian Temperament Project; the Mater University of Queensland Study of Pregnancy; the Port Pirie Cohort Study; and Tasmanian Infant Health Study. These studies provide an excellent source of learning for the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (see Nicholson et al. 2002 for further details and references on these studies).

All these studies involve birth cohorts. Some have been quite narrowly focused – for example, the Port Pirie study examined the impacts of lead exposure, and the Tasmanian Infant Health Study addressed Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, and both shed important light on these issues.

Most have broadened their focus over time from their initial goals, as the richness of the data is recognised and exploited. As an example, the Australian Temperament Project, which initially was concerned with children’s temperament and social adjustment, is currently working collaboratively with a number of agencies. These include working with Crime Prevention Victoria to address pathways to adolescent and young adult antisocial behaviour, with the National Drug Research Institute on predictors of substance use and misuse, and with the RACV and Traffic Accident Commission to explore risky driving behaviour. The project is also addressing issues such as citizenship, relationship formation and social competence (see Smart elsewhere in this edition).

The key drawback of all these studies is that they involved single cohorts which were born in the 1980s, and so the relevance of their findings to early childhood in the early 21st century is uncertain.

### Commonalities and differences

Despite this diverse array of longitudinal studies, some common features emerge.

Most studies have relied on biennial data collection – this frequency allows contact to be maintained with families without over-burdening them, and at the same time allowing reasonably sensitive data on development and change to be obtained.

A number of the more recent studies involve a multidisciplinary team of academic researchers, reflecting recognition of the interconnections between different aspects of children’s development and their social context. As a corollary, most studies have been conducted by consortia. Some studies (for example, the Christchurch study) have ensured continuity by having a small team involved throughout the life of the study, whereas others (such as NLSCY) have involved extensive consultation and a large consortium of researchers. One way to ensure that the needs for both continuity and broad multidisciplinary input are met is to have a small core team of researchers working in conjunction with a large consortium.

Because of the need for a substantial funding base over an extended period of time, most studies have relied at least in part on government funding. Over-reliance on short-term competitive research
permanent residence will be included. Children in very remote locations may potentially be excluded if they are too costly to visit. The Health Insurance Commission also requires that children without any registered Medicare activity for a specified period of time are excluded due to concerns that the child may have died or contact details may be incorrect.

It has been decided that there should be no oversampling of any particular group, but it is hoped that “nested” studies may focus on some such groups. The sample will be clustered at the postcode level, both for economy of data collection and to facilitate analysis of community level effects. There will be biennial waves of data collection starting in 2004, involving face-to-face interviews in the home, as well as an additional mail-back questionnaire wave in 2005.

**Respondents and data collection**

The study will collect data from multiple informants. Extending beyond most other studies, both the child’s parents will be asked to provide information through a face-to-face interview and self-completion questionnaires. In cases where a parent does not live with the child, consent will be sought to contact the non-resident parent. Further, non-parental child care providers will be asked to complete questionnaires. Data will be sought about all forms of care – long day care centres, family day care, preschools, nannies, relatives, friends and neighbours. This again is an area where LSAC will go beyond almost all existing studies.

As children become older, we will be asking schools and teachers to provide data. Direct assessment of the child’s language and school readiness skills will be undertaken for four-year-olds, and we will measure children’s height and weight. When the children reach an appropriate age, they will also be asked to provide their own perspectives on their lives.

In total, 18 different instruments will be used to collect data, since separate questionnaires are needed for the two cohorts and the different informants. (See Christine Millward’s AIFS conference paper on the Institute’s website for more details about the data that will be collected.)

In addition, the study will use community level indices (for example, SEIFA and ARIA), to help assess community level effects. We are currently pilot-testing the feasibility of collecting saliva samples (to allow the analysis of cortisol levels) and collecting time use data through a simple diary. Other forms of data linkage are also under consideration.

The data collected will be geared towards facilitating longitudinal analysis of children’s developmental pathways over time. Confidentialised data sets will be developed and warehoused at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. It is intended that these data will be widely available to researchers...
The contract to implement the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (Growing Up in Australia) was awarded to a consortium headed by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Consortium members and the management structure are shown in the Table 2 and Figure 1.

The strengths of the consortium lie in its multi-disciplinary nature, the comprehensive understanding of the conceptual and empirical research base held by its members, its expertise in large longitudinal and/or population based studies, its awareness of and interest in the current policy context, and its long-term commitment to study.

In adopting the management structure shown, we have ensured that there is a small dedicated team working on the study (the Project Operations Team), and have mechanisms for engaging the expertise within the consortium (through the Design Teams and Consortium Advisory Group). There is a close working relationship between the Project Operations Team, the Consortium Advisory Group and FaCS, and broader consultation and input through FaCS’s Steering Committee, the Scientific and Policy Advisory Group, and the Reference Group.

The Project Operations Team currently comprises the Project Director (Ann Sanson), Design Manager (Christine Millward), Survey Manager (Carol Soloff), Senior Research Officer (Grace Soriano), and Survey Officer (Emma White).
in accordance with stringent privacy and security protocols. User support will be provided through newsletters, a website and training courses.

**Current status and next steps**

In the first year of the project extensive consultation has occurred with scientific experts, state and territory government representatives, and other stakeholders. A first Discussion Paper on the approach to addressing the research questions has been published (Sanson et al. 2002). Draft instruments for collecting the data from the various informants for both cohorts have been developed.

Extensive pre-testing of the instruments and study methodology has occurred, and a more formal pilot test is underway. The sample design has been developed and refined, and the fieldwork for the study has been sub-contracted to Colmar Brunton Social Research in association with NCS Pearson.

The website for the study (www.aifs.gov.au/growingup has been established, and a logo developed.

A dress rehearsal involving approximately 250 children per cohort will take place in August-October 2003, followed by first main wave of data collection in March 2004. Release of the first wave of data is planned for April 2005.

**Conclusion**

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children is a landmark study that will provide a unique opportunity to provide policy-makers with a solid, comprehensive evidence base to guide future support, intervention and prevention policies for children and families. In this way, we believe that it will help future Australian children to have the best possible start in life.

**References**


How accessible are child abuse prevention programs?

KATIE KOVACS reports on a recent exploratory study conducted by the National Child Protection Clearinghouse that sheds some light on how families with a child at risk of being maltreated avail themselves of child abuse prevention programs.

Child abuse is a serious issue affecting significant numbers of Australian children every year. In 2000–2001, 27,367 cases of child abuse or neglect were substantiated by statutory child protection authorities nationally (AIHW 2002). Since the “modern discovery” of child abuse, a range of services have been developed in order to attempt to combat this problem. In order for child abuse prevention services to be effective, it is imperative to discover whether they are proving to be accessible for those families and children most in need of them.

For the purposes of this study, those “most in need” are defined as families where the parents have not abused or neglected their children, but are most at risk of doing so.

There is currently little documented information available about how families locate, gain access to and use, child abuse prevention services. In order to start to redress this knowledge gap, the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services requested the National Child Protection Clearinghouse at the Australian Institute of Family Studies to undertake a small exploratory research project. The aim of the research was to investigate issues impacting on accessibility of services designed to prevent maltreatment, and how families with a child at risk of being maltreated avail themselves of such services.

Defining accessibility

The accessibility of child abuse prevention services is determined by various factors. It was the aim of the study to obtain information about the availability of child abuse prevention services, and whether such services were adequately publicised, catered to those most in need of a child abuse prevention service, and successful in preventing child abuse and neglect.

Some of the key issues identified by the researchers as affecting accessibility have been arranged in a flow chart (Figure 1). As the chart illustrates, in order for a child abuse prevention service to be considered accessible and effective, it needs to meet five requirements that can be hierarchically “nested”, such that progression through the chart is reliant on fulfilling the requirements of each level.

The Accessibility Study

In order to obtain detailed information about access to child abuse prevention services, perspectives were sought from providers currently involved in the operation of either group-based parent education or home-visiting services in New South Wales and Victoria (both rural and urban localities).

Group-based parent education courses are centre-based and have the primary aim of enhancing parental competencies and particularly child management skills through group-based discussions and activities. Home-visiting services involve a social worker or trained volunteer visitor attending the home of families with young children. The visitor may offer parent education and/or family support including information on health, nutrition and safety, and advice on the mother–child interaction. Visitors...
may also monitor the child’s wellbeing and assist families to connect to other services and resources.

The Accessibility Study was conducted late in 2002. Respondents were located through snowball sampling techniques using the phone book, local councils, and the National Child Abuse Prevention Programs Database.

Overall, service providers from 32 agencies who met the study criteria agreed to participate. The sample included 13 group-based parent education services and 19 home-visiting services operating in rural and urban New South Wales (19) and in rural and urban Victoria (13). Most services were being run by non-government agencies (20), with the remaining (12) services being run by government agencies.

A short mailed questionnaire asked providers about their service, the area in which it was located, and the respondents’ role at the agency. Respondents were asked to rate their service catchment areas against a range of health, wellbeing and demographic indicators. The second part of the study involved a 20 minute semi-structured telephone interview, designed to explore the service’s aims, design, type of assistance provided, participant characteristics, referral sources, funding sources, and levels of service evaluation.

Many of the agencies had been operating the service for a considerable time, with 75 per cent (24) running services for three years or more. Of these, ten services had been operating for more than ten years. This contrasts with previous analyses of prevention services (Tomison and Poole 2000: 106) where there was a “trend of funding predominantly short-term pilot or demonstration projects” in the area of child abuse prevention. Thus, it appeared that the Accessibility Study sample comprised relatively stable services which had substantial experience in service provision.

**Need for and availability of services**

Child abuse prevention services in this study were located in areas rated by service providers as having significant levels of child abuse and domestic violence. As shown in Figure 2, it was found that, along with perceived high levels of child abuse and domestic violence, the catchment areas also were characterised by a range of other demographic factors often identified as “risk factors” associated with higher rates of child abuse, neglect and domestic violence, including single-parent families, high levels of drug abuse (by children and other family members), high levels of criminal activity and anti-social behaviour by children, youth homelessness, unemployment, and a large numbers of families with multiple problems.

While service providers reported that people in the service catchment areas experienced considerable disadvantage, they also reported that there was a low level of welfare services, activities and infrastructure available for children and families in these areas. With regard to child abuse prevention services specifically, the majority of respondents (88 per cent) stated that there were few services of this type in their areas.

In light of reports that there were many high-need families in the service catchment areas and a dearth of support services, it was not surprising to find that demand on existing services was rated “high” in almost all areas (94 per cent). A further finding was

![Figure 2](image-url)
that the level of child abuse and numbers of available prevention services did not coincide, with many areas having a higher level of abuse than available services.

Where services were available, respondents rated the standard in one-third of the areas as “very low” to “low”, and another one-third of the areas as “average”. Reasons for this were not sought, but may relate to inadequate resourcing since the quality tended to be lower where the demand was higher.

**Public awareness of service availability**

In order to access a service, those who are most in need of a prevention service need to be aware of its existence. Some providers (6) commented that they did not actively recruit or advertise their service because demand was already very high and they did not wish to be swamped. One respondent stated:

“Sporadically we did advertise but we really had more clients than we could deal with and so we only occasionally send flyers to agencies.”

However, over half of the respondents mentioned a lack of community awareness about their program as an issue negatively affecting accessibility (54 per cent). Thus, although demand on services was already high, providers believed that demand could have potentially been higher, as there were still families in the catchment area who were unaware of the existence of the service.

With regard to services which did advertise, the most common form of advertising used was “word of mouth”. Many providers commented that if families hear positive reports about the service from other families, then this is a very effective form of engagement. Other, less frequently used forms of advertising included the use of brochures, local media, newsletters, and informing other services and possible referral agencies in the area.

**Provisions to facilitate use**

Agencies can encourage the use of services through measures such as limiting costs and providing transport, child care and flexible hours of operation. In the **Accessibility Study**, respondents reported that almost all of their services were provided to clients free of charge.

According to respondents, access to transport affected access to services in 85 per cent (11) of parent education groups because of a general lack of public transport or service-owned transport available to clients. With regard to home visiting, 37 per cent (7) of the home visiting staff also commented on the matter of transport and the large distances entailed for workers carrying out their visits. They noted the effects of a shortage of staff and the need for workers to cover very large areas, resulting in resources being fairly thinly spread across the catchment area and a consequent reduction in the numbers of clients that could be seen.

While service providers were not directly asked about child care provisions, child care emerged as an important issue. Services which had child care facilities saw this as a positive factor in increasing accessibility, while services without such facilities saw it as a negative factor. This was especially the case for the group-based parent education services where 54 per cent stated that the presence or absence of child care was a major factor affecting accessibility.

Another factor having a negative impact on accessibility was the operating hours of services. Many services were being offered only during office hours (66 per cent), which was seen by some respondents as useful in that clients could attend while their children were at school. However, narrow hours of operation were seen as a hindrance by other respondents who acknowledged that operating during standard working hours often excluded the participation of fathers. Several providers (6) stated that they were aware that accessibility would be increased by the extension of hours of operation but they were unable to afford to do so.

**Servicing those most in need**

Are those most in need of a child abuse prevention service able to access and receive the services they need? Service providers were asked whether they believed their service was attracting and assisting those most in need of a child abuse prevention serv-
with the service. They mentioned an array of methods for attempting to increase engagement, including: encouraging client input into service delivery, verbal encouragement, telephone calls and active outreach, the provision of child care and transport, and arranging social events and activities.

One of the causes of the heavy demand experienced by many services is that they were overwhelmed with tertiary clients (families where children had already been abused), being referred from statutory child protection authorities. Several comments were made by providers about how resources were being absorbed by tertiary clients, leaving little time left to be spent on secondary prevention:

“Lack of funding negatively impacts us as we can only afford 30 hours a week of workers and we don’t get any time to do prevention. In reality, everyone works extra hours.”

Another matter to arise was that the performance of some services is measured by client turnover, so statistically a service looks better if it takes on the easier clients with less complex and time consuming needs which can be resolved in a limited period of time:

“We are finding that it is a number crunching game at present. Outcomes are measured in terms of number of people seen. Therefore we are seeing people who are easier to get and not those most in need of a child abuse prevention service.”

Success in the prevention of child abuse and neglect

It is interesting that, when asked to give the aims of their service, only one provider mentioned the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Further, when asked to outline desired major and minor outcomes of the service, more than half (53 per cent) of providers made no mention of children’s welfare; in the majority of cases, service aims revolved around parents or family support and education.

Clearly, many services see the parent/s as the central client in their service rather than the children, presuming that providing services to parents would automatically result in the prevention of, or reduction in, maltreatment of children, a view which has traditionally been held by providers in this sector (Thompson 1994).

The assumed link between parental support and child abuse prevention is illustrated by responses to the question: “To what degree does your service prevent child abuse and neglect?” Many providers felt that their service was making some contribution towards child abuse prevention. The majority (53 per cent) (17) believed that they prevented child abuse “completely” or “mostly”. Interestingly, 16 per cent (5) of respondents answered that they did not know whether their service was effectively preventing child abuse and neglect.

It is difficult for either observers or service providers themselves to be clear as to whether the services are effective in preventing child abuse and neglect. Information about the impact of services is unavailable because services are seldom formally evaluated. However, there is evidence that service providers are increasingly recognising the importance of gathering information about the effectiveness of their services (Tomison and Poole 2000).

All agencies but one collected some information about their service operation. By documenting practice knowledge, services can develop a rich source of information which may be a useful resource if shared.

Conclusion

The exploratory Accessibility Study, undertaken by the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, is one of the first Australian studies to look into the issues surrounding access to child abuse prevention services. Although the sample was small and not randomly obtained, and therefore the findings not generalisable, some interesting insights were gained. By surveying and interviewing service providers running group-based parent education or home visiting services, some key issues were identified that offer some direction for further research in this area.

The study’s key findings indicated that there was generally a greater need for child abuse prevention services than there were services available. The availability of existing services was known in the community, but possibly not by those most in need of the service. The most important provisions to facilitate use of the services were seen to be child care, transport, and flexible hours of operation.

With regard to those most in need of a prevention service, concerns were expressed about the fact that these families were not being assisted because services were overwhelmed with tertiary clients requiring intervention. It was difficult to gauge service outcomes as few evaluations were being conducted. However, while the prevention of child abuse was not seen by the majority of services as one of their major aims, providers thought that their services were making some contribution in the child abuse prevention area.

Future studies should increase the sample size so that it can be ascertained whether these findings are generalisable, to similar child abuse prevention services across Australia. It would also be beneficial to include the perspectives of families attending the services, and some independent data about the community characteristics. There is also a critical need for long-term follow-up studies, to assess the impacts of services on the welfare of children over time.

References


Katie Kovacs is the Project Officer with the National Child Protection Clearinghouse at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Based on a report by Janet Stanley and Katie Kovacs entitled “An exploration of issues of accessibility and child abuse prevention programs” (in press 2003), this article is a condensed and edited version of a paper presented at the Eighth Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, held in Melbourne on 12–14 February 2003.
“People always say, ‘Oh, how do you cope staying at home?’ … You shouldn’t be made to feel guilty, but I think sometimes you are, as though you’re a cabbage because you’re at home.” (Mother not in paid work)

“I’ve found since my youngest started school that the pressure’s been there from everybody around. You know: ‘Now both of yours are at school, what are you doing with all these hours?’” (Mother not in paid work)

Women noted that some families valued material possessions, or career development, more than their children:

“I find it strange when people want to have a family and have two or three children and then leave them forever with a nanny. Why have them? It defeats the object.” (Young woman without children)

In the absence of financial need, only 5 per cent of mothers would choose to work full-time hours, three-quarters would prefer a part-time job, and one-fifth would prefer not to work at all. These results are in line with European Union surveys showing that, across all countries, the majority of mothers would prefer not to work, or to work part-time only, while their children were young. Full-time mothers said that child care problems were not important; the reason they were at home full-time was because motherhood and parenting took a central place in their lives until their children had grown up and left home. One in ten said they would not do paid work or use child care in any circumstances.

Only one-third of women (and one-quarter of mothers) thought employers should have to offer special arrangements to help women combine jobs and child care. The most popular family-friendly arrangement was special leave for sick children (paid or unpaid), but women were evenly divided as to whether employers should have to offer such a scheme or not. Otherwise, the most popular...
family-friendly policies were those offering time flexibility, which was generally maximised in part-time jobs.

The Listening to Women research program concluded that we should stop thinking of women as a homogeneous group; that women want choices in their lives; that most women have jobs rather than careers; that full-time mothers want their role as mother to be valued and respected; that most women were prepared to take any job that fitted in with their family and child care commitments; that women thought greater societal value should be attached to the role of housewife; and that women saw themselves as secondary earners, with male partners regarded as having ultimate responsibility for household income. One-quarter of men and women still thought complete role segregation in the family worked best.

The diversity of women’s perspectives is highlighted by the contrasting comments received. For example, there was recognition that social pressures had changed:

“I know from my mum’s point of view, when she had children there was some kind of social stigma about having to send your wife out to work – people didn’t. But now lots of wives work, don’t they, and I think it’s the other way round, isn’t it. You’re very lucky if you can afford to be at home full-time. Whereas I think we managed on a lot less perhaps, and we want a lot more now.” (Mother in paid work)

Some mothers were clear that they were happier in a job and, as a result, so too were their families:

“I feel that it’s good for the mother to have an outside interest, because the time that the family has together is much better quality time … you have more to talk about. I think that, for myself, I’m a much better person when I’m out working than when I’m at home all the time.” (Older mother not in paid work)

“I think some children are better off being looked after by someone else. A lot of people haven’t got the patience or the life skills to look after their children.” (Mother in paid work)

Other mothers were clear that they themselves could never have left their children with other carers:

“The thought of somebody else looking after my babies – I couldn’t have coped. I have to say I would have found it very difficult to miss all of that – they’re only little for such a short time, and to miss that – you can’t go back and get that.” (Mother in paid work)

Overall, mothers were clear that a choice usually had to be made, that competing life interests were too stressful:

“I mean, something’s got to give in the end, hasn’t it. Either you, or work, or the family and the home.” (Mother not in paid work)

“It seems to me you have either got to keep the career going and not have kids, or have the kids and lose your career, and you have got to make a choice.” (Young middle-class woman)

“I had quite a good job in a local authority and I felt I was ready to be promoted to a decent position. But it was a choice between a decent position or looking after my baby, and I chose my baby.” (Older middle-class woman)

They were also clear that women now have choices and opportunities:

“I think if a woman puts her mind to doing something she can do it. Nothing’s impossible now.” (Older woman)

“It is important for women to work if they want to. I think there should be a choice. If they want to stay at home with their children, then I think they should be able to.” (Mother in paid work)

Younger women consciously planned their careers around family life:

“It is really important to me to have a family. I am only 19, I know, but even when I was at school the decision I made to be a teacher was partly because it was important for me to have children, and what with the holidays being the same and everything, you know … I think it does greatly influence you, children.” (Young working class woman)
Occupations that would be treated as a career by men were often regarded as short-term jobs by women:

“I knew from a very young age that I was going to get married and have children, that was my career in life. It was purely a job. I went to work in a bank for four or five years. And I always knew it was just a job until I had children.” *(Older middle class woman)*

Some women looked enviously at policies supporting mothers in Scandinavian countries:

“In several of the Scandinavian countries, including Finland, mothers do get paid a low salary for being at home with their children. It is a poorly paid job, bringing up children, but it is paid.” *(Older middle class woman)*

Did the New Labour Government of Tony Blair take any notice of the results of the *Listening to Women* research program? Of course not. The studies revealed more diversity of values and complexity of opinion than was politically useful. So the findings were used selectively to support the government’s predetermined policy positions – in particular, policies promoting paid work as women’s central life activity.¹ The reason this is surprising is that this government pursues evidence-based policies.

Why is it so hard for governments and politicians to listen to women? The main reason is that they want to treat women as a single-issue constituency, on a level with other issues. Yet women form over half the population in most modern societies, so we might expect them to display substantial diversity in values, preferences and life goals.

So far, social scientists have also treated women as a homogeneous group, slightly different from men, with a single set of preferences and political interests. We now need to break away from this simplistic perspective to develop theories and research that recognise women’s diversity and conflicting interests. At present, preference theory is the only theory to do this. Some demographers have focussed on changing attitudes and values as the driving force in contemporary developments (Lesthaeghe and Meekers 1986; Lesthaeghe 1995; Mason and Jensen 1995), but more commonly the focus is on institutional factors and macro-level policy analysis (for example, McDonald 2000) without any real understanding of how these impact on women’s choices and behaviour.

### Preference theory

Preference theory is a new theory for explaining and predicting women’s choices between market work and family work, a theory that is historically-informed, empirically-based, multidisciplinary, prospective rather than retrospective in orientation, and applicable in all rich modern societies (Hakim 2000). Lifestyle preferences are defined as causal factors which thus need to be monitored in modern societies. In contrast, other social attitudes (such as patriarchal values) are either unimportant as predictors of behaviour, or else have only a very small marginal impact in creating a particular climate of public opinion on women’s roles (Hakim 2003b).

Preference theory specifies the historical context in which lifestyle preferences become important predictors of behaviour. It notes that five historical changes collectively produce a qualitatively new scenario for women in rich modern societies in the 21st century, giving them options that were not previously available. Small elites of women born into wealthy families, or prosperous families with liberal ideas sometimes had real choices in the past, just as their brothers did. Today, genuine choices are open to women in the sense that the vast majority of women have choices, not only particular subgroups in the population.

The five social and economic changes started in the late 20th century and are now producing a qualitatively different and new scenario of options and opportunities for women in the 21st century. The five conditions that create a new scenario are: the contraceptive revolution; the equal opportunities revolution; the expansion of white-collar occupations; the creation of jobs for second-career earners; and the increasing importance of attitudes, values and personal preferences in lifestyle choices.

The two revolutions (contraception and equal opportunities) constitute the core of the social revolution for women. Collectively, the five changes are necessary to create a new scenario in which women have genuine choices and female heterogeneity is revealed to its full extent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Classification of women’s work–lifestyle preferences in the 21st century</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home-centred 20% of women (varies 10%-30%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Adaptive 60% of women (varies 40%-80%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family life and children are the main priorities throughout life</td>
<td>This group is most diverse and includes women who want to combine work and family, plus drifters and unplanned careers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to work.</td>
<td>Want to work, but not totally committed to work career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications obtained as cultural capital</td>
<td>Qualifications obtained with the intention of working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children is affected by government social policy, family wealth, etc.</td>
<td>This group is very responsive to government social policy, employment policy, equal opportunities policy/propaganda, economic cycle/recession/growth, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not responsive to employment policy</td>
<td>Such as: income tax and social welfare benefits educational policies school timetables child care services public attitude towards working women legislation promoting female employment trade union attitudes to working women availability of part-time work and similar work flexibility economic growth and prosperity and institutional factors generally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Hakim (2000).*
With rare exceptions (Cleland 1985; Murphy 1993; Castles 2002), male demographers have generally overlooked the social and psychological significance of the contraceptive revolution (Westoff and Ryder 1977). Demographers discuss the use of contraception without distinguishing between the methods controlled by men and those controlled by women. Modern forms of contraception (the pill, IUD and sterilisation) are thus defined primarily by their greater reliability, overlooking the crucial fact that they transfer control over reproduction from men to women.

Control over her fertility produces a change of perspective among women, even a psychological change, creating a sense of autonomy, responsibility and personal freedom that is not achieved with contraception controlled by men. Qualitative studies of contraceptive practice using the old methods clearly show that women did not feel they had any control over their childbearing, and had fatalistic rather than calculating attitudes (Fisher 2000). The contraceptive revolution is thus an essential precondition for the equal opportunities revolution and other changes to have any substantial effect on women’s lives.

In Western Europe, the United States, Australia and other modern societies, these five changes only took place from the 1960s onwards. The timing and pace of change has varied, even between countries in Europe. However, the strong social, cultural, economic and political links between modern countries suggests that no country will lag behind on any of the changes indefinitely. All five changes were completed early in America and Britain, so that the new scenario was well established by the last two decades of the 20th century in these two countries. Thus they provide the main illustration of the consequences of the new scenario for women.

Three life choices for women

Reviews of recent research evidence (Hakim 1996, 2000) show that once genuine choices are open to them, women at all levels of education and in all social classes choose one of three different lifestyles – work-centred, home-centred, or adaptive (Table 1).

**Work-centred women** are in a minority, despite the massive influx of women into higher education and into professional and managerial occupations in the last three decades. Work-centred people (men and women) are focused on competitive activities in the public sphere — in careers, sport, politics, or the arts. Family life is fitted around their work, and many of these women remain childless, even when married. Qualifications and training are obtained as a career investment rather than as an insurance policy, as in the adaptive group (below). The majority of men are work-centred, compared to only a minority of women, even in professional occupations (Hakim 1998: 221-34). Preference theory predicts that men will retain their dominance in the labour market, politics and other competitive activities, because only a minority of women are prepared to prioritise their jobs (or other activities in the public sphere) in the same way as men. This is unwelcome news to many feminists, who have assumed that women would be just as likely as men to be work-centred once opportunities were opened to them, and that sex discrimination alone has so far held women back from the top jobs in any society.

**Home-centred women** are also a minority group, and a relatively invisible one, given the current political and media focus on working women and high achievers. Home-centred women prefer to give priority to private life and family life after they marry. They are most inclined to have larger families, and these women avoid paid work after marriage unless the family is experiencing financial problems. They do not necessarily invest less in qualifications, because the educational system functions as a marriage market as well as a training institution. Despite the elimination of the sex differential in educational attainment, an increasing proportion of wives in America and Europe are now marrying men with substantially better qualifications, and the likelihood of marrying a graduate spouse is hugely increased if the woman herself has obtained a degree (Hakim 2000: 193-222). This may be why women remain less likely to choose vocational courses with a direct economic value, and are more likely to take courses in the arts, humanities or languages, which provide cultural capital but have lower earnings potential.

**Adaptive women** prefer to combine employment and family work without giving a fixed priority to either. They want to enjoy the best of both worlds. Adaptive women are generally the largest group among women, and will be found in substantial numbers in most occupations. Certain occupations, such as school teaching, are attractive to women because they facilitate an even work–family balance. The great majority of women who transfer to part-time work after they have children are adaptive women, who seek to devote as much time and effort to their family work as to their jobs. In some countries (such as the United States and southern European countries), and in certain occupations, part-time jobs are still rare, so other types of job are chosen. For example, seasonal jobs, temporary work, or school-term-time jobs all offer a better work-family balance than the typical full-time job, especially if commuting is also involved. Faute de mieux, adaptive women sometimes take ordinary full-time jobs.

The three preference groups are set out as sociological ideal-types in Table 1, with estimates of the relative sizes of the three groups in societies where public policy does not bias the distribution. In this case, the distribution of women across the three groups corresponds to a “normal” distribution of responses to the family–work conflict. In practice, in most societies, public policy is biased towards one group or another, by accident or by design, so that the exact percentages vary between modern societies, with a bias towards work-centred women or towards home-centred women.

The three lifestyle preference groups are not merely different. Each has a substantively different value system, as well as differing life goals. These differences sometimes bring women into conflict with each other — for example, on whether public child care services are necessary or not, or whether positive discrimination in favour of women for promotion to top jobs is a good thing or not. In a sense, there is no single, representative group of women in modern society, but three contrasting, even conflicting groups with sharply differentiated work and lifestyle preferences. In the
United States, the conflict between work-centred and home-centred women has been expressed through the two women’s movements: the feminist “women’s liberation” movement and the maternalist movement, with conflict often focused on the issues of abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment.

Achieving the new scenario for women does not mean that sex discrimination has been entirely eliminated. As definitions of sex discrimination keep expanding, from direct discrimination to increasingly arcane forms of indirect discrimination, this battle is arguably never won. However, it is important that trenchant equal opportunities legislation is backed up by a system of labour courts, equality agencies and other tangible public support for converting the letter of the law into reality.

Equally important is the heterogeneity of national cultures. Britain, America and Australia have large and diverse populations, ensuring that cultural diversity and differences in values become accepted and even welcomed. Some European countries (notably the Scandinavian countries) have not yet come to terms with the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity that generally ensues from decades of immigration, and they have low acceptance of diversity in values and lifestyles.

We do not expect convergence in work rates and lifestyle choices in new scenario countries. Even the most liberal society and laissez faire polity still has institutions, laws, customs, national policies and cultures that shape and structure behaviour. Choices are not made in a vacuum. Social and economic factors still matter, and will produce national variations in employment patterns and lifestyle choices. In addition, the choices people make are moulded by an unpredictable circus of events: economic recessions and booms, wars, changes of government, as well as events in private lives, individual ability, accidents or ill health, “disastrous” marriages and “brilliant” marriages. As a result, there will always be differences between new scenario countries in patterns of fertility and employment.

In sum, lifestyle preferences help to determine:
- women’s fertility – the incidence of childlessness and, for the majority who do have children, family sizes;
- women’s employment pattern over the lifecycle – choices between careers and jobs, full-time and part-time work, and associated job values; and
- women’s responsiveness – to public policies, employer policies, economic and social circumstances.

Preferences do not predict outcomes with complete certainty, even when women have genuine choices, because of variations in individual abilities and factors in the social and economic environment. However, in prosperous modern societies, preferences become a much more important determinant, maybe even the primary determinant of women’s behaviour.

The three lifestyle preference groups differ in values, goals and aspirations. That is, they are defined by their contrasting lifestyle preferences rather than by behavioural outcomes. The three groups also differ in consistency of aspirations and values, not by strong versus weak preferences.

People who argue that women’s choices are always shaped by external events and the situation around them are describing adaptable women, who are in the majority. The distinctive feature of the two extreme groups of women (and equivalent men) is that they do not waver in their goals, even when they fail to achieve them. Work-centred people are defined by prioritising market work (or other competitive activities in the public sphere) over family work and family life, not by exceptional success in the public sphere.

**Choices are not made in a vacuum. Social and economic factors still matter, and will produce national variations in employment patterns and lifestyle choices.**

The 1999 British survey

Preference theory is empirically-based in that it was built up from a review and synthesis of hundreds of social science studies in several disciplines using a variety of research methods (Hakim 1996, 2000). To test the impact of lifestyle preferences on fertility and employment, a new survey was carried out in 1999.

The aim of the new study was to pick out the smallest possible number of survey questions and indicators appropriate to a structured interview survey that could be used to identify the three lifestyle preference groups among women. This had previously been done most effectively by qualitative studies based on depth interviews, as illustrated by Gerson’s brilliant study of how women decide about motherhood and careers (Gerson 1985: Table G22; Hakim 2000: 149-154). The aim of the new study was to identify classificatory questions and variables that might be included in any large survey.

The survey was carried out as one of 27 projects selected for an Economic and Social Research Council Research Program on the Future of Work running over five years (1998–2003) in Britain. The interview survey was carried out for the author by the Office of National Statistics in Britain, in January and February 1999.
The survey was based on a probability random sample of households, and face-to-face interviews with one person aged 16 and over chosen randomly within each household. The proportion of households in which the selected informant was the head of household or spouse was 81 per cent in this sample. From a sample of 5388 eligible addresses, an overall response rate of 68 per cent was achieved, producing data for a nationally representative sample of 3651 people aged 16 and over in Britain. The final sample included 1691 men and 1960 women. Excluding the pensioners aged 65 and over reduced the sample for the population of working age to 2900, including 2345 married and cohabiting couples.

The survey was used to operationalise the identification of lifestyle preferences in the context of a large scale structured interview survey, to test the classification against women's lifestyle choices and behaviour, and to explore further applications of the taxonomy in sociological research on women's employment.\(^2\) Tables 2–4 report key findings from the 1999 British survey. The analysis is person-centred rather than variable-centred (Magnusson 1998).

**Preferences and lifestyle choices**

Three questions were used to operationalise lifestyle preferences. Two questions were taken from the Eurobarometer series.\(^3\) The third, a question on work commitment, has been widely used, in slightly different versions, in research on work orientations in America and Britain.

A question on ideal family models identifies home-centred women: women who prefer to focus their time and energy on home and family work, and thus seek a marriage with complete role segregation. Just under one-fifth of the sample fell into this category.

Two questions on work orientations identify people for whom market work is central to their identities and lifestyle. A question on work commitment identifies people who claim they would continue with paid work (not necessarily in the same job) in the absence of economic necessity. The introduction of a national lottery in Britain in the 1990s made this hypothetical situation more realistic than previously. Primary and secondary earners were identified by a question asking about the main income-earner(s) in the household. People who classified themselves as sole or joint main earner(s) were classified as primary earners; all others were classified as secondary earners.

The question was treated as an opinion question, and analyses of responses show clearly that is what it is. For example, married men adopt the identity of primary (co)earner irrespective of income level, and even when they are not in employment. In contrast, women who regard themselves as primary earners when single switch immediately to the secondary earner identity after marriage, almost irrespective of their income level. Work centrality is defined as a combination of adopting a primary earner identity and having non-financial commitment to one’s paid work.

For married women, this means in practice those who regard themselves as joint main earner as well as being committed to their employment activities. Less than one-fifth of married women passed this test, and overall only one-quarter of women (compared to half of men) were classified as work-centred. The residual group of women with more complex, or contradictory, values were classified as adaptive.

The distribution of lifestyle preferences among women of working age (Table 2) and wives of working age (Table 3) is close to that predicted by preference theory (Table 1). The distribution varies slightly according to the population base. For example, among wives and cohabitees aged 20-59 years, the distribution becomes 13 per cent home-centred, 77 per cent adaptive, and only 10 per cent work-centred.

In line with preference theory, Table 2 shows that lifestyle choices differ very substantially between the three preference groups. Two-thirds of work-centred women are in full-time employment. In contrast, two-thirds of adaptive women work part-time or not at all. Almost half of the home-centred women are not in employment, and a small minority have never had a job. A relatively high 40 per cent of home-centred women have full-time jobs. The reasons for this unexpected result are explored in the full report, and show that in certain circumstances, economic necessity can override personal preferences (Hakim 2003a: 141-143, 211-233).

Home-centred and adaptive women are most likely to marry or cohabit, and to stay married. This is not surprising, as their preferred lifestyle is heavily dependent on having a breadwinner spouse who is in regular employment. Work-centred women are least likely to marry, and most likely to be separated or divorced. Women who regard themselves as financially independent anyway have less motive to marry and to stay married.\(^4\) Most important, home-centred women have twice as many children as work-centred women, many of whom seem to be childless. The fertility measure here is the “own child” measure: the average number of children aged less than 16 years living at home per woman aged 20-54 years. It does not include older children (who may no longer live at home anyway), so it underestimates total fertility. The measure shows clearly that fertility levels vary dramatically between the three preference groups, along with marriage rates and employment patterns.

Educational standards differ between the three preference groups, but not by enormous amounts. Work-centred women are slightly more likely to have higher education – 26 per cent compared to 18 per cent in the

![Table 2: Characteristics of women in the three lifestyle preference groups](image)
other two groups. The difference is small enough to be explained by differential self-selection into higher education. As predicted by preference theory, lifestyle preferences cut across education groups, as well as socio-economic and income groups. Overall, the key features of the three lifestyle preference groups are in line with preference theory. In broad terms, preferences predict outcomes. Further analysis (Hakim 2003a) shows that attitudes predict behaviour, but that behaviour does not predict attitudes. That is, attitudes are not a post hoc rationalisation for decisions already taken.

**Careers and fertility**

Further analysis of the 1999 British survey shows that lifestyle preferences are even more important than educational qualifications in shaping women’s choice between market work and a life centred on family life and children. The theses that women’s fertility declines with increasing social status, and that higher education invariably leads women to become career-oriented, are shown to be unsupported.

The analysis in Tables 3 and 4 is restricted to wives because women’s choices only become sharply defined, and can only be implemented, after marriage to a breadwinner spouse. The analysis is also restricted to wives aged 20–54 years because women aged 55 and over almost never have children aged under 16 at home, and because many women (and men) quit the labour market from age 55 onwards. The analysis focuses on the choice between a career, as indicated by full-time employment (Table 3), compared to a life centred on family work, as indicated by the fertility measure (Table 4).

The possession of higher education qualifications is a good general indicator of women’s social status. It is an indicator of women’s self-confidence and self-assertiveness; of women’s potential earnings if they choose to work; and a rough indicator of their socio-economic status, either through their own job or their husband’s status. Tables 3 and 4 show virtually no impact of education, or social status, on wives’ career orientation and fertility levels.

Education does have an impact on employment: full-time work rates are 24 percentage points higher among highly qualified women. However, lifestyle preferences are far more important – as a determinant of both employment and fertility levels. Work-centred wives have much higher full-time work rates than home-centred (or adaptive) wives, whether they are highly educated or not. Small base numbers mean the results for family-centred women in the highly qualified group are not absolutely reliable, but the pattern is consistent, and strong, in both groups of women.

Fertility among home-centred women is double the level among work-centred women. Again the differences are even larger among highly qualified women, with fertility rates almost trebled compared with work-centred wives. Overall, lifestyle preferences are more important than the variables more commonly measured in surveys, such as education or social status. It appears that lifestyle preferences are the hidden, unmeasured factor that determines women’s behaviour to a very large extent.

**Competing social policies**

Preference theory offers a new approach to policy development, one that takes account of the diversity of lifestyle preferences instead of adopting the usual one-size-fits-all approach. As Gauthier (1996) has pointed out, the heterogeneity of individual and household employment strategies within modern societies makes it impossible to get accurate measures of the impact of family policies. Policies that treat women as a homogeneous group are bound to fail, or to work poorly. Policies that are designed to be neutral between the three preference groups, offering each of them a flexible benefit, will be hugely successful in terms of take-up rates and political popularity.

These arguments are set out more fully elsewhere (Hakim 2000: 223-253). In practice, however, politicians have tended to develop policies that favour one group at the expense of the others, because they rely (sometimes implicitly) on a single model of the ideal family rather than accepting the diversity of fully effective family models implied by the typology in Table 1. The analytical framework of preference theory helps us to identify such biased policies.

At present, social policy and family policy generally focus on the working mother and ignore home-centred women. It is often argued that maternity leave (unpaid or paid) helps women to combine paid work with having children. However, a preference theory perspective clarifies that it is mainly work-centred women (and to a lesser extent adaptive women who lean towards careers) who benefit from maternity leave and related job rights – that is, women who have the lowest fertility and are least likely to increase it.

This helps to explain why maternity leave rights have relatively low take-up rates. In Britain, studies of maternity leave rights have concluded that “two-thirds of mothers now return to work after childbirth”. In fact, two-thirds of all mothers are at home full-time caring

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**Table 3 Relative importance of lifestyle preferences and education: full-time work rates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifestyle preferences</th>
<th>Working full-time</th>
<th>Distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Highly qualified women</td>
<td>Other women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work-centred</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adaptive</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family-centred (28)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All wives 20-54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base=100%</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>589</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Married women aged 20-54 who have completed their full-time education. In the absence of information on educational qualifications, the highly qualified are defined as those completing their full-time education at age 21 and over, because in Britain first degrees are normally completed by age 21. People completing full-time education at age 20 or earlier are assumed to have qualifications below tertiary education level.

for their baby, as a matter of choice. For the minority who do return to work, this return is usually short-lived. And promises to return to work are routinely broken: only about half of working women who promise to return to their jobs after the birth actually do so in Britain – a likelihood that is no better than chance (Hakim 1996: 127-129, 2000: 120-122).

An Australian study produced broadly similar results (Glezer 1988). Only half of all Australian women eligible for maternity leave took it. The other half did not take it because they did not intend returning to the same job, or any job, after the birth. Two-thirds of those who did return to work chose part-time or marginal hours rather than full-time work. Eligibility for maternity rights made no difference to the likelihood of being back in a job of some sort 18 months after the birth. Glezer found that attitudes towards motherhood versus paid work was the most important determinant of the decision to return to work, or not. However, women always said they returned to work because they “needed the money”, a response given across all categories of family income. In sum, maternity leave rights seem to make virtually no difference to women’s behaviour.

Governments that are serious about raising fertility rates (and few are, as Demeny 1987 points out) should focus instead on policies to support home-centred women, who have the highest fertility rates and can most easily be persuaded to increase their family size. Such policies would also benefit those adaptive women who lean towards the family, rather than market work, as their main priority. In practice, the focus of social and family policy in most modern societies has swung so far towards the working mother that there is now a systematic policy bias against non-working mothers, most obviously in relation to lone mothers.

Until recently, policy makers accepted that it was in children’s best interest for the sole parent to be a full-time parent, even if this meant long-term dependence on welfare, social housing and other benefits. Policy has now swung against full-time mothers, and lone mothers are forced into low-paid and unrewarding jobs in Welfare to Work schemes in the United States. In Britain, there are similar pressures pushing lone mothers into jobs on the grounds that they are “better off” psychologically and financially. Publicity for such schemes underlines the low public esteem accorded to full-time mothers and parenting work generally, and reinforces the idea that citizenship is dependent on gainful employment, however low-status and low-paid. In the United States, Crittenden (2001: 2) maintains that full-time parenting tends to be equated with “doing nothing”.

For some reason, governments find it difficult to accord reproductive work the same status, dignity and value as productive work. This is probably because governments, and public policy, are still male-dominated, even in modern societies, and men insist on treating women’s unpaid reproductive work as taken-for-granted, “natural” women’s work that does not merit the same valuation and rewards as male-style productive work. The bottom line in public policy is that women should provide reproductive services for free. Unfortunately, many women have absorbed this phallocentric thesis, leading them to support policies that deny professional fees to surrogate mothers, denigrate sex workers, deride couples who pay to adopt children, and disdain other activities involved in the industrialisation of sexual and reproductive work.6

### Table 4 Relative importance of lifestyle preferences and education: fertility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifestyle preferences</th>
<th>Average number of children &lt;16 at home</th>
<th>No children at home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Highly qualified women</td>
<td>Other women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family-centred</td>
<td>(2.0)</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adaptive</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work-centred</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All wives 20-54</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base=100%</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>589</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Married women aged 20-54 who have completed their full-time education. See notes to Table 3. Source: Hakim (2003a).
Similarly, many governments have fiscal policies that discriminate against single-earner families, including Britain, Sweden and Australia (Hakim 2000: 230).

Child care services provide another example of policies that are presented as being beneficial to women generally but in fact favour one particular group. Like maternity leave, public child care services (free or subsidised) are primarily of benefit to work-centred women who choose to return to work shortly after a birth. They are of less value to adaptive women, who either drop out of the labour market while their children are young, or else work part-time hours if at all possible. Public child care services are of no value at all to home-centred women who choose to care for their children themselves. Indeed, many home-centred women resent their husband’s taxes being used to subsidise child care for women who “cannot be bothered” to look after their own children.

Preference theory exposes the bias against full-time motherhood in current fiscal, social and family policies in many modern societies. It also helps us to identify policies that are neutral between the three preference groups. One example is the home care allowance introduced in various forms in the 1990s in Finland, Norway and France (Hakim 2000: 232-235). The home care allowance is a salary paid to the mother (or any parent) who stays at home to care for children without using public day care nurseries. It is quite separate from financial benefits paid for dependent children, which are intended to help parents with the extra costs of children’s food, clothing and education.

The home care allowance can be regarded as a wage for child care at home, as a partial replacement for earnings foregone, or it can be used as a subsidy for purchased child care services which enable the parent to return to work, full-time or part-time. The scheme has been hugely popular wherever it is introduced, with take-up rates close to 100 per cent even in the early years, unlike the much-publicised parental leave rights.

The value of the home care allowance varies between countries and schemes, but is never nominal. For example, in Finland the home care allowance for one child amounts to 40 per cent of the average monthly earnings of female employees. The allowance is a public statement of the social value accorded to full-time parenting and the dignity of motherhood. By raising the social status of motherhood as compared with paid jobs, it redresses the bias against motherhood as an activity, and can also impact on fertility rates.

Conclusions

Most research seeks to identify central tendencies: what the average woman does, or wants. The implicit assumption is that women and men form homogeneous groups, with the differences between them steadily shrinking in modern societies. This was a reasonably accurate picture in the past. However, this picture was recognised that sexually active heterosexual women had no control over their fertility, and had little or no choice about the shape of their lives, prior to the introduction of modern methods of contraception.

The contraceptive revolution gave women independent control of their fertility, if necessary without the agreement or cooperation of male partners, for the first time in history. When women control their own fertility, it is their preferences and values which shape responses to public policy – and public policy has not, in practice, paid much attention to women’s wishes so far.

The second distinctive feature of preference theory is the recognition that the contraceptive revolution of the 1960s, and several other recent social and economic changes create a new scenario of opportunities and options for women. This is a fundamental and radical change in women’s position in society and the lifestyle choices open to them. Male demographers (and many other social scientists) have tended to assume that motherhood was a natural, even biologically determined destiny for women, and that the high levels of fertility seen in the past were “normal”. They have failed to overturn the contraceptive revolution, and the other social and economic changes it made possible.

The first distinctive feature of preference theory is the recognition that the contraceptive revolution of the 1960s, and several other recent social and economic changes create a new scenario of opportunities and options for women. This is a fundamental and radical change in women’s position in society and the lifestyle choices open to them. Male demographers (and many other social scientists) have tended to assume that motherhood was a natural, even biologically determined destiny for women, and that the high levels of fertility seen in the past were “normal”. They have failed to
focused on careers and jobs, or on children and family life. The more highly educated a woman is the greater the impact of her preferences on her lifestyle choices.

Two conclusions follow from this. First, it is necessary to collect information on women's (and men's) lifestyle preferences as well as on all the other factors routinely covered by surveys, such as education, income and so forth. An ideal opportunity presents itself in HILDA (the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey), the new longitudinal study of 7700 Australian households being carried out by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research in conjunction with the Australian Institute of Family Studies and others (Weston and Wooden 2002). The survey already collects data on attitudes and values, through interviews and self-completion questionnaires, so it would be easy to add the handful of questions required to identify lifestyle preferences. This would allow all the HILDA research topics to be analysed in the context of people's ideal family model, including employment patterns, fertility decisions, voluntary childlessness, and responses to policy interventions.

Second, we have to recognise that one-size-fits-all policies will no longer suffice. Policy-making must become a more complex enterprise, recognising that competing family models require diversified social policies that offer different types of support to each preference group. At best, we should be developing flexible and neutral policies, such as the home care allowance, that leave people free to choose how to spend their benefits.

Most important, we need to redress the current bias towards policies supporting working women exclusively, at the expense of policies supporting full-time homemakers and full-time parents.

Endnotes

1. This is very obvious in the summaries published in the October 1999 magazine-style report Voices: Turning listening into action. The emphasis in this report is on education and training, access to paid work, job segregation, the pay gap, and child care services for working mothers. There is virtually no mention of full-time homemakers and full-time parents, and there are no policies listed to support this group.

2. A full report on the 1999 British survey and an equivalent 1999 Spanish survey is given in Hakim (2003a). The Eurobarometer series of surveys is run by the European Commission with the Australian Institute of Family Studies and others (Weston and Wooden 2002). The survey already collects data on attitudes and values, through interviews and self-completion questionnaires, so it would be easy to add the handful of questions required to identify lifestyle preferences. This would allow all the HILDA research topics to be analysed in the context of people's ideal family model, including employment patterns, fertility decisions, voluntary childlessness, and responses to policy interventions.

3. The Eurobarometer series of surveys is run by the European Commission to inform European Union policy-making. They cover all EU member states, and focus on social and political attitudes.

4. There is a substantial literature debating whether increased economic independence reduces women's interest in marriage (Oppenheimer 1994, 1997; Oppenheimer and Lew 1995). It appears that this effect operates only among work-centred women, who are a small minority.

5. The analysis was repeated for women who were not married and not cohabiting. In this sub-group, there is little variation in full-time work rates and fertility between preference groups. It is only after marriage that the three preference groups show differentiated behaviour patterns.

6. One reason why women resist the industrialisation and commercialisation of sexual and reproductive work is because this introduces competitive values into an area of social life currently dominated by cooperative and caring values. These contrasting value systems are features of the market economy and the domestic economy respectively and not, as Parsons and Bales (1955) assumed, characteristics of men and women per se.

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Worcester, R.M. et al. (1999), Listening to Women: Qualitative Research, Cabinet Office Women's Unit, London.
Steps forward for families
Research, practice and policy

Eighth Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference

The theme of the 8th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, held in Melbourne on 12-14 February 2003, was ‘Steps forward for families: Research, practice and policy’. The conference was attended by 454 delegates, with 145 papers presented over the three days of the conference.

In welcoming the delegates to the conference, the Institute’s Acting Director, Associate Professor Ann Sanson, said that the aim of the conference was to bring together research on a wide range of family issues, noting that many of the papers and conference sessions were at the intersection of research, policy and practice.

Minister opens conference
The conference was opened by the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator the Hon. Amanda Vanstone. The Minister’s remarks were presented to the large audience of the opening session via a video address, as she was unable to attend in person due to Parliamentary commitments.

The Minister’s address focused on the challenges families face as they balance work and family priorities. Touching on the reasons why many women return to work soon after having children, the Minister acknowledged that women returning to work is necessary to ensure long-term financial security – as an investment in their future, and the future of their children.

The Minister challenged the widespread view that two-income families are affluent, pointing out that most earn less than $70,000 per year, and that their income is a product of having two people working, not two high salaries. “We need to recognise the contribution, and sacrifices, that both parents are making by going out to work.”

Senator Vanstone commended the work of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and thanked the former Director (recently retired), Mr David Stanton, for his outstanding contribution to the Institute over the last four years.

The Institute was fortunate that The Hon. Larry Anthony, MP, Federal Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, was able to accept a late invitation to address the opening session of the conference in person. (See accompanying box for a summary of Minister Anthony’s remarks.)

The organising themes of the conference
The conference was structured around three major themes – Children and Parenting, Family and

INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK AND FAMILY

The Hon. Larry Anthony, the Federal Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, gave an address at the opening session of the Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference on 12 February 2003.

Minister Anthony spoke of the interrelationship between work and family, with the positive or negative aspects of one spilling over to the other. Helping parents to negotiate their work and family responsibilities is also about giving children a better go in life, he said.

He outlined his concerns for children growing up in jobless families and emphasised the government’s view that promoting family stability is also part of assisting workforce participation and improving the circumstances of children.

Noting that there is now compelling evidence of the importance of the early years of a child’s life in shaping lifelong outcomes, the Minister outlined the Government’s planned development of a national Early Childhood Agenda. Early childhood experiences, along with other key experiences throughout children’s development, affect education, career prospects, health, reliance on welfare, substance misuse and becoming entangled with the criminal justice system.

Working closely with Commonwealth Ministers in other portfolios, other levels of government, research organisations and key groups with an interest in early childhood, the agenda will focus on early child and maternal health, early learning and care, and supporting child-friendly communities.

The Minister said that supporting family resilience through capacity-building investments in early childhood development and youth can be the basis for greater independence in adulthood and a more productive future workforce. “Investing in children now is not only about valuing children but is also about economic development in the future. It is central to future workforce productivity and social wellbeing.”

The Minister reiterated Senator Vanstone’s comments about the Government’s support for a quality child care system that is more responsive to families’ needs. The Government’s focus has been on four key areas – affordability, access, choice and quality. Each has a major bearing on current workforce participation. And, of course, quality of child care has a significant impact on outcomes for children as well as being a high priority for parents.

Minister Anthony also noted that positive outcomes for “at risk” children in particular are linked to quality child care and early childhood education. For at risk children, the Government is putting in place other cooperative initiatives with state and territory governments that will improve the conditions for children and young people in foster care; set up better child abuse prevention strategies, particularly for indigenous communities; and improve child protection after notification of maltreatment.
Marriage, and Family and Society. These themes largely reflect the work currently being undertaken by the Institute and relate directly to government policy and areas of particular interest. Several family policy issues continued to attract a great deal of interest. These issues include the declining fertility rate, balancing work and family, factors affecting child development, and strengthening families and communities.

Both keynote speakers, Dr Catherine Hakim and Professor Bob Gregory, were first-rate.

Dr Hakim is a Senior Research Fellow in the London School of Economics Department of Sociology, and an internationally renowned authority on women’s employment and women’s role in the family. Her paper, Competing family models and competing social policies, discussed the importance of policy-makers and social scientists concerned with family and social policy taking greater account of women’s values, preferences and life goals, and heterogeneity among women in these. (Dr Hakim’s address is published in this edition of Family Matters.)

Professor Gregory, Head of the Economics Program in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University, presented an address on The impact of continued labour market change on families. (See accompanying box for a summary of Professor Gregory’s address.)

The conference concluded with a panel discussion on the topic How can government support families in bringing up their children?

It is not possible in a short overview to provide a summary of all the sessions at the conference, still less a review of all the approximately 140 papers that were delivered (see www.aifs.gov.au/institute/afrsc8/papers.html for copies of many of the papers) and the discussions that followed them. This summary confines itself to identifying several key themes.

Children and parenting issues

Family and social changes, such as the dramatic rise in female employment over the past few decades, have challenged traditional notions of “family” as comprising a breadwinner father and a stay-at-home mother. This has created an interest in the role of non-maternal caregivers in children’s upbringing, and the way in which non-traditional family structures nurture children and support their growth and development.

In keeping with the theme of parenting and child rearing as a central family function during a period of rapid social and family change, several papers discussed child rearing attitudes and practices among fathers and non-maternal caregivers such as grandparents, foster carers and child care professionals, as well as the correlates of such care.

Papers suggested that the time children spend with fathers and in child care is qualitatively different from time in maternal care. In the context of mother care and child care differences, it was suggested that differences in values and practices between adult caretakers could have a negative relationship to children’s wellbeing.

Australian and British studies highlighted key social changes that are transforming the grandparenting role, with anecdotal evidence suggesting an increased reliance on grandparents as a source of routine, non-parental child care. Juxtaposed with this, however, are tensions arising from different attitudes among grandparents towards assuming responsibility for child care, and limited material and practical support to assist grandparents in meeting responsibilities for child raising.

Papers on fathering and grandparenting tended not to address their impact on child outcomes. In contrast, papers related to non-parental child care examined the impacts of particular types of care experiences, such as the use of multiple and changeable child care arrangements, on child outcomes. Curriculum development for children from birth to two years of age, and the recruitment and retention of qualified early childhood workers, were also discussed in terms of what can be done better to ensure children’s non-parental child care experiences are developmentally enhancing.

A number of papers examined the importance of a range of child, family and community factors on specific child outcomes. These papers enhanced understanding about interventions that can help prevent problem outcomes such as antisocial behaviour, offending and mental health problems, and help promote social competency and resiliency in children.

Key messages that came through from this set of papers, particularly those relating to the well-established Australian Temperament Project and the new Growing Up in Australia study, were the importance of a longitudinal design, representative samples, and a multivariate analytic approach in understanding the course of child development.

Finally, there was the question of what the future holds for partnering, child bearing and child rearing. Papers relating to the use of artificial reproduction technologies, lesbian women anticipating and achieving parenthood, suggest that pathways to family formation and concepts of “mother”, “father” and “family” are ever diversifying. However, if the attitudes of the young adults involved in the Australian Temperament Project are anything to go by, aspirations for relationships and family continue to be strong. The challenge is how best to support the broad array of family types in which children grow and develop.

Support for families

An important theme to emerge from reports from longitudinal child outcomes studies was the importance of the early years of development for later life. A related message was that effective investment in the early years can not only give children a happy start to life, but can set the stage for positive development over the life course. This was picked up during the final session of the conference – a panel based around the question “How can government support families in bringing up their children?”

Panelists Professor Peter McDonald, Associate Professor Dorothy Scott, and Professor Frank
A keynote address was given to the 8th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference by Professor R.G. (Bob) Gregory AO, Professor of Economics and Head of the Economics Program at the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra.

Professor Gregory’s address, *The impact of continued labour market change on families*, focused on the relationship between income support payments, employment, and partnering for lone mothers. At the heart of the discussion was the question of duration: For how long are lone mothers reliant on the welfare system and what were the effects of this reliance on their children?

Using Centrelink longitudinal administrative data to examine lone mothers’ benefit histories, Professor Gregory found that between 1995 and 2001 only 16 per cent of lone mothers entering Parenting Payment Single (previously the Sole Parent Pension) in 1995 left the welfare system entirely after one spell. His analyses revealed that, when movements from one payment type to another and movements off and then back onto welfare payments are taken into account, the total amount of time spent in receipt of welfare payments is around 12 years.

About one quarter of the lone parent women moved between the payment for lone mothers (Parenting Payment Single – PPS) and the payment for mothers with a partner (Parenting Payment Partnered – PPP), apparently after moving in with a low-income, usually unemployed man. However, the relationships they form appear to be relatively brief, with most of the women returning to PPS after a short period of time. The implication of this is that, for many lone mothers, partnering within the welfare system is not usually the first step towards leaving income support.

Professor Gregory argued that his findings dramatically change how we should look at lone parents on benefits. If lone mothers are in the

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**Welfare payments, employment and partnering for lone mothers**

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Oberklaid explored the need to resolve issues around the balance between work and family life, to integrate services into local, integrated systems of services for children and their families, to promote quality environments wherever child development takes place (at home or in non-parental child care settings), and to provide earlier identification of, and thus a more timely response to, children at risk of health, development or behavioural problems.

The importance of the non-government sector, informal systems of help, and supportive, child-friendly communities in fostering positive family and child functioning was also highlighted. There were also several suggestions for reorienting financial supports to families that would ensure that benefits are attached to children rather than to their parents or caregivers, and that the level of assistance provided is sufficient to meet the needs of children living in low-income, or work-poor, families.

**Addressing family violence**

The expansion of the Institute’s research program into the area of family violence, particularly through the operation of the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, was reflected in the program. Individual papers explored a range of family violence issues, including: aspects of child protection practice; adult sexual assault by intimate partners; intra-familial homicide; female perpetrators of child abuse; and violence directed at animals. A number of key trends were evident. First, there has been growing recognition that family violence tends to be manifested in several ways within the
one family. That is, there is a link between the different forms of family violence. This is perhaps clearest when looking at the association between different forms of child abuse and domestic violence (that is, the violence between intimate partners). This is an issue that received considerable attention at the conference.

The second broad theme concerned developments in research and practice. Presentations were given on aspects of child protection practice, particularly as it pertained to children living with domestic violence, and child sexual assault. A symposium on the roles and functions of the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People highlighted the use of evidence-based practice to inform the advice provided to government and the professional sector. The session also highlighted a third theme, the growing recognition of the need to engage with

system for 12 years, rather than the two to three that has been argued previously, there is a much greater degree of reliance on welfare payments among this group than had previously been believed.

Professor Gregory presented data on the proportion of lone mothers receiving welfare payments who also have some earnings. For 60 per cent, the PPS provided the only source of income. Less than 30 per cent of lone parents receiving benefits worked part-time, and only 13 per cent of these earned more than $200 a week.

Only a relatively small proportion of lone mothers who leave the income support system are leaving because they have found full-time employment with an income that results in loss of eligibility for benefits. For most lone mothers, finding a job which pays more than the $32,000 cut-off for benefits is quite difficult. The more usual exit route is partnering with a man who worked full-time, and it was the women who worked part-time, who were most likely to meet potential partners with jobs.

Professor Gregory argued, the major reason that partnering did not always lead to long term exits from the welfare system is the increase in joblessness in the male labour market, that is the shortage of eligible employed men. According to Professor Gregory, the longer-term solution to increasing welfare dependency of lone mothers may thus not be making minor changes to the financial incentive to take-up paid employment, but rather changes in the male labour market. He said the focus of the Federal Government’s welfare reform agenda on helping lone parents get back into the workforce would probably help women with older children the most, but that reducing male unemployment would probably have the largest effect.

Professor Gregory’s concluding comment was that the welfare system in Australia should not be thought of as a system which provided insurance in the case of a one-off adverse event: rather, it is a longer-term but dynamic system of support. Lone mothers are continually moving back and forwards across payment types and in and out of part-time jobs while still on income support.
Policy links. Moving well beyond the methodological confusion that was rife in social capital research until recently, the focus of these papers was on exploring which aspects of family life contributed to community participation and trust – and how this link occurs.

A focus on resilience

The change from (purely) preventing risks or social ills towards the creation of family and community capacity (resilience) is now an important trend. The impact of this shift, and some of the challenges for family support work, were explored in a number of sessions.

The Institute’s role in conducting research allied to the Commonwealth’s Stronger Families and Communities Strategy came to the fore via sessions that highlighted the innovative work of the Stronger Families Learning Exchange. A major component of the Learning Exchange is a Training and Support Team of researchers who provide “action research” evaluation support to approximately 40 community development projects, funded under the Strategy’s Stronger Families Fund.

A Stronger Families Learning Exchange symposium outlined how the Commonwealth’s vision of research support for a range of community development projects located across the nation is in the process of being translated by the research team into broader learnings that can inform policy. The specifics of providing action research support were further delineated via the presentation of an action research methodology workshop. This session provided the audience with an opportunity to hear of the research team’s experiences in working with a range of projects within a government bureaucratic context, and to workshop issues of research practice.

Social capital, families and communities

Two sessions at the conference were dedicated to exploring the interaction between family life and community life. This issue reflects a current policy emphasis on social participation, as well as the increasing research recognition that social relationships and community context are important to a range of outcomes for families and individuals.

Beginning with studies that used the “social capital” concept to explore the links between family life and community participation, papers demonstrated the increasing sophistication in conceptualisation, measurement and research-

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has not, in practice, paid much attention to women’s wishes. She outlined the results of the UK Listening to Women research program, a major conclusion of which was that the diversity of women’s lifestyle preferences corresponds to three distinct models of the family, each of them effective and rewarding in different ways for those who choose them. (See Dr Hakim’s paper elsewhere in this edition.)

Several papers discussed the issues families face in reconciling their family and their work commitments and the nature of policies which may ease the time and money pressures faced by families. An innovative feature of several of the papers in this area was the analysis of time use data.

The cost associated with raising children is a vital question for parents and is significant for governments in setting payments to assist families with children and considering child support rules. It is also highly relevant in the context of debates about fertility. Estimates were presented of the costs of raising children in Australia and how these costs vary according to family size, age of children and family income. The conference heard about the results of research on the costs of child care and the level of assistance with these costs provided by the government.

There were several papers on living standards and poverty. Some of these emphasised the role of paid employment in reducing poverty and improving living standards. One paper illustrated the impact of living in low-income families on the lives of children and the ability of children to participate in a range of activities. A feature of this study is that it reported on children’s perceptions of the impact of limited financial resources on their lives, something which has rarely been done in Australia.

The high rates of poverty among lone-mother families formed a major focus. Many commentators saw relatively low rates of employment as the primary factor explaining their financial disadvantage.

In his keynote address, Professor Bob Gregory focused on the relationship between income support payments, employment, and partnering for lone mothers. At the heart of his address was the question of duration. That is, for how long are lone mothers reliant on the welfare system? Professor Gregory presented data showing that there is a much greater degree of long-term reliance on welfare payments among this group than had previously been believed. (See accompanying box for a summary of Professor Gregory’s paper.)

Another paper on lone parents presented research examining the relationship between receipt of income support payments and social disadvantage, including poor mental health, substance misuse, and the experience of traumatic and stressful life events. This research demonstrated that lone mothers in receipt of income support payments are much more likely to face a wide range of multiple disadvantages than are partnered women in receipt of these payments.

Family formation, stability and wellbeing

The importance of family in the lives of adults and children alike represented a clear theme permeating and linking the diverse topics covered in the
improvements that could be implemented to ease the passage of those with mental health problems.

In a very lively and interesting session, various presenters from Western Australia spoke about a number of innovative projects underway, largely aimed at making the Family Court of Western Australia an integrated system. These projects include: the development and evaluation of the Columbus pilot project (a case management system for tracking matters involving allegations of violence and abuse); the development of an extensive referral network and protocols for information sharing between agencies; and the Mums and Dads Forever (Contact Orders Pilot) Program aimed at encouraging cooperative post-separation parenting and reducing litigation over children’s matters (see the account by Paul Murphy and colleagues in the Family Law column in this edition.)

Of interest to many delegates were papers on the need to take account of children’s experiences and views in decisions that affect their lives – particularly decisions on their living arrangements after parental separation. Also of interest was a paper highlighting the importance of including day-only contact in examining patterns of parenting after separation. These data suggest that much more shared parenting occurs than the statistics on overnight stays would suggest.

Sibling relationships are often overlooked as parents adjust to divorce. Research at the University of Queensland identified some of the dynamics of sibling relationships which, during this typically

conference. Dr Catherine Hakim argued that most women want to have and raise a family. Likewise, Professor Peter McDonald pointed out that the family has remained central to most people’s lives, with the strong motivation for intimacy being put under strain by policies that emphasise individualism.

This tension was underlined in a paper that focused on the struggles of young graduates as they pursued stimulating work, while planning to achieve more out of life than a career – most particularly, starting a family and maintaining considerable involvement in their children’s lives. Complementing this work was research based on the Australian Temperament Project which suggested that marriage and family life were very much on the agenda of those in their late teens – an agenda that received strong support from their parents.

Despite the strong motivation for family formation, Australia’s total fertility rate has declined and is now below replacement level. This trend formed the basis of several papers that together highlighted the importance of taking into account forces operating at various levels of society, such as prevailing economic conditions, the socio-economic status and residential location of couples, and the dynamics of the decision making process itself.

A central aspect of the motivation for intimacy is the achievement of a close, supportive relationship with a partner. Themes covered here included factors contributing to: relationship happiness and stability; implications of relationship status and gender for various aspects of life, including occupational status, earnings, domestic labour, and life satisfaction; and the provision of counselling and mediation services for those encountering difficulties in their relationships.

Family transitions and family law

Several new lines of research were presented around the dynamics of parental separation. A scoping study was described that explores the ability of the family law system to respond to people who have mental health issues. Among other things, this study noted the psychological distress that can be generated by being in the system and how existing mental health issues can impact on the way the system is experienced. It suggested a number of
difficult time in children’s lives, can be intense and emotionally-charged.

**Longitudinal data**

Papers based on the ongoing Australian Temperament Project and the Negotiating the Life Course Project underscored the importance of longitudinal research to distinguish between outcomes and their causes and thus to better inform policy.

Two major initiatives in this area received a great deal of attention at the conference: the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey; and the earlier-mentioned Growing Up in Australia survey. Both of these are large-scale national studies funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services.

Although only released in October 2002, data from wave 1 of HILDA formed the basis of several papers on a diverse range of policy-relevant issues, including: marriage, children and subjective well-being; pathways to marriage and marital stability; balancing parenting and work; and patterns of parent-child contact after separation.

While Growing Up in Australia is still in the development phase, papers outlining the nature of this study drew a great deal of interest (see elsewhere in this edition for an overview of this major new study).

In tandem, both surveys herald in a new chapter in social science research in Australia and will provide information of critical importance for advancing the wellbeing of families in this country.

We look forward to presentations based on these data at the Institute’s next national conference.

**The conference evaluated**

The Institute received an almost 20 per cent response rate to the evaluation forms handed out at the conference, with about 40 per cent of these from government and the rest spread evenly across service providers and academia. Of those who submitted evaluations, almost all were presenters as well as delegates.

The overall results are as follows:

- 80 per cent rated the conference organisation as good to excellent;
- 90 per cent rated the quality of presenters as good to excellent;
- 71 per cent rated the quality of research as good to excellent;
- 78 per cent said the balance in coverage of research was good to excellent;
- 53 per cent agreed that the conference met, or exceeded, all their expectations, 32 per cent agreed that it met most of their expectations, and 15 per cent agreed that it met some of their expectations.

The Institute is pleased with the generally very positive results from the evaluations, and will use the data and comments to assist with planning for its next conference.

This overview was prepared by researchers at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
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- an extensive collection of links to useful web sites to assist people working in family studies research and policy and related areas

specialist web sites …
- for the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, Growing Up in Australia, the Australian Temperament Project, and the Stronger Families Learning Exchange

PRODUCTIVE YEAR OF RESEARCH INTERVIEWING

In March 2003, the Institute’s Survey Operations Unit wound up a highly productive year of research interviewing using the Institute’s Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system.

During the year, the team of thirteen experienced interviewers conducted 2500 15-minute surveys, and 1200 35-minute surveys, distributed over five different studies.

- The Child Care Choices Study involved the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Macquarie and Charles Sturt Universities, and the New South Wales Department of Community Services.
- Measuring Social Capital in Families involved Families First, Department of Community Services, New South Wales, and the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- The Lincoln Gerontology Retirement Study was conducted on behalf of La Trobe University.
- The Healthy Behaviours in Older People Study was conducted on behalf of La Trobe University.
- The International Youth Development Study (in conjunction with the University of Washington DC), was carried out on behalf of the Royal Children’s Hospital’s Centre for Adolescent Health in Melbourne.

The interviewers were involved with each of the studies from the outset. They timed questionnaires, provided feedback to researchers on the substance of the scripts (or questionnaires), maintained a dialogue with researchers during the course of the studies, and generally took a keen interest in the progress of the research.

Chris McCarthy, the Institute’s Survey Operations Manager, was responsible for the recruitment, training and management of Operations staff, and she participated in the design, programming and testing of scripts, and the maintenance of the high quality of the data collection. Ross Millward, IT Manager for the Institute, has had overall responsibility for the Survey Operations Unit.

Thanks are due to the interviewers involved in this task: Anna Whithear, Caroline Shaw, Claire Walker, Dion McKewean, Meredith Levi, Ren Adams, Renee Sephton, Tom Fooks, Tom Rossiter, Sally Stewart, Toby Lawrence and Zoe Takacs. The team was also fortunate to have the services of Lan Vuong who did the Vietnamese and Cantonese translations.

INSTITUTE ADDRESS CHANGES FROM org TO gov

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, long-standing 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.
INSTITUTE FAREWELLS DIRECTOR

David Stanton’s decision not to seek reappointment as Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies was a blow to staff at the Institute, but understandable, given that his family lives in Canberra (see Acting Director’s Report, p. 2). Although David joined the Institute at a difficult time (after the sudden death of the previous Director), under his four-year leadership, the Institute’s productivity flourished.

In keeping with his deep and abiding interest in things historical, David placed an emphasis on building on the Institute’s previous achievements in developing its future directions, while at the same time actively encouraging new ideas, initiatives, plans and projects. Having the Institute’s interests always at heart, David took every opportunity to bring the work of the Institute to public attention. He forged many new links and strengthened existing ones. David was extremely interested in and supportive of his staff, and he was excellent company.

It is thus little wonder that staff ignored David’s request for a “no fuss” departure. Indeed, he was given two lively farewells. The first was an informal staff gathering at the end of his last day at the Institute (on 14 January 2003) which continued well into the evening. Then on the occasion of the Institute’s conference dinner (on 13 February 2003), Acting Director Ann Sanson publicly acknowledged his outstanding contribution to the Institute’s progress.

As the Institute enters a new era, with a new (yet-to-be-appointed) Director, David Stanton’s time at the helm is remembered with appreciation and affection.

STRONGER FAMILIES FUND WORKSHOP

A national workshop on action research for Stronger Families Fund projects was hosted in Melbourne from 1-3 April 2003 by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in partnership with the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. The Institute provides a clearinghouse and research training and support for the projects that are using action research to document and evaluate their work with families with children aged up to five years.

The workshop, which brought together more than 100 people from across Australia working with the Stronger Families Fund, provided projects with practice forums and information to assist them in their work. The workshop was interactive in nature, offering opportunities for participants to develop skills in action research and to network with others doing similar work.

Practice forums included: working with government; using action research; involving children and families in the project; developing reference groups; and using reflective techniques in evaluation. Participants were able to visit the Clearinghouse at the Institute as well as community-based organisations in the local area.

It is anticipated that the workshop will form the basis for the next stage of work by the projects, the Department, and the Institute in their work with the Stronger Families Fund.

FAMILY MATTERS IS A REFEREED JOURNAL

Readers are reminded that Family Matters is a fully refereed academic journal, recognised by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) for the purposes of Research Data Collection, and included in the Register of Refereed Journals. Family Matters welcomes submissions by external authors as well as by Institute staff. Acceptance of all research papers is subject to a formal review process. See the Institute’s website for Family Matters author guidelines. Please send submissions to the editor: email meredith.michie@aifs.gov.au
The Australian Institute of Family Studies was represented at a recent international forum – the International Workshop on Family, Gender and Health – hosted by Vietnam’s Centre for Family and Women Studies to celebrate its 15th Anniversary. The Centre is one of a number of specialist research centres that make up Vietnam’s National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities.

The three-day workshop, held in Hanoi last December 2002, attracted more than 100 invited participants from Vietnam’s institutes, research centres and government agencies; international funding bodies; member organisations of the Vietnam Network for Women’s Development; and representatives of international and foreign organisations from Thailand, Sweden, Korea, India, Japan, the United States, Uzbekistan, Laos, Singapore and Australia. Also present was the United Nations Development Program Representative in Vietnam, Jordan Ryan (from Australia).

The conference was divided into four main sessions attended by all delegates. These were: Gender, family, and health; Gender and population; Gender theories and development; and Using advanced technology in exploring and disseminating information on family, gender and health.

Population strategy was the focus of the second session. Vietnam’s population is 76.3 million. Its current relatively low birthrate of 2.3 is due to recent population control policies, although large families are still common in rural areas. The aim in Vietnam is zero population growth by 2015. In discussion following the papers, smaller families were seen as a way of improving living standards and services, and the education of mothers was identified as essential for child development.

In the fourth session, Deborah Whithear, the Institute’s Information Development and Web Manager, presented a paper on using the Internet to disseminate information, which highlighted successful strategies developed and used by the Institute over the years.

Some of the other contributions over the three days examined the impact of Vietnam’s new market economy on health care, reproductive health and education for young women, medical services for the poor, and domestic violence and women’s health.

Contributions from other countries included social change and family support systems in Japan, adolescent reproductive health in Thailand, gender and health issues in India, population and family policies in Singapore, and family and gender in Korea.

According to Justice John Fogarty, writing in an earlier Family Matters (no. 60, 2000), the Family Law Council and the Australian Institute of Family Studies are “two outstanding success stories” emanating from the Family Law Act 1975. Justice Fogarty is in a good position to comment, having been a founding Judge of the Family Court of Australia, a former Chair of the Family Law Council, and a former Presiding Member of the Institute’s Board of Management.

According to Justice Fogarty, from their inception, both organisations established themselves as key independent bodies contributing to family policy in Australia. The Family Law Council has been the author of many major reforms in family law, while the Institute quickly became Australia’s main centre for family research.

The Institute and the Council have continued to maintain close links over the decades, with one example being the representation of the Institute as an observer on the Council. Ruth Weston, a Principal Research Fellow heading the Institute’s Family and Marriage research program, currently acts in this role.
Family Matters Reader Survey

Family Matters is published three times a year by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS). We invite readers to help us plan for future issues by sending us your views about Family Matters.

1. How did you first find out about Family Matters?
   - At work?
   - Word of mouth?
   - Received flyer?
   - AIFS website?
   - AIFS conference?
   - Received complimentary copy?
   - Read about it?
   - Referred to by teacher/lecturer?

2. How much of Family Matters would you normally read?
   - All/most of it
   - Some of it
   - Very little of it

3. How interesting do you find each of the following?

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4. What do you think about the general style of research articles?
   - Too academic/technical
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   - Too long
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   - Too short

5. What do you think about the overall size (number of pages) of Family Matters?
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Indexing and abstracting services have long been the means of monitoring the literature of a discipline and have thus been the foundation tool for researchers, students, professionals and the like. Australian Family & Society Abstracts, the database initiated by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in 1984, now offers more than 50,000 citations and abstracts, and is the key to the social science literature of Australian family studies.

Drawing predominantly on the disciplines of sociology, psychology and demography, the database also covers family law and social issues that impact on the family, such as economic and employment matters, health sciences, and government policies. Journal articles make up 50 per cent of documents indexed, but the database reaches more broadly to include research papers and reports, government documents, and to the more general literature of the field, such as conference papers.

In 2003, a new joint initiative of RMIT Publishing and the Australian Institute of Family Studies will see these numbers greatly increase as subscribers will be offered direct access to many of the previously unavailable journal articles indexed in the database. Negotiations with journal publishers regarding copyright licences are underway.

More information about Australian Family & Society Abstracts database is available on the Institute’s website at: www.aifs.gov.au/institute/info/infodev.html#afsa

NON-PARENTAL CHILD CARE WORKSHOP

On 7 March 2003, representatives from the Australian Institute of Family Studies were among a group of academics, researchers and senior Commonwealth public servants who attended a closed workshop about the impact of non-parental child care on children. The workshop, held in Canberra, was organised by the Hon Larry Anthony MP, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The purpose of the workshop was to debate the evidence concerning the impact of formal child care experiences on children, to examine the need for further Australian research, and to identify priorities for policy in this area.

To generate discussion on these matters, findings from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care, the Cost, Quality and Outcomes Study, and evaluations of Early Head Start were presented. This was followed by a presentation that compared child care use in Australia and the United States to better understand the relevance of American child care research in the Australian context.

HILDA CONFERENCE 2003

Two Australian Institute of Family Studies researchers were recently invited to present papers at the inaugural Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey Conference in Melbourne. The first wave of the survey was conducted in the second half of 2001 with information being collected from 7682 households.

The one-day conference was held on 13 March 2003 at the Melbourne Business School, University of Melbourne. Organised by the Department of Family and Community Services and the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, the conference showcased the immense research and policy potential of the HILDA data. Some 150 delegates from around Australia attended the conference, with papers given by several prominent international and Australian experts on social policy issues.

International speakers included: Professor Stephen Jenkins (University of Essex, UK) who provided a convincing outline of the benefits of longitudinal data for policy development; and Professor Robert Drago (Pennsylvania State University) who focused on working time preferences. Dr John Haisken-DeNew (DIW Berlin) and Professor Dan Hamermesh (University of Texas) both highlighted the usefulness of HILDA internationally by comparing these data with overseas trends regarding life satisfaction and time stress respectively.

Papers were presented by Institute researchers Bruce Smyth, on parent–child contact, and Ruth Weston (who is also a member of the HILDA design team), on cohabitation and marital stability. Other presentations demonstrated the capacity of HILDA data to inform a wide range of issues including housing tenure aspirations and household formation, housing leverage, health and early retirement, partnering and fertility patterns, and experiences of the unemployed.

A User Workshop held the following day (14 March) provided guided supervision and “hands-on” experience with the HILDA data. A Roundtable discussion focusing on design and content issues to be confronted in future waves was also held on 14 March.
Parents’ decisions about child care

Australian Institute of Family Studies researchers Sarah Wise, a Principal Research Fellow, and Associate Professor Ann Sanson, Acting Director, presented a seminar on the Child Care Choices Study – a new longitudinal study examining the extent of multiple and changeable child care across different age groups, and parents’ reasons for their child care decisions. The study is a collaborative project undertaken by Macquarie University, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Charles Sturt University, and the New South Wales Office of Child Care. The seminar described the rationale for and design of the study and reported on the preliminary sample of 363 children aged between 0 and 4 years. Initial analyses show that use of multicare is common among families with children in child care, and that parents are generally satisfied with these arrangements.

Fragile families and child wellbeing

Professor Irwin Garfinkel, Columbia University School of Social Work, and Professor Sara McLanahan, Princeton University, presented a seminar on data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. This is a United States-based longitudinal study focusing on parents of children born between 1998 and 2000. It was designed to examine parental relationship outcomes and child wellbeing in families with unmarried parents. Interviews were carried out with mothers and fathers shortly after the birth of their child and then at the ages of one, three, and five. Preliminary findings show that at the time of birth, unmarried parents have high hopes for the future of their relationships and of paternal contact with the child. However, results from the one year follow-up show that for many, these hopes don’t eventuate. It appears that unmarried parents face many barriers to forming stable unions, including low human capital, prior commitments, and policies that discourage marriage.

Childhood poverty and social exclusion

Dr Tess Ridge, Research Officer from the Department of Social and Policy Sciences at the University of Bath, presented a seminar on her recent qualitative child-centred study that explored the everyday lives of children living in low-income families in the United Kingdom. The study found that children from low-income families experience high levels of social isolation and academic disadvantage, but often hide from their parents these experiences and their knowledge of their state of poverty. Critical concerns were raised regarding policy and practice related to the quality of low-income children’s economic, social, academic and familial lives. Also highlighted was the necessity to have a deeper understanding of the childhood experience of poverty in order for successful policies for the eradication of childhood poverty to be developed.

Role of personal attributes among at-risk children

Diana Smart, a Psychologist and Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, presented a seminar based on findings from the Australian Temperament Project – a longitudinal, community-based study of 2443 Victorian families, which has followed children’s psychological development from infancy to young adulthood. Thirteen waves of data from parents, teachers and children have been collected by mail surveys. “At-risk” children were identified at 11-12 years, and those who did not engage in later antisocial behaviour (resilient group) were compared to those who did (antisocial group). The seminar explored the individual, family and environmental strengths which assist young people to withstand high levels of “risk” and go on to lead productive and law-abiding lives. This is a collaborative project with Crime Prevention Victoria.
Many families and children face increased uncertainty and insecurity as a result of radical economic and social changes. The impacts are particularly experienced in the nature of work and family life and have implications for the emotional attachments and the experience of trust of all family members, especially children.

Australian governments commit themselves to achieve positive long-term outcomes for children. However, risk management approaches undermine the capacity of services to provide secure and supportive relationships, so important to troubled families and children. An alternative approach is proposed.

Uncertainty, risk and children’s futures

“The competitive management of uncertainty, as it thrusts the burden of adjusting to uncertainties on to the weakest, impoverishes the emotional quality of their lives and provokes responses which only reinforce their insecurity and deprivation.”

– Marris 1996a: 197.

In this opinion piece we argue that, as the Western world undergoes a period of profound economic and social change, insufficient attention is being paid to how that change, and the consequential risks and uncertainties that are generated, could be managed by governments to strengthen and protect families.

We maintain that the material insecurities associated with change are likely to undermine the strength of relationships, so important to family stability and to children’s development. We also argue that the way family and children’s services are funded and delivered means that these problems of uncertainty and relationship instability are compounded.

While vulnerable families have always been subject to both risk and uncertainty, the modern welfare state softened their impacts in the interests of stability, equity and optimising the futures for children. We contend that, in a period of profound change, the management of risk currently delivers certainty to those with social power and secure in their inclusion, at the expense of those unable to control their own participation in today’s economy (Taylor-Gooby 2000). This distribution of risk and uncertainty is of particular importance to parenting, which more than ever is a long-term project, requiring a firm and secure foundation in the present (Bourdieu 1998, cited by Bauman 2002: 177).

In terms of outcomes, these management processes result in policy shifts from collectivising the response to uncertainty to relocating it within families, individuals and localities; from solving social problems to managing them; and from program approaches to social problems based on treatment to approaches based on harm minimisation (Beck 1992; Rose 1999; Garland 2001). And at the level of practice, governments are adopting radically different approaches to the funding and delivery of services, including the transfer of the responsibility for the delivery of services to contracted providers. All these changes have implications for the distribution of risk.

This paper examines the forces that generate risks, and their differential effects on families – economically and socially. It also focuses on the risk management practices of governments at the level of service delivery, particularly through the contracting of services for vulnerable families and children. It suggests that while these approaches are likely to reduce the exposure to risk of governments and their administering agencies, they are increasing the uncertainty of families who are confronting contemporary change. It then proposes changes in the policies and practice of government, which would address this inequitable and destructive distribution of risk.

Forces of uncertainty, control of risk, and their impacts on families

Giddens (2001) identifies three great changes at the end of the 20th century that fuelled both increased uncertainty and opportunity. These are globalisation, the knowledge economy, and the rise of individualism. In many countries, particularly English-speaking countries, a dominant response has been to adopt neo-liberal strategies with a greater reliance on the market, thereby shifting the risks and uncertainties generated by these
Globalisation refers to increased economic, cultural and social interaction between countries. Such interaction is not new, but in combination with the knowledge economy and neo-liberalism, we now have a form of economic globalisation that is more intense and extensive. Alongside economic globalisation is greater individualisation or “reflexivity” (Jacobs 2001; Giddens 2001; Taylor-Gooby 2000) – meaning a greater focus on personal autonomy and personal choice. Its impact is also uneven, with general uncertainty increased along with a lack of trust in institutions and experts (Wheelcock 2001), but with a greater vulnerability for those individuals who have less power to make their own way (Taylor-Gooby 2000).

The interactive forces of globalisation, the knowledge economy and economic change (the post-industrial economy), individualisation, and neo-liberalism, are creating profound insecurities in the lives and prospects of many families and children, principally because they are changing the nature of the labour market and the nature of family life.

The labour market position of low-skilled people has declined worldwide, the male breadwinner model has been undermined by male unemployment and increased female labour market participation, and family formation and structure have also changed significantly (Esping-Andersen 2001; Wheelock 2001). In Australia, as elsewhere, the results are the uncertainties and inequalities that arise from high levels of unemployment, more jobless families alongside two-earner households, a growth in separation, divorce and sole-parent families, housing difficulties, family income inequality, and continuing (if not increased) levels of child poverty.

Governments have increasingly responded to these intractable problems in ways that have limited their exposure to the risks of failure and of excessive cost burdens – for example, the abandonment of full employment as an objective and a responsibility. And so “the upshot is that new risks and resource needs are bundling heavily on youth and in child families . . . presently, both markets and families create widespread insecurity, precariousness, and often social exclusion” (Esping-Andersen 2001: 135).

For parents and children, unemployment, joblessness and poverty are often accompanied by the uncertainties that arise from disrupted relationships, poorer health, financial difficulties and stress, and the sense that it is not possible to plan for the future (McClelland 2000). At June 2000, 14 per cent of dependent children in Australia were in jobless families (ABS 2001). Children are much more likely to experience poverty when their parents do not have paid work (McClelland 2000). The increase in sole-parent households has also contributed to child poverty. The proportion of Australian families with a dependent child aged 0-14 years headed by a lone parent, increased from 13.1 per cent in 1986 to 21.4 per cent in 2001 (Birrell et al. 2002).

For low-skilled parents, uncertainty does not necessarily end with a job. The nature of the labour market is changing. During the 1990s, job growth in Australia was almost entirely in part-time employment for low-skilled, low-paid work (Borland et al. 2001). There are now more casual jobs and more people who are underemployed than previously. Many parents now have precarious work, and are not in secure full-time employment.

These changes are related to a move away from the standard pattern of full-time, full-year employment for males, characteristic of the post World War II era, and which were critical to the experience of earnings security for families. They have also contributed to an increase in housing insecurity which “has become yet another ‘risk’ shouldered by individuals and families” (Wulff 2001: 57). There is an increasing disconnection of home ownership from other life course events and a decline in home purchase for couples aged less than 35 years with children. Governments are moving from supporting low-income families’ housing through public housing, towards support through the more insecure private rental market, and there is an increase in homelessness affecting families with children (Wulff 2001; Burke 1998). The security of the home is very important in our overall concept of security, especially for children (Woods 1999).

For children where both parents work, time with parents may be more uncertain. Where families have two earners, time pressures are likely to present a caring deficit (Wheelock 1999). The increase in paid work by mothers has not been accompanied by a commensurate increase in household work by fathers, and mothers are likely to be carrying a double load. Fathers who work full-time are also likely to be working longer hours than before. These pressures may be more acute in low-skilled, low-wage households where parents do not have the labour market power to obtain the benefits of family-friendly work practices (Dean and Shar 2002; Gray and Tudball 2002). For families where low-skilled fathers cannot obtain work, this is not translating to their return to nurturing, but is contributing to depression and family discord (McClelland 2000).

Overall, therefore, more “dimensions of life are subject to uncertainty and choice” (Jacobs 1999: 325), and the “family would appear to be less a haven of ‘affective security’ and more, as old securities diminish and new insecurities arise, a site for the negotiation and creation of risk” (Simpson 1999: 121). But the impact is unequal, bearing most heavily on those vulnerable families most affected by unemployment, joblessness or precarious work, and less on families where parents are highly skilled, likely to have well-paid jobs and the income to enable them to exercise choice and control, and likely to perceive risks as “opportunities”.

What risk management and new business rules mean for services

For many children and families, risk and uncertainty are further compounded by changes to the way services are delivered. Governments have sought to increase their certainty through radically transformed
business practices. Competition policies, contract-
ing out services, and managerialism have driven the
“reinventing of government” (Osborne and Gaebler
1993) in order to deliver both ideological goals and the
reduction of governments’ exposure to risk.

Changes to the ways governments manage services in
Australia – introduced in the name of efficiency,
accountability and improved choice for service users
– have contributed to fragmentation, and narrow and
tightly targeted service models. These outcomes are
not surprising; they were intended. In the mid-1990s,
the Victorian Department of Health and Community
Services (DH&CS) issued guidelines for “output-
based” funding, which specified that “the purpose
of the service definition is to narrow the focus of the
service being purchased and separate it from other
services” (Kettner and Martin 1985, cited in DH&CS
undated: 13). The result for many vulnerable families
and children has been increased uncertainty through
multiple short-term interventions, multiple
providers, and constantly changing front-line work-
ers (Victorian Parliament 2002).

In Victoria, the Australian state that led the way in
neo-liberal reform in the early 1990s, the changes to
the operations of government were encapsulated in
the “new business rules”, which transformed their
relationships with providers, service users and other
key stakeholders. This term became popular in the
human services portfolio of that state, as it captured
the radical nature of the changes in the practices of
the purchasing departments. The thematic, complex
and long-term elements of health, community and
family services had to be subjugated to an economic,
market-based logic, which required the precise defi-
nition of products, optimal demarcation of services,
delivery in compressed time, and the enumeration of
these services and products for accountability pur-
poses (Victorian Department of Treasury and
Finance 1995). Contracts have been the principal
vehicle for asserting this economic logic over services
for families.

In health and community care, the introduction of
casemix was the flagship and the template, demon-
strating how the process of enumeration, through the
identification and measurement of an intervention or
episode of service, could rein in the opaque and pro-
prietary expertise of the clinicians. The considerable
benefits to the purchaser included greater certainty
due to clear and precise output definition, and cost
containment by limiting the scope and timeframe of
the service. Further, transactions were more trans-
parent, productivity could be measured, and
efficiency improved. Accountability requirements of
providers were increased, and their power reduced.
Such business practices were well suited to the needs
of a government attempting to reduce the influence
that professionals and providers had over volatile and
sensitive services, and reduce their exposure to risks.

The new business rules delivered certainty and pred-
icability in the delivery of short-term, technical and
clinical services. The logic of casemix favours tangi-
bile, objective, and concrete products, which can be
counted and tracked. This results in certainties,
which governments and the market require.

The implications of these business strategies and their
effects on service users have been the focus of signifi-
cant policy and program reviews. As recently as 2002
the Victorian Parliament, through its Public Accounts
and Estimates Committee, was strongly recommend-
ing a “review of the suitability of the output-based
purchasing model for funding community, health and
welfare services”, particularly for “clients with varying
complexities of need and evolving needs over time”,
and to more effectively “accommodate preventative as
well as direct service provision” (2002: 175-6). Evi-
dence given to the Committee was highly critical of
the business rules and output-based funding, which
providers argued “places the focus of a service on
client throughput rather that on outcomes for clients”
(2002: 20). The Committee recognised that the con-
struction of tightly defined episodes or interventions
is problematic in services where outcomes are depend-
ent on relationships rather than technical procedures
or concrete products.

The investigation of the NSW Commission for Chil-
dren and Young People (2002), Children with no one
to turn to, concluded that, above all else, relation-
ships were the most important outcome of services
for children. A number of other major policy reviews
identified problems with downgrading of relation-
ships and “throughput models” of service delivery in
the era of contractualism. These include the NSW
Community Services Commission’s report on the
experiences of children and young people in foster
care (2000), the Victorian Community Care Review
(Carter 2000), and the Victorian Integrated Child
Protection Strategy (DIIS 2002). Alongside these
reports is the growing body of analysis and evidence,
which supports the importance of key relationships
and connections, for the security of families and the
development of children (Fuller 1998; Marris 1996b;
Simpson 1999).

In summary, the application of these risk manage-
ment business strategies to family and children’s
services has largely failed, for two major reasons.

First, these services are based on relationships, not
transactions or clinical interventions. For children
and parents, certainty is based on trusting relation-
ships and the experience of attachment (Marris
1996b). Multiple and compressed interventions pro-
vided by different services and workers, even those
judged to be of high quality, do not meet children’s
need for security based on trusting and continuing
relationships. The business rules and, in particular,
output-based funding as currently practiced, rarely
supports or even recognises trusting relationships as
the outcomes required for children’s experience of
attachment, or the strengthening of families (NSW
Commission for Children and Young People 2002;
NSW Community Services Commission 2000; Victo-
rian Parliament 2002).

Second, for services aiming to strengthen enduring
and secure relationships, the “outputs” required are
relationships built over time. The experience of
attachment and the development of trust cannot be
achieved within short-term interventions. However,
the logic of the business rules almost always favours
“episodes”, focusing on the visit, the intervention, or
the critical incident. These interventions deal with time by compressing it into constructed units and packages. The effect is to fracture relationships rather than sustain them.

**Improving economic and social certainty for families**

Significant changes to the risk management practices of government are needed to reduce the impacts of uncertainty on families and children. This applies both to the management of the significant forces of globalisation, economic change and individualism, and to the management of child and family services.

How can the forces of change be better managed? And how can the management of child and family services be improved?

**Managing change**

The forces of significant change will continue to exert a strong influence for the foreseeable future. However, improved management is needed, especially by governments who need to take more responsibility, and bear more of the risks, for dealing with intractable problems such as unemployment and poverty. How to do this is the subject of continuing and important debates. There is general agreement, however, that we cannot return to the securities of past arrangements – either economic or social (and this includes the conventional family) (Esping-Andersen 2001; Saunders 2002; Carney and Ramia 2002). We will need a different welfare state configuration with changes to the roles and contributions of governments, families, markets and community organisations.

In Australia, one such configuration has been coined “the new social settlement” (O'Donnell and Hancock 2000: 7). It entails the search “for an acceptable and achievable blend between the old ideas of social citizenship and the framework established by new welfare” (Carney and Ramia 2002: 145). And it is generally accepted that this blend “must thus involve theorising, designing and implementing policies that draw on new ideas that span the traditional left–right divide. There is no going back to a bureaucratic model of standardised state provision because it is not possible to unravel the choices and market mechanisms that are now intertwined in the social fabric.” (Saunders 2002: 10)

For children and families in Australia, whatever the configuration of the new social settlement, the earlier analysis about the impacts of change on families points to a number of fundamental areas that need attention. These areas include better employment outcomes, housing security, minimum income guarantees, and a rebalancing of the household economy.

We need improved employment outcomes, especially the generation of more jobs, so that families with children have the option of having at least one parent in paid work or, in many cases, two parents, as is increasingly required for family economic security (Esping-Andersen 2001). Housing security requires an increased supply of low-cost, secure housing in areas of employment opportunities, in “ways that offer security of tenure and the personal freedom associated with ownership” (Wulff 2001: 63). Further, a minimum income guarantee for families with children would provide the safety net to protect children from poverty.

Rebalancing the household economy requires action to allow parents to combine paid work and family responsibilities. Here, the challenge is to alleviate the difficult choices faced, particularly by women, between work participation and caring. This means improving the access by low-income families to family-friendly work practices (including maternity and parental leave arrangements) and affordable child care, continued and improved income support for caring of young children at home, and reducing the gender division of unpaid, caring work (Gray and Stanton 2002).

**For parents and children, unemployment, joblessness and poverty are often accompanied by the uncertainties that arise from disrupted relationships, poorer health, financial difficulties and stress, and the sense that it is not possible to plan for the future.**

Action in these four areas – generating jobs, improving housing supply, ensuring a minimum income, and balancing work and family – are the basic requirements for providing social and economic certainty for families. But governments’ sense of responsibility (and capacity) for achieving these things is limited by their approaches to risk and uncertainty. The old social settlement was marked by the preparedness of governments to commit to full employment, to undertake a new and bold approach to housing families, and to develop new payments for families at risk. The new social settlement must be marked by a similar commitment, even if it needs to be achieved in a less bureaucratic way, that is more responsive to different needs, and capable of working in partnerships with business and the community.
Improving certainty through service delivery

Changes designed to deliver greater economic and social certainty such as those outlined above need to be complemented with changes to the way that services are delivered to troubled families. This means redesigning contracts so that their primary focus is the delivery of long-term secure relationships for children, within their families, substitute families, and supportive communities. It is in the realm of relationships that governments and service providers have opportunities to improve children’s experience of security and attachment. While contracts based on interventions are the vehicles preferred by the market for defining and delivery of personal services, it is contracts based on relationships that challenge the current distribution of risk between families, providers and purchasers.

The role of relationships in the experience of care has been missing in public policy since the introduction of the contract as the principal vehicle for implementing government policy and managing risk. George Soros (2002) has observed: “Lasting relationships have been replaced by individual transactions. A transactional society undermines social values and loosens moral constraints. Social values express a concern for others. But a transaction economy is anything but a community.”

In their work on relationship-based social policy, Henderson and Forbat (2002) point out that even in the realm of informal care within the family “the importance of the interpersonal or relational component of care exchanges is not an understanding that is woven through policy” (p. 677). The feminist understanding of care as “emotional labour”, essentially constructed and “subsumed” within the distinctive meaning of relationships (p. 684), is the essential element of support programs for families and substitute care for children.

Services working to address the consequences of uncertainty in the lives of families and children must be able to deliver certainty in relationships if they are to be part of the solution rather than the problem. Most providers do in fact struggle to build relationships of trust and certainty. But in doing so, they continually confront the limitations imposed by a market logic which, eschewing dependency, always favours short-term contracts for short-term interventions.

While Australian state governments commit themselves in principle to achieve long-term outcomes for children, appropriate strategies to operationalise these commitments are largely absent (Wise 1999). Such strategies would involve systems for purchasing services that valued and delivered continuing and secure relationships to families and children. They would require bi-partisan political agreements to safeguard long-term support of families in local communities, and secure continuing relationships for children in out of home care. The significance of these objectives for the futures of children transcends marginal political differences and the reluctance of risk adverse governments to enter long-term agreements.

Long-term contracts would be a significant vehicle for improving the commitment, security and confidence of providers working to support and strengthen vulnerable families. In addition, long-term contracts would enhance their readiness to invest in local community networks and partnerships. Stronger communities are those where local relationships are based on trust, and trust can only be built on the basis of actions and communications, which take place over time (Cox and Caldwell 2000).

Long-term relationship-based contracts would require new performance measures to drive a radically different approach and to meet appropriate accountability requirements. Production and turnover figures based on short time frames must give way to the targets of continuity, persistence and the preservation of relationships within families, between family members and local services, and between providers and their local communities.

Rather than being rewarded for increased throughput, the casualisation of their workers, and early discharge or closure, providers would be supported for practices which foster staff retention, protect staff from the stressful effects of intensive relationship-based work, and reward innovation in continuity rather than rapid discharge and closure. Unit costs for relationship-based contracts would be higher and require a greater commitment to family support services from governments over the long term.

However, this increase in expenditure must be seen in the context of the costs now arising from existing policy failure, and the futility of short-term interventions for families who are bearing the greater burden of uncertainty (National Crime Prevention 1999; FaCS 2000; Tomison and Poole 2000).

Conclusion

The central proposition of this paper is that there is now an unfair and untenable re-distribution of risk to vulnerable families and children (Marris 1996; Culpitt 1999). This problem arises from governments’ responses to the forces of globalisation and change at the levels of both their policies and business practices. In particular, risk management policies in the sectors of employment, income and housing are compounded by management or business practices that favour short-term, fragmentary and emergency interventions and services. Increasingly it is assumed that the community will fill in the gaps (FaCS 1999, cited in Cox and Caldwell 2000).

The outcomes for vulnerable families include not only reduced participation in the economy and greater insecurity, but also the experience of services which fail to support relationships based on continuity and trust. As Cox and Caldwell (2000) point out, the processes of contracting are directed to issues of price and outputs, not the quality of relationships (p. 68). Further, fostering the conditions that strengthen families are not compatible with the prevailing orthodoxy of short-term, instrumental and fragmented interventions (p. 43).

There is increasing recognition of the damaging effects of these policies and practices for the attachments, security and long-term relationships of

This paper argues that governments have a clear responsibility to address the distribution of risk and take appropriate action to enhance rather than diminish opportunities for secure and trusting relationships. But as stated by Culpitt (1999: 4), the prevailing unfair distribution of uncertainty to those most vulnerable to its impacts will only be changed if governments are prepared to identify the moral cause of justice as more important than the minimising of their own risk.

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The Columbus Pilot project was developed by the Family Court of Western Australia to assist, enable, and encourage separated parents to acknowledge the debilitating effects of continuing conflict, violence or abusive behaviour, and to encourage couples to resolve their differences without recourse to prolonged litigation in the Family Court.

The Columbus Pilot
Catalyst for an emerging model of an integrated Family Court system in Western Australia

PAUL MURPHY, PAUL KERIN AND LISBETH PIKE

In July 2001 the Family Court of Western Australia in Perth commenced an innovative pilot project to individually case manage matters involving allegations of spousal violence, child abuse or sexual abuse, and family violence where there were significant risk issues. The Columbus Pilot project has acted as a catalyst for a number of changes as both the judicial officers and counselling service staff developed new skills and knowledge in this very difficult area of family litigation and dispute resolution.

Over the past 18 months there has been a gradual integration of various external support services and the Columbus process, with the result that a potential model of an integrated Family Court system is beginning to emerge. This article provides an overview of some of these developments and presents some ideas for future developments.

What is Columbus?

The Columbus Pilot project was developed by the Family Court of Western Australia to assist, enable, and encourage separated parents to acknowledge the debilitating effects of continuing conflict, violence or abusive behaviour, and to encourage couples to resolve their differences without recourse to prolonged litigation in the Family Court.

Columbus has extended the concept of differential case management inherent in the earlier Project Magellan (Brown, Sheehan, Frederico and Hewitt 2001). Magellan focused on matters involving child abuse and child sexual abuse whereas Columbus also includes cases where there have been allegations of domestic violence and family violence where there are risk issues in respect of the children.

All matters involving such allegations were referred to the Director of Family Court Counselling for assessment of the presenting risk factors and other selection criteria (for instance, the Columbus Pilot was limited to couples living in the Perth metropolitan area where the various support services were available, and to those who had not been engaged in previous litigation). In order to meet the criteria for early intervention, the ability to schedule a Columbus Conference within three weeks of the first court event was also a selection criteria: matters not included in the Pilot continued to be monitored as the “Control Group”.

Other distinctive features of Columbus are:

• cases are individually managed (not just fast tracked) through a series of family conferences which are jointly chaired by a designated Registrar and a Family Court Counsellor until either a stable, safe contact regime is established or the matter is progressed through the general court system;

• the inclusion of referrals to therapeutic services and education programs as part of the conference process;

• the proceedings of conferences are confidential from the Court and so are not admissible in evidence, thereby providing the potential to explore issues (especially disclosures of violence or abuse) and to discuss options for managing the situation in both the short and longer term without prejudice to either party; and

• the presiding Columbus Conference Registrar is disqualified from involvement in a Columbus matter that is subsequently referred back to the Family Court process.
The adversarial context

In its advice to the Australian Federal Parliament in 1974 on the ramifications of establishing a separate Family Court in Australia, the Standing Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs conceived the new system with its integral counselling services as a “helping court” (SCCLA 1974: 56). Despite the original intention that the Family Court should operate “without undue formality”, proceedings have tended to become increasingly formalised, not only as a way of dealing with the intense emotion that is so often present but also to imbue an air of authority (Fogarty 2001: 97).

There has been increasing acknowledgement that the adversarial framework so familiar to the legal profession (and which has developed over the past 25 years in the Family Court in Australia) is not conducive to cooperative post-separation parenting relationships, and thus not in the child’s best interests (Attorney General’s Department 2001; FLPAG 2001).

An alternative view advocates a broader and more comprehensive approach to the administration of family law. Such an approach involves the use of the “social sciences” (sociologists, psychiatrists, social workers, psychologists, marriage and family counsellors) to examine the impact of legislation, legal procedure, and the influence that legal actors (judges, magistrates, registrars, child separate representatives, and legal practitioners) have on the mental and physical health of the people whom they purport to represent or assist (Cooper 1998; Tesler 1999; Winick 1997).

This collaborative approach and its inherent healing effects is conceptualised as “therapeutic jurisprudence” whereby the legal (Family Court) system itself becomes part of the healing and personal growth process required to counter the disillusionment and bewilderment which are common outcomes of relationship breakdown (Allan 2001). Therapeutic jurisprudence represents a return to the original idealised concept of the “helping court” advocated during the formation of the Family Court.

Notwithstanding the changes in terminology of the Family Law Reform Act 1995, the emotion and potential for conflict remain as parents adjust to their new post-separation roles and responsibilities (Funder and Smyth 1996; Harrison 1999). The Reform Act also envisaged a degree of cooperation and communication between separated or divorced parents which, if it had existed, would possibly not have resulted in the parents separating in the first place (Campbell and Pike 1998; Harrison 1999).

It is this continuing parental conflict and inability to communicate which is often expressed in repeated reliance on the Family Court to adjudicate on seemingly simple parenting or administrative issues (such as variations in contact times, or liability to provide transport for contact visits). These factors are complicated when there is evidence, or allegations, of spousal (domestic) violence, child abuse, child sexual abuse, or family violence that raise concerns for the safety of children.

A long-term outcome of the Columbus project may be an improved ability for the parents either to negotiate the myriad of changes and issues which will inevitably arise as the children grow and mature, or at least to know how to seek assistance. This approach, together with relevant alternative avenues for dispute resolution, and an emerging suite of support and education programs, is consistent with the notion that the Family Court system can become an agent for therapeutic jurisprudence.

An emerging model of an integrated system

As a result of the development of Columbus, the various sectors of the family law system in Western Australia are now working more closely together.

The concept of an integrated Family Court system is not new and many jurisdictions have struggled with the inherent complexities and implications of moving too far from the procedures which have developed over the past 25 years (Oregon Judicial Department 2002; Rhoades 2002; Williams 2002). However, writers such as Geraghty and Mlyniec (2002) have also urged that enthusiasm for change must be tempered with caution.

Experience in Perth over the two years of the Columbus project confirms both of these views but also highlights the possibilities for positive change when the Family Court is able to access a range of external services in direct support of its aim to provide better services to separating parents and better outcomes for their children.

There are three components in the Family Court system that is emerging in Perth. These are: the Family Court of Western Australia, including the Columbus Pilot project (described above); the Legal Aid Commission and their Alternative Dispute Resolution program; and various government and non-government support and education programs, and family law networks.

Family Court of Western Australia

The first component of an integrated system is the Family Court of Western Australia. This was established in 1976 as an independent State-based Family Court with its own legislative framework, the Family Court Act, that mirrors the Family Law Act that applies to the rest of the country.

The only court Registry is in Perth. There are 13 judicial officers – five Judges and seven Magistrates who are also appointed as Registrars. The judiciary are supported by 40 administrative staff and 11 Court Counsellors. The jurisdiction covers an area almost five times the size of France, and a population of about two million people. At least one judicial officer and a counsellor are “on circuit” to one of six regional centres throughout the year.

The Court opens about 7,000 new files annually. About 3,500 applications and responses are filed annually for various Orders in respect of children’s issues (primarily contact and residency). Most of these litigants are also seen by the Family Court Counselling Service, many on the day of their first Court appearance (FCGS 2002).

Legal Aid Commission

The second component of an integrated Family Court system is the Legal Aid Commission of Western Australia.

There are two aspects to the Legal Aid Commission’s position in the model. The first aspect is that the Director of Legal Aid undertook to provide a Separate
The Child Representative has become an increasingly important participant in the Columbus conferencing process to the extent that they are often acting as the “broker” in arranging referrals to support services. The Legal Aid Commission is also responsible for funding the appointment of Court Experts to report on family dynamics as requested by the Court. Preliminary data in the cost/outcome analysis in Stage II of the evaluation suggest that, despite the apparent intensive input from the Commission, the Columbus cases are proving to be about 15 per cent cheaper than the Control Group matters.

The second aspect has been the development of a comprehensive Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) service. In an endeavour to assist people seeking Legal Aid to identify their needs at the earliest possible opportunity, and to assist a broader range of them to resolve their family law disputes in a fair and durable way without resorting to litigation, Legal Aid WA introduced a greatly expanded ADR program in January 2002 (Brown and Larkin 2001).

The four levels of this service (creatively named ADR 1, 2, 3 and 4) deal with increasingly more complex issues. The ADR 1 conferences are chaired by a trained mediator and deal with “simple” contact and residency matters. The other three levels (which address increasingly more complex issues and provide for parties to be legally represented) are chaired by experienced legal practitioners. There is provision for Heads of Agreement negotiated during a conference to be endorsed as Court Orders.

This program has been in operation for 12 months and appears to be achieving positive outcomes in a high proportion of matters considered in each of the four streams. The Alternative Dispute Resolution program has recently received a State West Achievement Award for excellence in the public sector.

Support and education programs

The third component of the integrated Family Court system comprises government and non-government support and education programs, and family law networks.

Government agency

The Department for Community Development is the statutory authority for investigating and reporting on allegations of child abuse. Detailed protocols have been established to enable notifications of suspected child abuse to be expeditiously investigated and reported. In some cases, the Department Investigating Officer has attended the Columbus Conference to report on the outcome of the inquiry and to assist the conference in recommending appropriate action and/or interventions.

Non-government agencies

An integral element of the Pilot is the ability of the conferences to refer parents to a variety of support services (such as the Indigenous Conflict Resolution Service), therapeutic services (such as personal counselling or behaviour modification groups), education programs (such as WA Anglicare’s “Mums and Dads Forever”, also reported at the recent Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference), and supervised contact services provided by agencies such as Anglicare, Relationships Australia, and Mother Hen.

Protocols are being developed to allow for some information sharing between agencies and the Family Court with the over-riding aim of facilitating safe, stable contact regimes for children and their parents.

The Columbus Pilot program (and to some degree the general court process) makes extensive use of these services and many of them are now regarded as essential elements of the emerging integrated model. However, the support services depend on a variety of funding sources that are not necessarily linked to court-based outcomes. This absence of dedicated funding is proving increasingly problematic as agencies tailor services to meet the needs of the court without any certainty over continuity of supply. It may be that consideration should be given to having court-linked services funded from a suitably increased Family Court budget which would ensure continuity, subject to the programs continuing to meet the requirements of the Court.

Family law networks

In addition to the agencies noted above, the Family Court in Western Australia also has an extensive support network represented by the Law Society, the Family Law Practitioners’ Association, Community Legal Centres, and legal practitioners generally. The President of the Practitioners’ Association also sits as a member of the Columbus Reference Group.

Consultation, collaboration, and coordination

The Columbus Pilot has acted as a catalyst for the emergence of new roles and responsibilities, most notably the Principal Registrar and the Director of Family Court Counselling Services. The Director of Counselling was instrumental in establishing the initial network of agencies and support services, and developing the information-sharing Protocols. However, it became evident that, together with the Director of Counselling, the Principal Registrar has had a central role in promoting and sustaining the changes that were beginning to occur.

Some of these roles were:

• co-chairing the Columbus Reference Group and receiving critical feedback about the program and inherent court processes;

• convening a research interest group to co-ordinate the research activity within the Court, to advise on ethical and procedural issues, and to liaise with agencies seeking to develop court-linked research initiatives;

• involving social and legal researchers in the development of new initiatives so that any new program is not only evidence-based but incorporates an evaluation framework from the preliminary planning stages;

• developing evaluation strategies and designs for other court processes;

• supporting funding applications initiated by the Court itself and also with external collaborative partners;
• convening joint “professional training” seminars for judicial officers and counselling staff;
• convening an academic advisory committee to liaise with relevant institutions and have an input into course content in both legal and social science faculties;
• promoting community and professional education initiatives through agencies, professional associations (such as the Family Law Practitioners’ Association), and academic institutions; and
• presenting conference papers discussing the changes that were occurring.

All of these new roles require extensive consultation and collaboration in order to establish working relationships at a variety of levels. They also mean that the Principal Registrar and the Director of the Family Court Counselling Service have become more accessible to, and very visible in, the “family court sector”.

As noted above, a significant impact of Columbus has been the new working relationships that have developed between the judicial officers and counselling staff as they jointly manage the Columbus Conferences. All Registrars in the Family Court of Western Australia now chair conferences with a designated counsellor. All available Columbus staff meet regularly to review processes and techniques, share experiences, and to develop joint approaches aimed at achieving the best possible outcomes for the clients and their children. This cross-fertilisation of experience and expertise has led to greater awareness, understanding, and collegial support among Columbus staff, and to better practice in other spheres of the work of both professions.

Columbus evaluated

An extensive four-stage evaluation of the Columbus Pilot has been developed by an inter-disciplinary, inter-university research team. The research design was developed and the efficacy of the evaluation methodology tested in Stage I, which was completed in June 2002. The evaluation proper includes longitudinal cost/outcome analysis of matters assigned to both the Columbus Pilot and Control Groups (Stage II), as well as follow-up interviews with samples of parents and their children – Stage III (Columbus Pilot) and Stage IV (Control Group). All four stages of the evaluation include feedback from legal representatives, court personnel, separate child representatives, court experts, and support agency staff.

Preliminary results of Stage I suggested that Columbus was achieving its benchmark indicators of early intervention and timeframes, and is producing some encouraging results in terms of costs and outcomes. Registrars and Family Court Counselling Service staff have agreed that joint case conferencing will continue as an optional case management procedure in the Family Court of Western Australia. (A separate paper at the Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference reported some of the early findings from the evaluation. Full reports on Stages II and III are due in December 2003.)

Integral to the Columbus Pilot has been the work of the Columbus Reference Group which is chaired jointly by the Director of Family Court Counselling and the Principal Registrar. This group of professionals from both government and non-government agencies in the “Family Court sector” meets quarterly to review the progress of the Pilot project, suggest avenues for improvement or modification in the program, provide input into the development of inter-agency collaborative Protocols, and provide guidance to the evaluation team.

Members of the Reference Group have also been instrumental in promoting wider community support together with an awareness of the pressures on the general Family Court system through the Family Law Foundation.

Conclusion

The Columbus Pilot project has acted as a catalyst for change in a number of areas of the Family Court system in Perth. Registrars and counsellors have agreed to extend the Columbus process on a trial basis to explore matters involving allegations of drug and other substance abuse. This new development began in March 2003 with all judicial officers and counselling service staff undertaking a training program with staff from the Drug Court and other agencies that support that jurisdiction. Consideration is being given to this becoming a new pilot program within the Family Court of Western Australia, incorporating a range of potential new initiatives.

The Columbus Pilot project has led to the Family Court becoming the centre of a number of inter-disciplinary research and professional education initiatives involving social scientists, legal academics, and practitioners. These changes have led to practitioners in many areas (registrars, lawyers, counsellors, and agency staff) developing a greater understanding of the Family Court and its processes, and promoting new collaborative working relationships.
All of these changes not only appear to be producing better outcomes for parents and their children but are also encouraging a new model of practice in the Family Court of Western Australia.

References


Attorney General’s Department (2001), “A child-focused professional development program for family law practitioners and other providers of dispute resolution assistance to separating families”, Background Briefing Paper, Attorney General’s Department, Canberra.


FCOS (Family Court Counselling Service) (2002), Annual Report 2001-2002, Family Court Counselling Service, Family Court of Western Australia, Perth.


This view expressed in this article are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as reflecting the official policy or views of the Family Court of Western Australia, or any other government department or agency.

Dr Paul Murphy is seconded to the Family Court of Western Australia from the Department of Social Work and Social Policy at The University of Western Australia to evaluate the Columbus Pilot. Paul Kerin, who was instrumental in developing and implementing the Columbus Pilot, is the Acting Director of the Family Court Counselling Service in the Family Court of Western Australia. Associate Professor Lisbeth Pike is Head of the School of Psychology at Edith Cowan University (Joondalup Campus). The authors acknowledge the assistance of Mr Stephen Thackray, Principal Registrar of the Family Court of Western Australia, in providing feedback on this article.

This article is based on papers presented at the Eighth Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, held in Melbourne on 12-14 February 2003.
Using what she calls “child-centred” research, Ridge then sets out to determine how well current policies are meeting the needs of poor children, and how these children are experiencing poverty. Reporting on in-depth interviews conducted with 40 children aged between 10 and 17 years whose parent/s were in receipt of benefit (income support payments), Ridge explores how children view and experience their everyday lives, including their family relationships, their friendships, and their school and work – in an attempt to place children centre-stage. These qualitative data are supplemented by analysis of large scale survey data collected from young people aged 11 to 15 years.

Central among the findings, the book shows that poor children are suffering from insufficient access to the economic and material resources necessary for adequate social participation and academic parity.

Contrary to arguments espousing the development and transmission of dependency culture, such as adopted by Murray (1994) in the United States, Ridge argues that children are in fact active, responsive and adaptive to the circumstances in which they live.

For example, while previous research has shown that parents act to protect their children from the direct and indirect impacts of poverty, Ridge argues that children, too, act to protect their parents. This includes school-aged children seeking employment of their own, not expecting material goods and, perhaps of most concern, excluding themselves from “expensive” aspects of life, including school excursions and extra curricula activities – some of the very activities that can lead to friendships that can protect children from adversities associated with being poor, or act to increase children’s otherwise limited opportunities.

Related to this, Ridge also points to the fact that children’s experiences in the here and now are important – in contrast with approaches that focus primarily upon children as “the adults of the future”. Her findings highlight the very real concerns children have about their schooling, their friendships, their families and their neighbourhoods, and the way they manage their relationships and environments.

While the study comes out of a specifically British and European tradition of research around poverty and, more recently, social exclusion, it has strong resonance for the Australian context – perhaps all the stronger as it draws attention to issues and methodologies that are not yet central to the Australian research focus on poverty.

Childhood Poverty and Social Exclusion reminds us of the importance of first-hand accounts of children’s experiences. The book reinforces the idea that understanding the social and cultural context in which poverty takes place, in addition to material and financial factors, is critical to a full understanding of poverty. It emphasises that there is a place in policy research for qualitative as well as quantitative research, and that this can add meaning to what we already “know”.

Ridge’s work enters a previously underdeveloped field of poverty-related research, and in doing so makes substantive, theoretical and methodological contributions.

This book will be of interest to those involved in the development and evaluation of public policy, researchers concerned with policy and poverty, and those involved in education – as well as to anyone wanting to move toward a rich, contextual understanding of how the world is experienced and negotiated by children.

References


Wendy Stone is a Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, responsible for the Families, Social Capital and Citizenship project in the Institute’s Families and Society research program. Tess Ridge, a visiting scholar at the Institute for some months in 2003, presented an Institute seminar on her research (see p.75).
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.

**Carole Jean**

**Building community: The shared action experience, by Linda Beilharz, Solutions Press, Bendigo, 2002. Price: $50.00.**

Individual chapters cover: myths and realities of sexual violence; medical treatment; reporting the assault to the police; going to court; victim compensation; making a complaint; children who have been sexually abused; and strategies for safety. Particular mention is made of victims who may have special needs, such as older people, sex workers, and people with a disability. Although the handbook has a specific New South Wales focus, especially with regards to the list of relevant helping organisations, and the legal procedures explained, the general advice given in the book is applicable to all readers.

**Children caring for parents with mental illness: Perspectives of young carers, parents and professionals, by Jo Aldridge and Saul Becker, Policy Press, Bristol, 2003.**

In this book the authors challenge the claim that children and young people are damaged by caring for a parent with a mental illness. Instead they argue that, with adequate support, children can be helped to cope with their parent and their caring role. The research drew on data from interviews with 40 families where a child provided care to a parent with a severe mental illness, and with the mental health professionals involved with the family. Initial chapters present the perspectives of the parents, professionals, and most importantly, say the authors, the children themselves. It was found that many of these young carers felt that they gained positive experiences from caring for their parents. In contrast, most mental health...
professionals saw the children’s caring role as having a negative impact upon them. The authors argue that the needs and wishes on children need to be taken more into account by mental health professionals. This book would make important reading for anyone working in the mental health field.

**Papunya school book of country and history, by Papunya School, Allen and Unwin, Crow’s Nest, 2001.**

This beautifully presented and illustrated picture book was created by the students and staff at the Papunya School in Central Australia. It tells the story (in words and illustrations) of how the Anangu came to live together at Papunya, the impact of white settlement on the community, the struggle for land rights, and details of the Papunya art movement. The history, role, and future vision of the Papunya school is emphasised. This award winning book gives readers (both adult and children) a valuable insight into the lives of the Papunya people and their vision for the future.


While much attention has focused on children in formal day care settings, little has been given to family day care. This book is a collection of papers which give an international perspective to the care of children in family day care settings. Individual countries covered include Hungary, Germany, New Zealand, Britain, Israel, France and Australia. Chapters look at the role of the child-min-der; quality and standards in family day care; and providing care for “children in need”. A chapter by Institute researchers, Ann Sanson and Sarah Wise, examines the use of family day care by parents from diverse cultural backgrounds, and explores how these parents look for child care that reflects their own cultural values and practices. This book would make useful reading for all concerned with child care policy and provision.

**Making contact: How parents and children negotiate and experience contact after divorce, by Liz Trinder, Mary Beek and Jo Connolly, Joseph, Rowntree Foundation, 2002.**

Price: £12.95.

This report from the United Kingdom is based on a study which interviewed 61 families about their child contact arrangements. The aim of the study was to examine how adults and children negotiate contact, what their experience of contact is, and what factors shape contact arrangements. Families which had privately arranged contact as well as families which had court arranged contact were included. Contact was found to place significant demands on all family members (both adults and children), and that it is a combination of the actions, attitudes and interactions of all family members that shape contact. In families where conflict exists, the authors argue that legal interventions may not be the most helpful form of intervention; rather, a wide range of services (including therapeutic services) need to be made available to families. All professionals involved with family law and family justice would find this report fascinating reading.

**My house and Going to Fair Day, by Brenna and Vicki Harding, B & V Harding, Sydney, 2002.**

Price: $14.95 (each).

These two colourful picture books, telling the story of a little girl and her two Mums, is aimed at readers aged five to seven years. *Going to Fair Day* describes all the fun and excitement of a family outing, and *My house* relates a day in the life of the family and the adventures of their three household pets. These Australian books are not only relevant for children with same sex parents, but they also provide valuable insights for the wider community of children and their parents.

Carole Jean is the Reference Librarian in the Institute’s Family Information Centre.
12–15 June 2003  
**Spirituality in Suicide Prevention**  
Brisbane, Qld  
The title of the 10th Annual Suicidal Prevention Australia National Conference, “Finding meaning to sustain life: The place of spirituality in suicide prevention,” signals a theme of universal concern. The conference will examine the issue of spirituality and how it might be used to assist recovery from depression and suicidal behaviours.  
**Further information:** Lyn Greenfield or Crissy Ross. Phone: (07) 3858 5563. Fax: (07) 3858 5510. Email: spa2003@im.com.au/Web: www.suicidepreventionaus.org/  

13–15 June 2003  
**Family Strengths**  
Guangzhou, People’s Republic of China  
The objective of this conference, sponsored by the South China Normal University, the International Family Strengths Consortium/University of Nebraska, and Webster University, Missouri, USA, is to unite professionals and laypersons interested in helping to strengthen families around the world.  
**Further information:** Nancy Swarts. Email: nswarts2@unl.edu  

15–18 June 2003  
**Health of Indigenous Communities**  
Adelaide, SA  
An invitation is extended to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers across the nation, their colleagues, and all those who have an interest in the health of Indigenous communities, to attend the 4th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers Conference. Themes are: Professional development; Program innovations; Health and community development; and Partnerships and policies.  
**Further information:** Project Officer. Phone: 1800 888 575 or (02) 9311 2593. Email: journal@aihwj.com.au. Or contact the Secretariat, SAPMEA Conventions, 68 Greenhill Road, Wayville SA 5034. Phone: (08) 8274 6060. Toll-free phone: 1800 674 668. Fax: (08) 8274 6000. Email: aihw4thconf@sapmea.asn.au. Web: www.sapmea.asn.au  

17–19 June 2003  
**Domestic Violence Court Assistance Network**  
Brisbane, Qld  
Domestic Violence Court Assistance Network is a network of court assistance workers located throughout Queensland. The following areas will be covered at their forthcoming conference: Models of court assistance; The impact of domestic violence on children and young people; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives; New target groups included in the recent changes to the domestic violence legislation; and Criminal law perspectives on domestic violence.  
**Further information:** Catherine Hunt, Conference Organiser, Women’s Legal Service, PO Box 119, Annerley QLD 4103. Phone: (07) 3392 0644. Fax: (07) 3392 0658. Email: catherine_hunt@fcl fasn.au.  

18–20 June 2003  
**Health Care Research**  
Canberra, ACT  
The General Practice and Primary Health Care Research conference provides an opportunity for primary health care researchers to get together to network, form collaborations and share ideas and work. It also provides the opportunity to hear about current research in general practice and primary health care.  
**Further information:** Conference Logistics. Phone: (02) 6281 6624. Fax: (02) 6285 1336. Email: conference@conlog.com.au  

20–21 June 2003  
**Tresillian Family Care Centres**  
Sydney, NSW  
This 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 0800. Fax: (02) 9787 0880. Email: cathrine@email.cs.nsw.gov.au.  

20–21 June 2003  
**Children and the Law**  
Brisbane, Qld  
The conference aims to promote discussion on a wide range of contemporary issues in both Australia and the Asia Pacific region. The recent focus on children as refugees, as abductees, and as prostitutes, and specific issues relating to Indigenous children, will be examined in an Australian and regional context. Children’s rights and family law issues will also be discussed.  
**Further information:** LAWASIA Secretariat, GPO Box 3275, Darwin NT 0800. Phone: (08) 8946 9500. Fax: (08) 8946 9505. Email: lawasia@lawasia.asn.au  

20–22 June 2003  
**Children’s Services**  
Canberra, ACT  
Each year 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 the state of New South Wales. The theme of the 2003 Conference is “Embracing complexity and risking change”.  
**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  

20–22 June 2003  
**Violence against Women**  
Glenelg, SA  
“The evidence of difference: 12th International Conference of the Nursing Network on Violence against Women” aims to provide a forum for all those who work in human services to come together and discuss the work that is occurring to end violence against women and children and promote their safety. In particular, this conference aims to promote collaborative efforts throughout the community and across sectors with an emphasis on the responsibility of the health system to respond to violence against women and provide options for safety.  
**Further information:** Violence Against Women Conference Convenor, Dr Charmaine Power, School of Nursing and Midwifery, GPO Box 2100, Adelaide SA 5001. Phone: (08) 8201 3270. Fax: +61 8 8276 1602 Email: vawconf@flinders.edu.au. Web: www.nursing.sturt.flinders.edu.au/ violence/Front%20Page.htm  

21–26 June 2003  
**Family Violence**  
Prague, Czech Republic  
The Second World Conference on Family Violence is co-sponsored by the World Health Organisation and is convened under the auspices of the International Network on Family Violence (INFV) and its Secretariat – the
National Council on Child Abuse and Family Violence in the United States. The congress theme is “Protecting every generation: Sharing solutions that prevent child abuse, spouse/partner abuse (domestic violence), and elder abuse.”


22–24 June 2003
Equal Play: A Vision for Children London
The 11th European Network for School-age Child Care Conference aims to raise the profile of children’s rights and equality for children.

Further information: Web: www.enacc-conference2003.org.uk/

26–28 June 2003
Children and Families Dunedin, NZ
The 5th Child and Family Policy Conference from the Children’s Issues Centre, University of Otago, has the theme “Joined up services: Linking together for children and families”.

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: ccic@otago.ac.nz. Web: www.otago.ac.nz/CIC/CIC.html

1–4 July 2003
Human Rights and Diversity Byron Bay, NSW
Southern Cross University’s Centre for Law, Politics and Culture presents the inaugural international conference for those who cares passionately about human rights, and who wish to activate/re-activate human rights and their importance in the 21st century. The core aim of the Activating Human Rights and Diversity Conference is to bring together activists, scholars, non-government organisations, and health care and community workers who represent a diversity of viewpoints.


3–5 July 2003
Higher Education and Community Ipswich, Qld
The theme of the 2nd International InsideOut Conference on Higher Education and Community Engagement is “Charting uncertainty: Capital, community and citizenship.”

Further information: Email: crsce.quinquiries@uq.uq.edu.au. Phone: Karen Joyce (07) 3381 1278.

6–9 July 2003
Human Development Brisbane, Qld
The 13th conference from the Australasian Human Development Association will address a broad coverage of research activities focused on human development across the life span, in basic and applied research areas.

Further information: Email: sarnia.butler@aut.ac.nz or t.wouldes@australian.ac.nz. Web: www.ahda.australian.ac.nz/

7–11 July 2003
Social Change and Globalisation Beijing, People’s Republic of China
The theme of the 36th World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology is Social Change in the Age of Globalisation. The host institute is the Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, which covers not only sociological and anthropological issues, but also social psychology, social policy and youth studies.

Further information: 36th World Congress, International Institute of Sociology, Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 5 Jianguomen Nei Dajie, Beijing 100732, PR, China. Fax: (86 10) 6513 3870. Email: ioscss@public.bta.net.cn. Web: www.iiss2003.beijing.com.cn/en/index.html

9–11 July 2003
Narrative Therapy and Community Work University of Liverpool, UK
The International Narrative Therapy and Community Work Conference is being organised by Dulwich Centre Publications and the Centre for Narrative Practice, in Sheffield, UK. It promises the very latest thinking in narrative practice.

Further information: Dulwich Centre Publications, Hutt St PO Box 7192, Adelaide SA 5000. Phone: (08) 822 33966. Fax: (08) 8232 4441. Email: dulwich@senet.com.au. Web: www.dulwichcentre.com.au/ukconference.html

9–11 July 2003
Australian Social Policy Sydney, NSW
The biennial Australian Social Policy Conference (formerly known as the National Social Policy Conference) run by The Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales 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: Events and Promotions Coordinator, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales 2052. Phone: (02) 9385 7802. Email: cldridge@unsw.edu.au. Web: www.sprc.unsw.edu.au

9–12 July 2003
Safety and the Internet Auckland, NZ
The NetSafe II: Society, Safety and the Internet conference will focus on the themes of safety in the home, business, workplace and school, and legal, ethical and cultural issues regarding the Internet. The conference is presented by the Internet Safety Group, the University of Auckland and the New Zealand Police.

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.

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

SEMINAR PROGRAM

■ 15 MAY 2003
Family harmony and relationships: A fresh look at Parent Effectiveness Training
Christine Wood
Postgraduate School of Psychology, University of Tasmania
Facilitator – Robyn Parker, Australian Institute of Family Studies

■ 29 MAY 2003
The Minnesota Healthy Marriage and Family Formation Project
Professor William Doherty
Director, Marriage and Family Therapy Program
University of Minnesota, USA
Facilitator – Ruth Weston, Australian Institute of Family Studies

■ 5 JUNE 2003
Unmarried partners: The US context
Professor J. Thomas Oldham
University of Houston Law Centre, Texas, USA
Facilitator – Bruce Smyth, Australian Institute of Family Studies

■ 19 JUNE 2003
Young people’s life patterns: Is there evidence of a “new adulthood”?
Professor Johanna Wyn
Director, Youth Research Centre
Head of Department, Department of Education Policy and Management
University of Melbourne
Facilitator – Diana Smart, Australian Institute of Family Studies

■ 17 JULY 2003
An ethnographic exploration of the development of child rearing styles among the Nganyatjarra people from the pre-contact era to the present day
Gillian Shaw
School of Public Health and Community Medicine
University of New South Wales
Facilitator – Richard Munt, Australian Institute of Family Studies

10–13 July 2003

Children – the Core of Society
Hobart, Tas

The Australian Early Childhood Association invites you to participate 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

13 July 2003

Putting Peace into Practice
University of Melbourne

Psychologists for the Promotion of World Peace (POWP), an interest group of the Australian Psychological Society is hosting a one-day conference as a satellite conference to the 150th Anniversary University of Melbourne's Flagship Conference “International Perspectives on Peace and Reconciliation.” The predominant focus of the conference is on psychological and educational aspects of understanding, promoting and “doing” peace

Further information: Bronwen Hewitt, Conference Management, University of Melbourne, Old Physics Building, Victoria, 3010. Phone: (03) 8344 6389. Fax: (03) 8344 6122. Email: bhw@unimelb.edu.au

13–16 July 2003

Family Violence Research
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

The University of New Hampshire Family Research Laboratory and Crimes against Children Research Centre are pleased to announce the 8th International Family Violence Research Conference.

Further information: Sarah M. Giaconomi, Conference Administrator, Family Research Laboratory and Crimes against Children Research Centre, University of New Hampshire, 126 Horton Social Science Centre, Durham, NH 03824. Phone: (603) 862.0767. Fax: (603) 862 1122. Email: sarahg@cisunix.unh.edu

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@ baspcan.org.uk. Web: www. baspcan.org.uk

21–24 July 2003

Divorce: Causes and Consequences
Beijing, China

The International Society of Family Law is sponsoring a Regional Conference in Beijing, China, the theme of which is “Divorce – causes and consequences.”

Further information: Professor Lynn D. Wardle, 518 JRCB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602. Phone: (801) 422-2617; Fax: 422-0391; Email: lynnwardle@byu.edu. Web: www.law.byu.edu/ISFL/

24–26 July 2003

Building Better Beginnings
Adelaide, SA

The Australian Association for Infant Mental Health and the Marce Society, in conjunction with the Helen Mayo House, are hosting the Building Better Beginnings: Perinatal and Infant Initiatives in Context conference. The conference and workshops will focus on making the earliest connections – between parent and infant, between parents, between infants and professionals, and between different cultural approaches and perceptions. It will be relevant to all people working in the early intervention area.

Further information: The Conference Organiser, PO Box 385, Malvern, Vic 3144. Phone: (03) 9509 7121. Fax: (03) 9509 7151. Email: info@conorg.com.au.

21–22 August 2003

Forensic Disabilities Conference
Melbourne, Vic

The multifaceted needs of people with a disability, who present with victim and/or offender issues, draw together a range of systems designed to respond to the different issues arising from complex life situations. The theme of this conference is Forensic disabilities: Services in the community – residential and outreach.

Further information: Forensic Disabilities Conference, The Conference Organiser, PO Box 385, Malvern, Vic 3144. Email: info@conorg.com.au

26–30 August 2003

Family Empowerment
Veldhoven, Netherlands

It is suggested that to achieve lasting impact on governmental policy and societal practice we must join together – across professions, national boundaries and oceans – in “Building a global alliance for restorative practices and family empowerment”. By uniting a wide range of disciplines and vocations, the Fourth International Conference on Conferencing, Circles and other Restorative Practices seeks to strengthen the potential for meaningful change in modern society.

Further information: International Institute for Restorative Practices. Web: www.restorativepractices.org/

29–31 August 2003

Child Abuse and Neglect
Warsaw, Poland

The main theme of the 9th ISPCAN Regional European Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, to be held in Warsaw, Poland, is “Promoting interdisciplinary approaches to child protection.” The conference will cover a wide range of issues dealing with child abuse and neglect, such as: Interdisciplinary procedures and practices; Legal aspects of child protection; Prevention policies. Issues focusing directly on children include: Sexually abused children; Street and abandoned children; and Interviewing children.


2–5 September 2003

Mental Health Resources
Canberra, ACT

How far have we come in moving beyond prose and promises toward the delivery of high quality, effective, evidence based practices – practices that contribute to a better quality of life for everyone involved in mental health services? The Mental Health Services Conference Inc. of Australia and New Zealand invites you to reflect on the gains and setbacks, and offers you the opportunity to present your vision of a new reality that promotes the mental health of every individual.

Further information: Mental Health Services Conference, PO Box 192, Balmain NSW 2041. Phone: (02) 9926 6057. Fax: (02) 9926 7078. Email: enquiries@thesms.org. Web: www.thems.org

2–5 September 2003

A Better Way to do Business
Sydney, NSW

This conference from the National Alternative Dispute Resolution Advisory Council will focus on effective ways of resolving business disputes.


11–13 September 2003

Youth Cultures in the 21st Century
Northampton, UK

The aim of the “Scenes, Subcultures and Tribes: Youth Cultures in the 21st Century” conference, organised by the Youth Study Group of the British Sociological Association, is to address the cultural practices, identities and formations of young people at the beginning of the 21st century in the light of new theoretical and empirical revelations about youth culture.

Further information: Web: www.britsoc.co.uk/bsaweb.php? link_id=478area=item2

11–14 September 2003

Young People, Social Capital and Empowerment
Glasgow

The University of Strathclyde is hosting a conference titled “Connections that Count: Young People, Social Capital and Empowerment.” Conference themes include: Definitions and dimensions of social capital; Building social capital through social networks; Creating trust and social connectedness; Family, peer group and the community; Youth participation; Citizenship, community and young people; Peer mentoring and mediation; Self-help networks and action groups; Development and strengthening of social networks.

Further information: Email sarah.harper@strath.ac.uk and type in your postal address.

11–14 September 2003

Trauma, Attachment and Dissociation
Melbourne, Vic

This landmark international conference on Trauma, Attachment and Dissociation, “Transforming Trauma,” is to be hosted by the Delphi Centre in collaboration with the Cannan Institute. The conference aims to unite diverse professional and community groups committed...
to ethical, effective and compassionate services in the area of trauma and abuse.

Further information: Naomi Halpern or Susan Henry at Email: info@delphicentre.com.au.
Web: www.delphicentre.com.au

16–20 September 2003
Family Violence
San Diego, California

Conference co-hosts of the 8th International Conference on Family Violence are: the Family Violence and Sexual Assault Institute, San Diego; the Children’s Institute International, Los Angeles; and Alliant International University. The theme of the conference is “Advocacy, assessment, intervention, research, prevention and policy”,

Further information: Lisa Conradi, FV Conference 2003, FVSAI at Alliant International University, 6160 Cornerstone Court East, San Diego, CA 92121. Phone: (858) 627 7277 ext. 427. Fax: (858) 646-0761. Email: fvconf@alliant.edu.Web: www.fvsai.org

17–19 September 2003
Out of Home Care
Canberra, ACT

The Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia invites participation in three days of cutting edge debate and practice exchange to explore the development of effective treatment models for children and young people in out of home care. With the theme “When care is not enough; the practice symposium will cover government responses, practice papers, extended workshops, showcase presentations and hot topic debates.

Further information: CAFWAA, Locked Bag 13, Haymarket NSW 1240. Fax: (02) 9281 8827. Email: cafwaa@acaw.asn.au

18–19 September 2003
National Carers Conference
Canberra, ACT

Caring Matters: A National Debate is a conference to raise national debate on the strategic and policy matters that affect the lives of Australia’s 2.3 million unpaid family and other informal carers.

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

22–24 September 2003
Participatory 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 of “Learning Partners in Action”. Sub-themes include Organisational learning and the future of work; Participation in social and community development; Legislative and policy issues; and Links and partnerships.


23–26 September 2003
Youth and Generation
Murcia, Spain

Issues addressed at the Research Network: Youth and Generation in Europe and 6th Congress of the European Sociological Association, will include: Redefinitions of generational relationships and new family patterns; Youth in the united Europe: Emerging identities; Towards a new youth sociology; and Confronting the challenges from transitional societies and youth migrants.

Further information: Email: lagree@ext.jussieu.fr or cdiaznetcom.es

25–28 September 2003
Trauma and Survival
Fremantle, WA

Hosted by the Western Australian Branch of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Psychiatry, Psychology and Law, the 2003 conference will focus on the theme of Psychological Trauma and Survival. Presentations will concentrate on how the research on psychological trauma can be used to inform legal practice and legislation.

Further information: The Conference Organiser, PO Box 385, Malvern, Vic 3144. Phone: (03) 9509 7121. Fax: (03) 9509 7151. Email: info@conorg.com.au. Web: www.med.monash.edu/psychmed/anzapprl/

28 September – 1 October 2003
Public Health
Brisbane, Qld

“Essentials, Differentials and Potentials in Health” is the title of the 35th Public Health Association of Australia Annual Conference. Conference themes include Social policy and social determinants of health; Injury and Indigenous health; Engaging the community in health policy.

Further information: PPHA, PO Box 319, Currumbin 4223. Phone: (07) 5526 4327. Email: conference@phta.net.au. Web: www.phta.net.au/conferences/frame_conferences.htm

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, including law, psychiatry, psychology, the social sciences and humanities. The theme is “Social Justice within Diversity.” A Pre-Conference 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

1–3 October 2003
Controlling Crime
Sydney, NSW

The theme of the 2003 Annual Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology will be “Controlling crime: risks and responsibilities”.


2–6 October 2003
Development through Diversity
Perth, WA

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

Further information: Australian Psychological Society, Level 11, 257 Collins Street, Melbourne Vic 3000. Phone: (03) 9662 3300. Fax: (03) 9663 6177. Web: www.psychsocociety.com.au/

9–11 October 2003
Strategies for Young Minds
Melbourne, Vic

Clinical issues will be the focus of the “Strategies for Young Minds: Emotions, Behaviour and Development” conference, hosted by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, in association with the Royal Australasian College of Physicians Division of Paediatrics and Child Health.

Further information: The Conference Organiser, PO Box 385, Malvern Victoria 3144. Phone: (03) 9509 7121. Fax: (03) 9509 7151. Email: info@conorg.com.au.

7 November 2003
Elderly Suicide Prevention
Sydney, NSW

“What’s Resilience Got To Do With It?” The concepts of mental health promotion, resilience building and health maintenance in contributing to the prevention of suicide and depression among the elderly will be discussed during the 3rd NSW Elderly Suicide Prevention Network conference presented in conjunction with Western Sydney Area Mental Health Service.

Further information: Troy Speirs, Conference Coordinator, Western Sydney Area Health Service. Phone: (02) 9840 4126. Fax: (02) 9840 3703. Email: espnconference@wsahs.nsw.gov.au

12–14 November 2003
Community Development
Port Macquarie, NSW

“What Money Can’t Buy: Community development, globalisation and the market economy” is a conference hosted by the New South Wales Local Government Community Services Association. It aims to explore the emerging issues around community development and service provision and their interface with the market economy and the effects of globalisation.

Issues of social action, the poor, economic development, and private and public sector partnerships will be examined, along with the ethical dilemmas confronting the sector in this rapidly changing environment.

Further information: Craig Milburn, Hastings Council, PO Box 84 Port Macquarie 2444. Phone: (02) 65 818 634. Fax: (02) 65 818 717. Email: craig.milburn@nsw.gov.au. Web: www.hastings.nsw.gov.au/Community

12–14 November 2003
Improving Child Welfare
Miami, Florida

13–14 November 2003
Disabled children and emotional abuse and neglect
Warwick University, UK
The emotional abuse and neglect of disabled children has not received sufficient attention in research or practice. The multi-agency conference “I feel; I think” – the experience of disabled children who have been emotionally abused and neglected – aims to redress this exclusion by drawing on research into attachment, resilience, self-esteem and identity, and applying this to disabled children.
Further information: The Conference Organiser, In-Trac Training and Consultancy, PO Box 74, Haslemere, Surrey GU27 2YP. Phone/Fax: 01428 641425. Email: info@in-trac.co.uk

17–22 November 2003
What is the Future of Marriage?
Vancouver, BC, Canada
In recognition of the changing nature of marriage, the 65th National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference will address research on the current status of marriage, the causes of marital change, the likely future of marriage, and the consequences of marital change for the lives of men, women and children.
Further information: National Council on Family Relations, 3989 Central Ave. NE, Suite 550, Minneapolis MN 55421.

24–26 November 2003
Housing Futures
Adelaide, SA
Australia will undergo considerable demographic and social change in the next 10–20 years. The Third National Housing Conference will focus on options for addressing housing needs in the future. Conference hosts are the South Australian Department of Human Services and the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.
Further information: National Housing Conference Secretariat, Plevin and Associates Pty Ltd, PO Box 54, Burnside SA 5066. Phone: (08) 8379 8177. Email: events@plevin.com.au. Web: www.nationalhousingconference.org.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 NSW 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. The theme for 2003, “Voices, Many Choices”, recognises that child abuse and neglect is of concern to a wide range of people across society and that there are many ways to address child abuse and neglect issues.
Further information: Jeanette Morgan, Conference Manager, Department of Community Services, New South Wales. Phone: (02) 9209 6229. Fax: (02) 9209 6233. Email: jeanette.morgan@community.nsw.gov.au. Web: www.community.nsw.gov.au/acccan.

30 November – 3 December 2003
Family and Community Strengths
University of Newcastle, NSW
The Building a Truly Civil Society, the 3rd Australian Family and Community Strengths Conference, is about the successes and challenges of applying different forms of strengths perspective, such as asset-based community development, strengths-based practice, narrative therapy, appreciative inquiry and brief solution-focused therapy. The main themes of the conference are: promoting strengths-based leadership/management; linking schools, family and community; working from a strengths perspective in a problem-focused environment; exploring resilience; and mobilising people and community resources (practical application).

8–12 December 2003
Population Ageing and Health
Canberra, ACT
The International Microsimulation Conference on Population Ageing and Health, “Modelling Our Future”, is organised by Professor Ann Harding, the Director of NATSEM, Australia, and Anil Gupta, Director, Health Canada. The primary focus is microsimulation models and their applications, but those using other modelling approaches to examine these issues are also very welcome.
Further information: Email: conference@natsen.canberra.edu.au

10–12 January 2004
Adolescent Health
Hong Kong
The 1st Asia-Pacific Regional Adolescent Health Congress, “Towards healthy adolescence: Intersectoral collaboration”, will cover themes such as Adolescent development; Health policy; Depression and suicide; Family and health policy. This special event brings together people from across Australia who work to strengthen communities and families. Details are available on the conference website (www.adhcon.org).

21–24 April 2004
Internet, Media and Mental Health
Brisbane, Qld
First announcement about the Internet, Media and Mental Health International Conference.
Further information: Intermedia Convention and Event Management, PO Box 1280, MILTON QLD 4064. Phone: (07) 3858 5437. Fax: (07) 3858 5510. Email: alichaf@im.com.au

13–14 May, 2004
National Respite Conference
Darwin, NT
The conference will reflect the interests and issues of all involved in respite – carers, individuals, advocates, service providers, policy makers and academics. It will marry the policy and practical with a focus on the views and interests of those who require respite care.
Further information: Aged and Community Services Australia. Phone: (03) 9666 3460. Email: agedcare@vincnet.net.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 in Belgium.
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.

21–24 July 2004
One World: Many Childhoods
Melbourne, Vic
One World: Many Childhoods – Strengthening Early Childhood International Links, is the title of the XXIV World Congress of The World Organisation for Early Childhood Education. This will be a unique opportunity to highlight OMEPs concern for early childhood development across the world. The Congress program will provide opportunities to explore issues such as children in difficult circumstances, innovation in service delivery, indigenous children’s needs and services and children’s health and social services.
Children in families

Contemporary research on the adjustment of children growing up in “non-traditional” family forms has raised questions about the capacity of these families to provide for a child’s interests. As the dominance of the conventional nuclear family continues to decline, Australian data about diversity within families and between families, and the life chances of children growing up in different family structures, are needed.

This Research Paper describes a new Institute study that aims to enhance understanding about how family structure relates to the development of children. It examines outcomes for children in different family types and in relation to factors internal and external to the family.

The relevant theoretical and empirical literature and the policy context that together form the background to the study, as well as the details of the research approach, are described.


Social capital at work

In Australia, as in many other nations, there is an emphasis upon paid work as a primary means for achieving economic independence, alleviating poverty, and avoiding welfare dependency. Much of this attention focuses on an individual’s skills and attributes, or upon characteristics of the labour market.

A new Institute Research Paper extends these analyses, by investigating the extent to which an individual’s “stock” of social capital relates to labour force outcomes, over and above more well established determinants. In particular, it examines how family and kinship networks, friends and neighbours relate to individual labour market outcomes, compared with the role of civic ties and institutional networks.

Based on data collected from a national random sample of 1500 Australians, the paper uses both a network and typology approach to social capital to investigate the relative impact of trust, bonding, bridging and linking relationships on labour force status and successful job search method. In so doing, it examines what social capital adds to established understandings of labour market determinants and job search. As well, the paper provides one of the few accounts of how the various dimensions and types of social capital relate to each of these outcomes.

Social capital at work: How family, friends and civic ties relate to labour market outcomes, by Wendy Stone, Matthew Gray and Jody Hughes, Research Paper No. 31, Australian Institute of Family Studies, April 2003. 44 pages. Also available online.

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- Family change and community life

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Family change and community life

Concern about community decline, a prominent theme in the social capital literature, is often based on the assumption that changes in family life, such as the increased number of marriages ending in separation and divorce, the growth of lone-parent families, and the increased workforce participation of women, have led to declining levels of social capital in communities. Yet while the idea that family change is leading to community decline features in the work of influential social capital thinkers, the relationship between family change and community life has rarely been the focus of empirical scrutiny.

Using a national random sample of 1500 Australians from the Australian Institute of Family Studies survey (2001), this paper explores whether there is a link between changes in family life and community social capital, and the nature of any such link.

The paper finds some support for the idea that changes in family life relate to low levels of community social capital. It also finds that social capital within families does not always translate into high levels of social capital in communities; that family changes have some positive spin offs for community social capital; and that factors other than family life are also important for explaining aspects of community life.


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