The Institute is a statutory authority that originated in the Australian Family Law Act 1975. It was established by the Australian Government in February 1980.

The Institute promotes the identification and understanding of factors affecting marital and family stability in Australia by:

- researching and evaluating the social, legal and economic wellbeing of all Australian families;
- informing government and the policy-making process about Institute findings;
- communicating the results of Institute and other family research to organisations concerned with family wellbeing and to the wider general community; and
- promoting improved support for families, including measures that prevent family disruption and enhance marital and family stability.

The objectives of the Institute are essentially practical ones, concerned primarily with learning about real situations through research on Australian families.
Cover
Miranda Lloyd, South Australia
Winter oak tree
Mixed media on canvas 100 × 100 cm
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2 Director’s report
Alan Hayes

5 Perspectives on intergenerational bequests: Inheritance arrangements and family resources
Jeanette A. Lawrence and Jacqueline J. Goodnow

15 Fathering in Australia among couple families with young children: Research highlights
Jennifer Baxter and Diana Smart

27 Family law: Family violence
Peter Boshier

31 How do pregnancy and newborns affect the household budget?
Jason D. Brandrup and Paula L. Mance

42 Grandparenting and the 2006 family law reforms
Lixia Qu, Laurie Moloney, Ruth Weston, Kelly Hand, Julie Deblaquiere and John De Maio

51 Shared care time: An increasingly common arrangement?
Ruth Weston, Lixia Qu, Matthew Gray, John De Maio, Rae Kaspiew, Laurie Moloney & Kelly Hand

57 What works with adolescents? Family connections and involvement in interventions for adolescent problem behaviours
Elly Robinson, Lyndal Power and David Allan

65 Family law update
Rae Kaspiew and Sharnee Moore

70 Institute seminars

74 Clearinghouse publications

78 Book notes

Family Matters is indexed/abstracted
Academic OneFile; Academic Search Alumni Edition; Academic Search Complete; Academic Search Premier; Attorney-General’s Information Service (AGIS); Australian Public Affairs Information Service (AP LIS); Australia New Zealand Reference Centre; Australian Education Index (AEI); Australian Family & Society Abstracts; Australian Family & Society Plus; Child Development & Adolescent Studies; Australian Criminology Database (CINCH); Current Abstracts; PAIS International; Public Affairs Index; Scopus; SocINDEX; SocINDEX with Full Text; Sociological Abstracts.

Subscriptions
From the 2011−12 subscription year, Family Matters will be available for free download from: <www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/fammats.html>. Printed copies (2 per year) can be purchased on subscription: Australia: A$66 (individuals) and A$99 (organisations) per year (inc. GST and postage). International: A$120 (exc. GST and inc. postage). Family Matters is also available from RMIT Publishing’s Informit e-Library: <www.informit.com.au>.

Typeset by Lan Wang
Printed by GEON Impact Printing
ISSN 1030-2646 (print)
ISSN 1832-8318 (online)
So far this year, the Institute has once again seen a high level of research and dissemination activity.

**National Families Week 2011**

*Families in Australia 2011: Sticking together in good and tough times*

Held from 15–21 May, National Families Week is an initiative of Families Australia that celebrates the many contributions of families. Communities across the country hold a diverse range of activities that grow each year in their scope and scale. In previous years, the Institute has produced a factsheet to fit with the theme adopted for each week. This year, however, the Institute was asked to produce the first of what will become an annual report drawing together recent statistics to provide a picture of selected aspects of Australian families. This year’s report—*Families in Australia 2011: Sticking Together in Good and Tough Times*—was again focused on the theme for Families Week. It explored the factors that contribute to the resilience or vulnerability of families, by briefly outlining some of the demographic and social changes that set the scene for contemporary family life and then considering patterns of participation in work and family life; engagement in community through voluntary work and caring for others; expectations about the availability of support in times of need; and sources of government assistance to families and individuals. The final sections of the report explored economic wellbeing and life satisfaction. The report attracted extensive media interest from print, television and radio media outlets. Support for this annual celebration of families is a priority for the Institute and we are very pleased to use this as an ideal opportunity to report on the progress of families in Australia.

**Family law**

Family relationships and family law have been consistent areas of research priority for the Institute since its inception in 1980, in line with the Institute’s legislative base—the *Family Law Act*.

National and international interest in the findings of the Institute’s evaluation of the *Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006* (Cth) continues. I was delighted that Dr Rae Kaspiew was invited, in May, to give evidence to the UK House of Commons Justice Select Committee inquiring into the operation of the family courts. The committee asked Dr Kaspiew to comment on the aspects of the 2006 family law reforms that had been successful and those that had been less so, as well as the overall impacts of the Act. The UK Family Justice Review has recently released its interim report with recommendations for reforms of the UK family law system. The Review Committee has indicated its continuing interest in the Institute’s family law research and in tracking the developments that are occurring across the Australian family law system.

Nationally, the Institute has been called upon to provide submissions in response to the Exposure Draft of the *Family Law Amendment (Family Violence) Bill 2010*, circulated by the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department (AGD); the Inquiry by the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs into *Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill 2011*; the Family Court of Australia and Federal Magistrates Court’s consultation paper on *Best Practice Principles for Use in Parenting Disputes When Family Violence or Abuse is Alleged*; and input to the AGD consultations on Children’s Contact Services and possible measures to address the practices of forced and servile marriage.

Recently released publications have reported further analyses of the data from the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families (LSSF)—a national study of 10,000 parents with a child under 18 years old, who separated after the reforms were introduced. The report revealed a generally positive picture for the families two to three years after their separation.
Most parents indicated that they were able to maintain a harmonious relationship with their child’s other parent and that their children were progressing well. Nevertheless, a substantial minority experienced continuing safety concerns relating to their children’s ongoing contact with the other parent, their experience of emotional abuse, and other negative inter-parental relationships.

Another study, commissioned by the AGD and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), explored how adolescent children of parents in the LSSF view their experiences of parental separation. The study surveyed 623 adolescent children aged 12–18 years whose parents separated after the introduction of the family law reforms in July 2006. The findings shed new light on the extent of adolescents’ involvement in the decisions parents made about them following separation, what they wanted in their care-time arrangements, how they expressed their views, who they turned to for support, their relationships with parents and other family members, and their understanding of issues concerning parental conflict.

Past adoption experiences

AIFS is currently seeking participants in a forthcoming study into past adoption experiences. It will be the largest study of this nature ever conducted in Australia. The research commenced in August and is exploring the effects of “closed adoption” processes, which were in place in Australia until the 1980s. The purpose of this research is to understand the current service and support needs of people affected by past adoption experiences. Input is being sought from people who were involved in any way, including birth parents, people who were adopted, adoptive parents, and other family members, including other children, spouses and grandparents.

People can participate in the survey through: <www.aifs.gov.au/pastadoptionpractices> or by calling (03) 9214 7888.

Closing the Gap on Indigenous disadvantage

The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse was launched in May at Parliament House, Canberra, by the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, The Hon. Jenny Macklin. This clearinghouse, operating in partnership with the Australian Institute for Health & Welfare (AIHW), provides evidence-based research on overcoming disadvantage for Indigenous Australians. It will become the nation’s premier collection of quality-assessed information on what works in overcoming disadvantage for Indigenous Australians. Publications released at the launch are available from: <www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap>.

Visits

The Institute continued to receive a steady flow of international visitors and delegations in the first half of 2011, including: Their Honours Judge Ogiwara (Tokyo District Court, Japan) and Assistant Judge Ueno (Okayama Family Court); Ms Han Jinjing, a research fellow at the Beijing Legal Aid Organisation (BLAO); Mr Carl Davidson, the Chief Commissioner of the NZ Families Commission; a delegation from the New Zealand Parliamentary Social Services Committee that has been undertaking an inquiry over the last year into the identification, rehabilitation, care and protection of child offenders; and an Indonesian Ministry of Social Development study group, sponsored by FaHCSIA, to discuss the conduct of qualitative research, drawing on the Institute’s experience in this area, especially in relation to children’s issues.

Reference groups

Civil justice system

I have recently joined a reference group convened by the AGD that focuses on building an evidence base for the civil justice system. The reference group also involves the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Australian
Social Science Data Archive, the Victorian Department of Justice, Family Relationship Services Australia, and experts involved in the management of justice and dispute resolution. The group will operate for two years and will provide advice to the AGD on how the systems for data linkage, research and evaluation might be strengthened.

**Indigenous justice**

In partnership with the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), the Institute has been funded by AGD to evaluate a number of programs aimed at preventing crime in Indigenous communities and diverting offenders from the criminal justice system. As part of the collaboration, the two institutes have convened an advisory group, which met for the first time on 24 March. It is chaired by Dr Adam Tomison (Director, AIC), and includes Commissioner Mick Gooda (Australian Human Rights Commission), Dr Jill Guthrie (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) and a research team from AIFS and AIC. Dr Daryl Higgins represents me on the advisory group.

**AIFS conferences**

*Growing Up in Australia* and *Footprints in Time Research Conference*

This year’s annual Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) conference, on 15–16 November, is a joint event with the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC). This important event has drawn international interest and promises to be a valuable opportunity to increase understanding of the factors that affect children’s development and wellbeing through sharing analyses of this rich source of longitudinal data.

**12th AIFS Conference**

Planning is now well underway for the 12th AIFS Conference, to be held on 25–27 July 2012. It is the premier event for discussing cutting-edge research findings, policy priorities and topical issues important to family wellbeing in Australia, such as: social and economic impacts; family transitions and ageing; children, young people and their families; neglect, violence and abuse; family law and family relationships; and cultural diversity.

This conference is for researchers, policymakers and service providers working with families—parents, children, young people and their extended family members.

**Concluding thoughts**

While major projects such as the Family Law Evaluation have been finalised, Institute staff continue to attract new research opportunities. The Institute’s collaborative relationships with an increasingly diverse set of partners have resulted in a steady flow of work, consistent with our research plan and organisational capacity. A revised memorandum of understanding (MoU) with FaHCSIA in relation to the LSAC project reflects the increased role of the Institute in analysing and reporting the results of this flagship study. The study is a collaboration between the Institute, FaHCSIA, the ABS, and a consortium of academic advisors from a range of universities and institutes. The signing of a new MoU with the Department of Human Services (DHS) is an important development for the Institute that has already resulted in two new projects, the first focused on family violence and the second on the impact of life events on families.

Shaping the future direction of the Institute’s research is well underway as we move to develop the Institute’s next Research Plan (2012–15). Advice from the AIFS Advisory Council will be a key element in developing the plan, as well as close engagement with colleagues in the relevant Australian Government departments or agencies. Again, we intend to undertake a national consultation that will greatly assist us in shaping the new plan. The working title for the next plan is *Families in Australia: Transitions and Trajectories*, which captures the Institute’s focus on the diversity of Australian families, dimensions of their stability and change, and the determinants of the paths they take through life.

As we plan our future research directions, we are also carefully considering our approaches to dissemination of the Institute’s work, given the rapid developments in the new media. We have now adopted electronic publishing as our primary distribution method and the number of publications distributed in the last twelve months has increased by 6.5%, with a 5.8% increase in publication pages downloaded from the website. We are currently seeking advice on the opportunities that developments in online communication and social media present to extend the reach of the Institute and make our work more accessible to a wider and better targeted audience. Of course, the generation of high-quality research content remains the Institute’s key priority.
The wellbeing of Australian families is affected by the resources they have available at present and anticipate will be available in the future (Saunders & Zhu, 2009). Part of that anticipation consists of expectations about what may be left to them by their parents. Those expectations matter. They make a difference to economic planning and to family harmony. They provide young generations with additional assets. They often bring out strong family feelings. In particular, expectations about appropriate and inappropriate inheritance arrangements can lead to misunderstanding, conflict and disharmony in the family.

People’s expectations are important also to researchers of family relations and values and to professionals who help people deal with their inheritance arrangements. Lawyers, counsellors, public trustees, for instance, all are involved in helping people make appropriate decisions about bequests. The courts often become the final destination of conflicts that tear families apart, sometimes for several generations.

Attracting widespread interest, then, is a current debate about whether there has been a change in what parents are likely to leave, and in parents’ attitudes towards making bequests. One side of the debate proposes that the current older generation of potential inheritance givers can be seen mostly as “Hedonistic Self-Servers”. The other side proposes they can be seen mostly as “Sensible Squirrels”.

It would be attractive to be able to take a one-sided perspective on elders as inheritance-givers. It is attractive to think about carefree grey nomads choosing between adventures while fending off decline. That softens the thought of the older generation as self-serving spenders. It also would be attractive to think about grey-headed fairy godmothers and godfathers dispensing gifts to their heirs. That softens the thought of the cautious, perhaps insecure saver. Neither of these perspectives fully covers the phenomena.

We take up this debate. First, we lay out several lines of argument in support of the two conflicting perspectives. Then we
The debate comes down to whether, in relation to inheritance arrangements, older people are currently thinking and acting more like Hedonistic Self-Servers or Sensible Squirrels.

Competing perspectives on inheritance giving

The debate comes down to the question of whether, in relation to inheritance arrangements, older people are currently thinking and acting more like Hedonistic Self-Servers or Sensible Squirrels. Each of these opposing perspectives focuses on what the older generation do with their financial resources in their old age. The focus is on how much they concentrate on spending their resources on their own pleasure, or on saving their resources for the contingencies of their old age and for having something to leave to their heirs.

Perspective 1: The older generation as Hedonistic Self-Servers

Identifying Hedonistic Self-Servers

The Hedonistic Self-Servers perspective appears in the popular media, in the advertising world, and among some researchers. The argument goes along the lines of “You need to think about yourself more”. The popular term associated with this view of inheritance giving is “The SKIer” (an elder who is “spending the kids’ inheritance”; Rowlingson & McKay, 2006, p. 29).

One Australian research group has taken up this side of the debate. Olsberg and Winter (2005) were investigating housing arrangements for the elderly. From their data, they concluded:

The attitudes of many men and women towards inheritance has shifted as to what previously would have been considered “the right thing to do” in terms of traditional obligations and responsibilities to their children. Our data strongly suggest that many older people’s attitudes have taken on more of those of their Baby Boomer children; that is “put yourself first”. The desire to bequeath assets to the next generation seems to be significantly diminishing. (p. xii)

This claim of a shift among elders towards the hedonistic values ascribed to Baby Boomers amounts to proposing an escalating cross-generational conflict between “your needs and interests—and mine”. At issue, then, is whether there has been a change over time in how elders use their resources—whether there has been a change in what they use for themselves compared with what they leave for their children. At issue also is whether present patterns of behaviour among inheritance-givers affect family resources and family harmony.

Supporting the Hedonistic Self-Server perspective

Five lines of argument have been offered as supporting the Hedonistic Self-Server perspective: (a) there is a concentration of wealth in older generations; (b) there is evidence of a drop in the amounts that older people are leaving; (c) there are strong advocates of later-life spending on oneself; (d) life in the 21st century is in “a world at risk”; and (e) progression through the life course brings changing demands and challenges.

There is a concentration of wealth in older generations

This raises questions about giving and keeping. Most older family members now have financial resources and assets that are potentially available for transfer to later generations. According to an Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010) report, the net worth of the average household in 2005–06 peaked at around $824,000 for the 55–64 age group and then decreased to around $575,000 for those in the over 75 age group. Although the average funds decreased with increasing age, there still was disposable wealth. This trend for older people to have a large share of the “wealth pie” has been consistent in Australia and other countries (Kelly & Harding, 2006; Productivity Commission, 2011). In effect, there is no shortage of money that could be left.

There is evidence of a drop in the amounts that older people are leaving

This trend has been observed in several countries. It especially raises the question of what older people are doing with their comparative wealth, and whether what could be left is being left, or is being spent. There is a distinct possibility that older people are spending money on themselves that they might otherwise have left to their children (e.g., Finch & Mason, 2000, for England; Kelly & Harding, 2006, for Australia). Another possibility is that older people, by dint of living longer, may be spending the money on medical and care expenses for the extra years. We probably need to distinguish between their discretionary...
and non-discretionary spending, but in either case it adds up to having less to pass on.

There are strong advocates of later-life spending on oneself

The decision of whether or not to pamper oneself in later life is not made in a vacuum. Advocates of spending speak with several voices. Some groups are aggressively urging the older generation to spend their resources. For example, the website of SKI Club Australia (2008) has the motto, “You can’t take it with you. And the kids are all set up in their own career, so our motto is: ‘Help them out as best you can while you’re still around, then spoil yourself’”. Advertising targeting the elder dollar echoes this sentiment; it specifically advises older people on how to spend SKI money on cruises or tours (e.g., “DriveWA on the kids dime”, DriveWA, 2011).

Life in the 21st century is in “a world at risk”

A sense of risk promotes in people a firm distrust of institutions and an inclination to look after their own interests. Beck (Beck, 2009; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) argued that life in this late modern era makes people more conscious of the need to take care of themselves. Social institutions, for instance, insist on dealing with people as individuals rather than as members of functioning family networks. Yet it is the “convoy” of family members working together that Antonucci and Jackson (2007, p. 680) saw as being so effective for giving family members a protective base.

In contrast, isolated, individualised responses to institutional demands are well suited as reactions to recent financial crises, especially in the wake of collapsing banks and insurance companies. People who are self-funding their retirement are particularly vulnerable to global financial collapses and to the level of government provisions open to them. As a result, people turn in on their own resources. Elders, according to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) “can no longer think of themselves only as an ‘appendage’ to the family, but must increasingly see themselves as individuals with their own interests and rights, plans and options” (p. 131).

Progression through the life course brings changing demands and challenges

Increased attention to oneself is compatible with accounts of what occurs as people move through different periods of life. One major account of life course changes (Havighurst, 1967) points to the changing developmental tasks that occupy people’s attention and energies over time. As people approach older age, it is entirely reasonable for them to take greater interest in what they will do with their money. Part of that is attending to how they will fund their own needs as they age. Another part, according to the advocates of SKiing, also involves attending more to their comfort and adventures.

Evidence that age makes a difference in attitudes to inheritance comes from an English study by Rowlingson and McKay (2006). They asked over 2,000 English respondents how much they agreed with statements such as “people should save in order to leave an inheritance”. Agreement turned out to be highest among those respondents below 30 and above 80 in age. It was lowest among those in the 50–59 age group. This group was most likely to be facing the costs of aging, and estimating their options before and after retirement.

We also found differences in the specific inheritance norms expressed by younger and older adults, but of a different kind (Goodnow & Lawrence, 2008b). Although each age group displayed a mix of norms for judging inheritance arrangements, an older group with a mean age of 75 years ($SD = 8.66$) were more likely to be members of cluster groups identified by their endorsement of norms related to individual rights and family feelings. Members of a younger group with a mean age of 18.5 years ($SD = 1.02$), in contrast, were more likely to be in a cluster endorsing norms...
related to family heritage. We now need data on how these competing individual rights and family heritage norms are being expressed in patterns of spending and keeping.

**Perspective 2: The older generation as Sensible Squirrels**

**Identifying Sensible Squirrels**

There is an alternative perspective. It involves seeing the older generation not primarily as SKIers, but as squirrels—squirrels saving their resources for rainy days. Those rainy days would be either in their own future or the future of their children. The current emphasis, however, is on saving and then using the money as needed for the demands and problems that they are experiencing or anticipating in their own future. This motif resonates with the experiences of older generations who lived through the Great Depression and the aftermath of World War II. Its iconic imagery is the box under the bed, along with a firm determination to have “at least enough to bury me decently” (as commented by one of the study participants; Goodnow & Lawrence, in press).

**Supporting the Sensible Squirrel perspective**

There are at least five lines of argument that counter the hedonistic perspective, which point to contemporary elders as being concerned bequesters, or at least as Saving Squirrels whose activities mean some resources are left for their children: (a) the concentration of wealth in older generations could give rise to a variety of patterns of giving; (b) there is evidence of parents’ commitments to making bequests to their children; (c) in a world of risk, bequests may be accidental instead of intended; (d) there is a distinction between during-life and end-of-life giving; and (e) progression through the life course involves striking a balance.

The concentration of wealth in older generations could give rise to a variety of patterns of giving

That concentration does not mean that elders will automatically spend their wealth on themselves. The average figures of concentrated wealth also can mask the variability in expendable finances in the older generation (Productivity Commission, 2011, p. 59). Older parents may have more than they had imagined to either leave or to use. This can be the outcome of tax laws, frugal living, careful saving, or, in some cases, an explosion in the value of the family home.

Bequests have not entirely suffered in older people’s planning. They are common practice and often sizable. In one US study (Dynan, Sinner, & Zeldes, 2002), the size of bequests was up to six times the average earnings of an older group of elders. Although placing considerable value on leaving bequests, this group did not say they were saving specifically in order to make those bequests. According to Dynan et al., that kind of specification would have just meant adding another motive on top of their already careful and precautionary saving.

There is evidence of parents’ commitments to making bequests to their children

The wish to have something to leave the children transcends cultural and legal contexts. Although people may have a variety of reasons for making bequests, there seems to be a general perspective that one will leave some family legacy (Rowlingson & McKay, 2006). While inheritance gifts are more concentrated in the wealthy, that concentration is not exclusive to those with much to leave.

The desire to leave something, however, may not sit lightly with a growing social expectation that older people should be prepared to contribute more to their own care needs. That expectation comes into collision with people’s desire to leave intact one particular source of potential wealth—the family home.
A recent draft report by the Productivity Commission (2011), for instance, proposed that older people should be expected to make contributions to their care. The Commission noted that over 83% of people of 65 and over own or are buying their own home. It proposed that a government-backed equity release scheme would allow these people to borrow against the equity in their homes with no (or limited) repayments until the home is transferred to another person. The journalist Ross Gittins (2011) vigorously took up this proposal, challenging people to discuss with him online the appropriateness of hanging onto the home as an intact resource. He argued that with the escalating cost of care, elders and their inheritance-conscious children can no longer reserve assets for passing on to younger generations.

That argument is not popular. In our bank of narratives, one father who needed to move to assisted accommodation, for example, engaged in a running battle with his children about the quality and cost of different care facilities. He did not want to spend. They wanted him to spend. In the end, the children could not persuade him to sell the family home and go to the better facility. He preferred to keep the asset of the home intact for his heirs rather than to buy extra comfort and services for himself.

In a world of risk, bequests may be accidental instead of intended

Funds in excess of need may be accrued as people focus on making sure they have enough for their needs (Pestieau, 2003). Many people squirrel away their assets, hoping they will have enough to last them out. As a result, unforeseen death leaves some heirs with unexpectedly generous amounts. Their parents’ resources outlast their needs, with their frugal living and saving resulting in the generous proportions of these accidental bequests.

One financial advisor told us about an older couple who had been particularly frugal in their spending during their early retirement. They wanted to make sure they had enough for when they were older. Now in their older years, they regretted not spending more when they were fitter. They had had more than enough to do so. According to Dynan et al. (2002):

Wealth is something like traveller’s checks; you take them along on vacation “just in case”, but the odds are they will remain uncashed and available for sundry goods after the journey is complete. (p. 724)

There is a distinction between during-life and end-of-life giving

Analyses of parents’ transfers of resources need to include more than the will and other end-of-life provisions. One-sided support for the hedonistic perspective loses some of its power when other forms of transfer between generations are counted alongside bequests. Parents may have already given substantial amounts to their children during their lifetimes. Early, carefully intended transfers can be a reasonable response to legal regulations. In the US, for example, state taxes are likely to be levied on what is left at the time of a parent’s death. Consequently, many parents work out intricate ways of providing for their children over the years to avoid death taxes (Pestieau, 2003). In Australia, which has no death taxes, there are other restrictions on patterns of transfer (e.g., gift taxes). In Islamic countries, some distinct advantages are attached to giving assets away before death. It is possible, for example, to give money to one’s children, kin or foundations in ways that will leave little to be covered by the Koranic distribution codes that normally apply (Carroll, 2001).

In general, there appears to be considerable variability in how people give resources to their children while they are alive compared with bequests. McGarry (1999), for example, found that transfers made during the parents’ lifetimes are more likely to benefit less well-off children. Inheritance bequests, however, are generally more likely to be equally divided between children. Similarly, unequal giving prompted by reciprocity seemed to be more acceptable among Japanese adult children while a parent was still alive, but less acceptable in inheritance situations (Izuhara, 2004).

Progression through the life course involves striking a balance

Regardless of historical changes, Erikson’s (1968) classic theory of psychosocial development continues to provide insights into the ways in which people balance competing demands. For all phases of the life course, it portrays the need for people to find their way through normative crises. These crises pull them in different ways that can lead to positive or negative resolutions of the crises (e.g., being over-self-protective or over-generous).

Striking a balance between tendencies to be cautious or to be generous is another way of viewing the choices available to the wealthy generation. With the trend for people to live longer and more actively, the Eriksonian crisis that demands a balance between
“generativity and stagnation” probably is now more applicable to people of older ages. It is relevant to how older people see and use their resources. Their balancing act, set within broad social trends, is not only important for their children’s wellbeing, but for their own. Striking this balance is a prelude to handling Erikson’s next crisis of “integrity versus despair”, as they face the end of their lives. The timing of Erikson’s age-related crises has changed as people live longer and take longer to traverse early adulthood. People in early old age are therefore often still balancing demands made upon them by the next generation with the demands of their own living.

Reservations and future directions for research

We may ask if it matters which of the perspectives discussed here dominates the discussion of inheritance arrangements and future lines of research. Is there a possibility of resolving the debate on one side or the other? Our answer to these two questions is, “Yes, it matters, but no, a resolution that favours only one side is not feasible”. The direction now needed, we suggest, is one of specifying reservations to one-sided solutions, and the research that would help fill the gaps that these reservations highlight.

Our reservations are of several kinds. They start with the need for attention to diversity: diversity in parents’ motives, forms of wealth, the way in which wealth is distributed, the way in which bequests are communicated, and the nature of the match between the views of generations. Still to receive close attention is a particular gap that has to do with the interplay between norms that pull in different directions, and with the circumstances that help shape the norms that people hold about what is feasible and what should happen.

Parents’ motivations for making bequests can take several forms

It is unlikely that parents’ motivations can be reduced solely to the two perspectives of hedonism or careful squirreling for rainy days or late-life demands. What is needed then is to specify other diverse forms that motivations may take.

One move in this direction is the proposal that even if we cut motivations down to two forms (in this case, altruism and exchange), the critical issue will be the relative strengths of these two (e.g., see McGarry, 1999). An alternative direction involves exploring parents’ motives in ways that allow diversity to come to the surface. An example is a study by Sousa, Silva, Santos and Patrão (2010). They analysed people’s stories of critical incidents related
to inheritance in Portugal. There, distributing equal shares to one’s children is the law, and people have freedom to bequeath only a third of their assets as they choose. Nonetheless, Sousa and her colleagues discovered eight patterns of motivation. As well as equality, these included motives of altruism, exchange and egoism, and these motives were not completely at odds. Instead, they could be laid on a continuum defined by the endpoints of altruism and egoism, with equality and exchange as interim points.

Along similar lines is the proposal that inheritance arrangements reflect the relative strengths of seeing them as predominantly serving instrumental or expressive functions. Parents’ support for their children, for example, can be instrumental (e.g., covering the costs of children becoming less dependent), expressive (e.g., specific gifts with loving symbolism that matches the gift carefully to the receiver), or a mix of the two (Nauck, 2010).

Bequests exclusively involving money also can take expressive as well as instrumental forms of giving. The expression is often conveyed in an accompanying message (e.g., “This amount is for X’s special trip”). Several of our narrators, for example, told of inheritance arrangements where the older giver went to great lengths to say that certain gifts of money were expressing love and concern (e.g., fulfilling a child or grandchild’s dream of travel, giving them a car, or funding a special course of study; Goodnow & Lawrence, 2008a). In some cases, the specific sum of money may convey to the receiver that the money is for a special project that they had talked about previously within a loving relationship.

**Wealth can take several forms**

Wealth can take the form of cash, shares, bonds, interest-bearing deposits or superannuation funds. All these can be converted into cash in hand, ready for distribution. The older generation’s resources, however, may be tied up in a house, other property or a family business. These resources are not readily converted into funds that can be used or that can be distributed among several potential heirs. Money is divisible, houses are not. People may be willing to use cash in hand either for necessities or for pleasure, but they are less likely to plunder the family home.

We now need analyses of how what is left or what is kept aside for other purposes varies with the main sources of parents’ wealth. The explosion in house prices, for instance, may well alter the sources of wealth. An ordinary suburban home may yield a generous estate, and the legacy of the house may then be large enough to affect the fortunes of the next generation. That effect may be positive (e.g., in the amount left) or negative (e.g., in the potential for family conflict over what is left). The proposals from the Productivity Commission (2011) and Gittins (2011) certainly make it clear that suggestions of turning the equity of the family home into useable funds can touch on sensitive family matters.

**Distributions can take varied forms**

A general starting point for wealth distribution seems to be to “treat the children equally”. Although that starting point may be honoured more in intent than in practice, any actual departures from equality seem to require explanation.

We now need to pay closer attention to the nature of those justifications and to the circumstances that can give rise to departures from equal distributions to children. Drake and Lawrence (2000), for example, asked an older group of adults (aged between 65 and 91 years) how they would allocate a set amount of money between children who varied in gender, need, and merit (i.e., providing support for parents). Departures from equal distributions of money did not occur when the difference was only on the basis of gender, but they were more frequent on the basis of differences in need than merit. Need exerted the stronger pull. Still stronger were combinations of need and merit.

Light and McGarry (2004) add further material. From within a sample of 5,000 mothers aged 45–80, they drew out 1,490 who had already made wills. Most of these mothers started with the intention of leaving equal shares. When they did make unequal bequests, those departures from equality were related either to the mother’s own poor health (probably giving more to children who provided care), their predictions of variations in their children’s income levels or, in the case of blended families, the biological status of their children (giving more to natural than adopted children). There is still much to learn about how elders perceive the personal circumstances of different family members as grounds for departures from strict equality. As one step forward, we presented research participants with a series of vignettes that asked for their approval or disapproval of other people’s inheritance arrangements that had caused problems (Goodnow & Lawrence, 2008a).

In one of these, a mother leaves to one especially needy daughter more than she...
leaves to the others. When asked for their comments on this way of making unequal shares, people in general were sympathetic about the mother’s response to her child’s financial needs. The unequal distribution was acceptable, provided that some other criteria were met. Unequal shares should in no way stem from “favouritism”, “undue influence” or “collusion”. In addition, most participants felt that if there were to be an unequal distribution, the other heirs should be informed, and informed in advance. It should not come as a shock.

Bequests on intentions may be communicated and carried out in several ways

We have already mentioned one example of communicating intentions about bequests: the significance of telling people in advance that the distribution of shares will be unequal. Heirs, above all, need to know where they stand in planned arrangements. There is little sympathy for secretive readings of wills. While a certain amount of non-disclosure may be self-preserving, it also may leave an unpleasant memorial.

The need now is to recognise that styles of communication and interpersonal interactions carry their own weight, over and above how items are distributed. To date, there has been little analysis of how forms of communication affect the acceptance of various inheritance arrangements. Yet to be understood, for example, is whether disinherited family members react like disenfranchised workers. Tyler (2000) has shown that people affected by decisions in occupational and legal settings are able to tolerate unfavourable outcomes if they think the processes of decision-making were procedurally fair. Testing the extent of concerns about communication and other procedures in inheritance situations could link inheritance studies to other areas where people make significant judgements that are tuned to their sense of fairness.

Part of communication style also has to do with occasions when family members feel they have been treated unfairly in distributions, and turn to the court. It is time for a closer look at the way in which people present their case to lawyers or to the court, and the kind of advice and judgements they find there. They may well be advised, for example, to emphasise need rather than how well they looked after their parents.

Orientations of two generations do not always match

When parents and children are of one mind about the use of the parents’ assets, it is not too difficult to make decisions about what to leave and to whom. Consensus can be achieved. The family enters areas of conflict when what the parents expect is not what the children expect. That lack of consensus can even violate the sense of being a family. One of our narrators, for example, ended his story about an inheritance arrangement he felt went wrong with the comment: “And this was supposed to be a family!”

We now need evidence of any variability or, alternatively, any consensus among older and younger members of the same families. More revealing will be information about the grounds for similar and different views.

When, for instance, is a lack of match likely to occur and to provoke family tension? One kind of occasion, our narratives suggest, is when parents leave their assets to people that some family members do not regard as family. Subsequent wives or husbands, children from subsequent marriages, and stepchildren and adopted children are often seen as not being completely “in the family”, as not being entitled to the same bequests that should apply to “full” family members.

A middle-aged man in one of our narratives, for example, asked his father to take a second mortgage on his modest house in order to help him, the son, get a home loan. Indeed, he argued that since his father had a new partner who would have residency rights for some years after the father died, he, the son, was effectively being cut out of his expected inheritance from the sale of the family home. Therefore, he claimed, he was due some extra financial support now; “That house is my inheritance. I am dependent on that when you go”. The father did not agree that his son was entitled to this form of financial support now. He countered that his own lifestyle would be severely cramped if there were a long-term debt hanging over his head. He had already covered what the son was entitled to from this form of financial support now.

He countered that his own lifestyle would be severely cramped if there were a long-term debt hanging over his head. He had already covered what the son was entitled to expect. That lack of consensus can even violate the sense of being a family. One of our narrators, for example, ended his story about an inheritance arrangement he felt went wrong with the comment: “And this was supposed to be a family!”

Responses to societal changes can vary, and are not all one-sided

Responses to social changes such as global risk and financial crises are not exclusive to retirees. Younger people are likely to have more precarious holds on social resources than
their elders. As Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) pointed out, young people in the 21st century are increasingly obliged to construct their own “do-it-yourself biographies” as they work to establish career and family lives in uncertain circumstances.

The uncertainties of contemporary life also mean that adult children have changing perspectives on relationships and responsibilities. Izuhara (2004) reported how a breakdown in traditional generational contracts for elder care in Japan has been accompanied by the expressed wish for more independence by adult children. In a study of inheritance expectations across six cultures, Nauck (2010) recently found further evidence of a general shift towards greater attention to giving personal objects that express relationships rather than material values. What needs to be considered are how relationships and circumstances may influence people’s behaviours and motives.

A particular gap: The interplay of norms

Up to this point, we have been concerned with reservations, gaps and future directions related to the recognition of greater diversity than the two perspectives of hedonism and squirreling imply. To these we need to add another largely overlooked issue—the interplay of conflicting norms that pull people in different directions. That issue is critical for understanding people’s behaviours and motives.

People function on the basis of a variety of concerns or norms about what is the right thing to do in specific situations. These concerns or norms rarely point people to only one way to proceed. Concerns about family harmony and individual rights, for example, are likely to pull elders in different directions when they are trying to resolve different calls on their affections, values and resources. It would be acting out of character, for example, for previously loving and supportive parents to suddenly turn into SKIers once they have more money than they ever imagined. However much they are enticed by trips and cruises, they are not likely to entirely dismiss “our kids’ needs”. Similarly, squirrels may also be torn when they are working out how much to go on saving “just in case”, and how much they can give away. Some of the pull may depend on whose rainy day has now come. One wants to be “a good parent”, but not “a soft touch”. As experienced by the father in the second mortgage narrative, the pull of obligation (to be a provider) may compete with the pull of a sense of fairness—that one has “already done enough” for a particular child.

We now need concepts and methods that will advance our understanding of the pull of different norms. That will involve understanding more about how people’s norms and values are influenced by cultural ideologies and legal codes. Even more searching and sorely needed are analyses that deal with how norms, ideologies and legal codes all interact with particular sets of circumstances. We need to know, for instance, the impact on people’s commitments of what they see as appropriate and right when their circumstances alter. Do considerations of what is appropriate and right, for instance, take precedence in the face of one’s own growing frailty, or are they given up or modified in the face of difficult circumstances? Does the pull of family harmony weaken in favour of concerns about individual rights and deservedness?

Conclusion

The financial wellbeing of a family obviously owes much to how its elders use the resources that are available to them. How these resources are passed on is closely tied to norms and expectations about obligation and entitlement. How the older generation exercises its own entitlement is not only a potential source of conflict within the family. It also remains an open question for family researchers.
Throughout, the evidence has pointed to the significance of achieving a balanced orientation to inheritance arrangements—a balance in approaches to spending and saving, a balance in judgements about the appropriate divisions of assets, a balance between competing norms. We have already pointed to the attraction of taking a one-sided view of how elders make their inheritance arrangements. One-sided views not only fail to take account of the evidence, but they sell short the experiences, demands and norms that pull bequest-makers in different directions. Instead of carefree nomads or benevolent fairy godmothers and godfathers, it may be more useful to think about elders as ageing jugglers. They are juggling their own needs and interests along with the needs and interests of the family. That is a handful in anyone’s terms.

References


Jeanette A. Lawrence is at Psychological Sciences, The University of Melbourne. Jacqueline J. Goodnow is at the Institute for Early Childhood, Macquarie University. Correspondence concerning this paper should be sent to: Jeanette A. Lawrence, Psychological Sciences, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, 3010. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 11th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, 9 July 2010.
Fathering in Australia among couple families with young children

Research highlights

Jennifer Baxter and Diana Smart

There has been growing recognition of the importance of fathers to families in recent years. Societal trends, such as rising levels of employment among mothers of young children and recognition of the importance of the father–child relationship, have given more prominence to the contribution that fathers make to family life. Governments are increasingly interested in creating conditions that can foster fathers’ involvement in families; for example, through promoting more flexible working arrangements or by ensuring that children maintain contact with fathers following family breakdown. This growing interest in the role of fathers has been mirrored in the scientific community, with a burgeoning of interest in research on fathers. However, there has been a limited amount of research on fathers in Australia, with the result that there remains much to be learned about the ways in which Australian fathers contribute to families and feel about themselves as fathers.

New information about fathering in Australia has recently been published, in a report titled Fathering in Australia Among Couple Families With Young Children (Baxter & Smart, 2010). The report aimed to increase understanding of the many ways in which fathers in couple families who are parents of young children contribute to family life. The aspects examined were fathers’ time investment with children, their supportiveness as partners, their financial contribution, their parenting behaviours and styles, and their perceptions of their own adequacy as fathers. The impact of fathers on children’s wellbeing was also examined. This article presents an edited version of the executive summary from the report, with the addition of selected research highlights to illustrate some of the key findings.

The report made use of data from Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), a large-scale, nationally representative study of children and families that is following the experiences and wellbeing of two cohorts of children and their families, from infancy to the threshold of adulthood. The children in the LSAC were, at the first wave of the study in 2004, aged...
0–1 years (the B cohort) and 4–5 years (the K cohort). The data from Wave 1 were used, along with those at Wave 2, when these same children were aged 2–3 years and 6–7 years respectively, and at Wave 3, when they were aged 4–5 years and 8–9 years. The availability of data at these different ages of the children allowed analyses of how fathering may change as children grow through these early years.

LSAC is unusual in that it obtains the perspectives of mothers and fathers, and collects information on a very broad range of influences on child and family wellbeing. It is thus particularly appropriate for the investigation of fathering in the Australian context.

Fathers’ time with children

The analyses began by considering the time fathers spend with their children as one facet of fathering, and making use of a number of measures of fathers’ time with children. These were: the amount of shared time spent together, whether fathers regularly cared for their child, the play-type activities that children and fathers shared, and fathers’ involvement in different personal care, social or educational activities with children.

Analyses of these data showed that children spent several hours per day with their fathers, although much of this time was when mothers were also present. This is shown in Table 1.

These data revealed that children were involved in a range of activities during shared father–child time. Fathers were not just present for playtime; for example, they were present during father’s personal care activities (bathing, grooming) and while they were travelling.

A substantial number of fathers reported having daily involvement in their child’s personal care activities, although not surprisingly, mothers had much higher rates of daily involvement. The gap between mothers’ and fathers’ involvement narrowed for most activities as children aged and mothers’ involvement also declined, no doubt reflecting changes in children’s needs (Table 2).

While joint time together is one way of looking at fathers’ involvement with children, in the analyses of how fathering was associated with child wellbeing, this measure of fathering was not significantly related to outcomes, unlike other measures of fathering (discussed below). This suggests that the sheer amount of time spent in the child’s company exerts less influence on children’s outcomes than other aspects of fathering. It is likely that the quality of the time that fathers and children spend together is more central, and this is where other measures of fathering are particularly useful.

Co-parenting and couples’ sharing of unpaid work

The nature of the co-parental relationship is crucial in explaining how or whether parents’ time with children may be beneficial (or otherwise). A positive co-parental relationship may model and foster communication and relationship skills in children—skills that children can emulate in their own relationships.

| Table 1 Children’s time spent with parents while awake, by cohort and age of child |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                                 | B cohort | K cohort |
|                                 | 0–1 year | 2–3 years | 4–5 years | 4–5 years | 6–7 years | 8–9 years |
| Minutes per day                 |          |          |          |          |          |          |
| Father–child time total         | 260      | 275      | 281      | 272      | 247      | 260      |
| Father-only child time          | 38       | 57       | 57       | 59       | 57       | 55       |
| Mother–child time total         | 517      | 510      | 486      | 470      | 377      | 389      |
| Mother-only child time          | 294      | 291      | 263      | 258      | 187      | 183      |
| Total parent–child time         | 554      | 567      | 544      | 530      | 434      | 443      |
| With other adults               | 38       | 110      | 174      | 156      | 255      | 251      |
| Alone or with other children only | 22      | 49       | 49       | 75       | 96       | 105      |
| Awake total                     | 626      | 738      | 779      | 775      | 804      | 818      |
| Number of children              | 2,787    | 2,527    | 2,197    | 2,144    | 2,151    | 1,903    |

Note: Total of parent–child time, time with other adults and time alone or with other children does not quite add to the total time awake, as total awake time includes a small amount (less than 20 minutes per day) of missing “who with” data, which has not been shown.

Source: LSAC, children’s time use diaries, Waves 1–3
This report by Baxter and Smart (2010) included analyses of the amounts of time that each parent spent on child care or other domestic work, and mothers’ and fathers’ perceptions of whether each parent did their fair share, as well as the degree to which partners supported or understood each other as parents, or disagreed about child rearing issues.

These analyses showed highly gendered patterns in the time distribution of parents of young children, with fathers spending more time than mothers in paid employment, and less time in child care and domestic work. When time spent in paid work and unpaid work was totalled, mothers and fathers undertook similar amounts of work in a usual week (Table 3).

Mothers and fathers had different perceptions of the degree to which the sharing of child care and other domestic work was fair. Overall, mothers were more likely than fathers to think they did more than their share of either type of unpaid work, with fathers more likely to think that they did their fair share, or less than their fair share. For example, among parents of children aged 0–1 year old, 20% of fathers thought they did less or much less than their fair share of the child care, 69% thought they did their fair share, and 11% thought they did more or much more than their fair share. Mothers, on the other hand, most often thought they did more or much more than their fair share (62%), with 37% saying they did their fair share and less than one per cent saying they did less than their fair share. Similar patterns were observed for parents of older children, although in these families mothers were somewhat less likely to report that they did more than their fair share, with the proportion reporting they did their fair share being higher than for mothers of younger children.

Within couples, there was a fair amount of consistency in perceptions of the fairness of the division of child care. For example, Table 4 shows that when fathers said they did less than their fair share, 73% of mothers felt that they (the mothers) did more than their fair share. However, when fathers thought they did their fair share, mothers were fairly equally split between also saying that they themselves did their fair share or more than their fair share.

Perceptions about fairness were related to the actual sharing of unpaid work in the home.

Table 2 Parents’ involvement in personal care activities in the past month, by age of child and frequency of fathers’ and mothers’ involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Age of child</th>
<th>Fathers’ frequency of involvement</th>
<th>Mothers’ frequency of involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Once a day or more</td>
<td>Few times a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist child with eating</td>
<td>2–3 years</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change child’s nappies or help use toilet</td>
<td>2–3 years</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get child ready for bed or put child to bed</td>
<td>2–3 years</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>55.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get child ready for bed or put child to bed</td>
<td>4–5 years</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get child ready for bed or put child to bed</td>
<td>6–7 years</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>50.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give child a bath or shower</td>
<td>2–3 years</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>55.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give child a bath or shower</td>
<td>4–5 years</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give child a bath or shower</td>
<td>6–7 years</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help child get dressed/ ready for day</td>
<td>2–3 years</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>54.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help child get dressed/ ready for day</td>
<td>4–5 years</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help child get dressed/ ready for day</td>
<td>6–7 years</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help supervise child brushing teeth</td>
<td>2–3 years</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help supervise child brushing teeth</td>
<td>4–5 years</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help supervise child brushing teeth</td>
<td>6–7 years</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help supervise child brushing teeth</td>
<td>8–9 years</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For fathers, sample sizes were 3,090 at 2–3 years, 2,732 at 4–5 years, 2,904 at 6–7 years and 2,645 at 8–9 years. For mothers, sample sizes were 3,198 at 2–3 years, 3,829 at 4–5 years, 3,015 at 6–7 years and 3,551 at 8–9 years. Numbers varied slightly on specific items due to small amounts of item non-response.

Source: LSAC, fathers’ and mothers’ self-complete questionnaires, both cohorts, Waves 2 and 3

There are highly gendered patterns in the time distribution of parents of young children, with fathers spending more time than mothers in paid employment, and less time in child care and domestic work.
Fathers who said they did their fair share had actually undertaken a greater share of the total hours of child care completed by either parent, compared to fathers who said they did less than their fair share. Mothers’ perceptions of fairness were also related to this amount of child care undertaken by fathers (Table 4).

An important aspect of parenting is being a resource and support to the other parent, and this is an indicator of the quality of the co-parental relationship. Fathers and mothers were very positive about the resources and support provided by mothers to fathers (Table 5). Fathers and mothers were not so positive about the resources or support provided by fathers to mothers. The finding that the majority of fathers felt well supported by their partners is important, as one of the enablers of fathers’ involvement with children is the perceived support they receive from their partners.

One indication of the negative aspects of co-parenting is the extent of disagreement between parents over child rearing issues. These analyses showed that most parents reported low levels of disagreement about child rearing issues. Only just over one-quarter of parents reported sometimes or more often having such disagreements.

The quality of the co-parental relationship was significantly related to children’s outcomes, with mothers’ and fathers’ reports of providing support to each other being related to children’s socio-emotional outcomes. Further, when fathers reported that there were more disagreements about child rearing, children’s

### Table 3 Estimated hours per day of maternal and paternal child care, and domestic and paid work, by cohort and age of child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B cohort</th>
<th>K cohort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2–3 years</td>
<td>4–5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fathers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total unpaid</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic work</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total paid employment</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total paid and unpaid</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample size</td>
<td>3,039</td>
<td>2,675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mothers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total unpaid</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic work</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total paid employment</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total paid and unpaid</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample size</td>
<td>2,932</td>
<td>3,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Couple-level estimates</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total couple-level child care (hours per day)</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean fathers’ child care (% of fathers + mothers)</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total couple-level domestic work (hours per day)</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean fathers’ domestic work (% of fathers + mothers)</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample size</td>
<td>2,771</td>
<td>2,651</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** These figures have been derived from weekly data by dividing by seven. The apparently low estimates for paid work are because most people do not work over seven days. Assumes child care, domestic work and paid work are all mutually exclusive. This may be a less valid assumption for child care and domestic work, as supervisory child care work may be done while doing domestic tasks. Couple-level estimates are based on families in which both mother and father returned self-complete questionnaires.

**Source:** LSAC, fathers’ and mothers’ self-complete questionnaires, Waves 2 and 3
socio-emotional outcomes and learning outcomes were poorer.

Parenting practices and styles

The report examined the parenting practices and styles of fathers (and mothers) by looking at six core dimensions: warmth, hostile parenting, angry parenting, inductive reasoning, consistency and over-protection. These measures offer some insights into the quality of the time fathers spend with children (see Table 6).

Mothers and fathers generally displayed high levels of warmth, inductive reasoning and consistency, low levels of hostility and anger, and moderate levels of over-protection. Thus, generally, LSAC fathers (and mothers) seemed to be parenting well. There were, however, consistent differences between fathers and mothers in their parenting styles. Over all aspects of parenting, fathers differed significantly from mothers, exhibiting, on average, less warmth, less inductive reasoning, less consistency and less over-protection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4 Agreement between fathers’ and mothers’ perceived share of child care, as a proportion of total parental child care time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mothers’ reports of child care fairness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do less than fair share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do less than fair share</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do fair share</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do more than fair share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fathers’ child care time (mean %)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do less than fair share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do fair share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do more than fair share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
<th>Significance</th>
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Note: Cohorts have been combined, including Waves 1–3 in calculations of the distribution, and Waves 2–3 in calculations of child care time (since these data were not collected at Wave 1). If there were non-responses at any wave, data at responding waves were retained. Includes only families in which both mother and father completed the self-complete questionnaire. Asterisks indicate significance of difference across the reports of fairness of sharing, across mothers’ reports (as indicated in total column) and across fathers’ reports (final row); *** p < .001.

Source: LSAC, fathers’ and mothers’ self-complete questionnaires, Waves 1–3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5 Parents’ reports of being a resource or support to each other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fathers’ reports of partner as a support</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely or never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12,236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data are from Waves 1 and 3 only, since these data were not collected at Wave 2.

Source: LSAC Waves 1 and 3, B and K cohorts

Mothers and fathers generally displayed high levels of warmth, inductive reasoning and consistency, low levels of hostility and anger, and moderate levels of over-protection.
The analyses of fathering and child wellbeing showed that greater paternal warmth was associated with more positive learning and socio-emotional outcomes among children, as was maternal warmth. Hence, the benefits of high-quality parenting by fathers were discernable. (The analyses did not explore associations between other parenting styles and child outcomes.)

Variation in fathering

There was considerable variation among LSAC fathers in the degree to which they undertook the various fathering roles. Not only were there differences across fathers at any one point in time, there were differences across time, as children, contexts and parents changed.

In the report, extensive use was made of data on family and child characteristics to examine how fathering varied across different families, recognising that fathering occurs within families, and within the context of relationships between mothers and fathers and children. This included the examination of how fathering changed as children grew, using cross-sectional as well as longitudinal perspectives.

A general point to make is that none of the explanatory variables used were associated with each and every measure of fathering. There were, however, some very consistent associations, which are summarised next.

The majority of fathers worked full-time hours and were the main income earners in many families, making fathers’ employment an important aspect of fathering.

Table 6 Levels of maternal and paternal parenting, mean scores, by cohort and age of child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parenting dimension</th>
<th>B cohort 0–1 years</th>
<th>B cohort 2–3 years</th>
<th>B cohort 4–5 years</th>
<th>K cohort 4–5 years</th>
<th>K cohort 6–7 years</th>
<th>K cohort 8–9 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fathers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility (score out of 10)</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>3.3†</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>2.2†</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.2†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inductive reasoning</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-protection</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility (score out of 10)</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>3.3†</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>2.1†</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.1†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inductive reasoning</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-protection</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>n. a.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n. a. = not applicable (not collected this wave). Scales on each measure ranged from 1 to 5, except hostility, which ranged from 1 to 10. A higher score indicates higher levels of the parenting behaviour. All mother–father differences are significant at the 1% level, except those labelled †, which did not reach significance at p < .05. Significance is based on paired t-tests, comparing mothers and fathers on each parenting dimension, with separate tests conducted for each cohort/wave.

Source: LSAC, fathers’ and mothers’ self-complete questionnaires, all cohorts/waves
missed out on home or family activities that they would have liked to have taken part in. Fathers’ responses to the other items indicate that a minority of fathers found that work had a negative impact upon their parenting, family life or children. More generally, the time factor was evident in the degree to which fathers reported being rushed or pressed for time (46% always or often and 39% sometimes).

For many fathers, the spillover from work was seen to be less intrusive on family. More than half the fathers disagreed (or strongly disagreed) with the statement that their family time was less enjoyable and more pressured because of work responsibilities; nearly three-quarters agreed that working helped them to better appreciate the time they spent with their children. Just over half agreed that their work had a positive effect on their children and almost half agreed that their working made them a better parent.

Some 62% of fathers disagreed or strongly disagreed that their family responsibilities had meant they had turned down work activities they would have preferred to take on.

Analyses of the LSAC data also showed connections between fathering and mothers’ employment, especially when mothers worked full-time hours. Fathers’ greater involvement in these families was apparent in the amount of fathers’ time spent with children and also in the extent of co-parenting. When mothers worked longer hours, fathers were more involved in some of the personal care activities, spent more time with their child or doing child care tasks, and were seen as more of a support to mothers in raising their children.

Turning to a different contextual set of variables, the analyses also considered the family context, including the quality of the parental relationship and the nature of the relationship between parents (whether married or cohabiting), and between father and children (whether biological or step-father).

The analyses revealed that marital (or relationship) quality was a consistent and powerful factor in explaining variation in fathering. Using fathers’ reports of the happiness of their relationships with their partners, positive associations were evident in the analyses of fathers’ time with children, co-parenting, and more positive parenting styles.

With regard to differences according to married versus cohabiting fathers, and biological versus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7</th>
<th>Fathers’ work–family spillover and time pressures, employed fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work–family spillover measures</td>
<td>Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of my work responsibilities I have missed out on home or family activities that I would have liked to have taken part in</td>
<td>Agree/ strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree/ strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of my work responsibilities my family time is less enjoyable and more pressured</td>
<td>Agree/strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree/strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working helps me to better appreciate the time that I spend with my children</td>
<td>Agree/strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree/strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My working has a positive effect on my children</td>
<td>Agree/strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree/strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fact that I work makes me a better parent</td>
<td>Agree/strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree/strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of my family responsibilities, I have had to turn down work activities or opportunities that I would prefer to take on</td>
<td>Agree/ strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree/ strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often feel rushed or pressed for time</td>
<td>Always/often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rarely/never</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSAC, fathers’ self-complete questionnaires, Waves 1–3, B and K cohorts
step-fathers, differences were not consistent and tended to be small.

Another indicator of family relationships, whether fathers have children living elsewhere, was significantly related to fathering, with these fathers appearing to be less involved with resident children than other fathers. For example, compared to fathers who did not have other children living elsewhere, fathers with children living apart from them spent less time doing child care tasks and were rated by mothers and fathers as being less of a resource or support in child rearing. Further, looking at their parenting styles, fathers with children living elsewhere tended to show lower warmth, less inductive reasoning and less consistency.

Fathering quite often differed according to family size; for example, fathers less frequently talked with the LSAC child or shared an evening meal when they were in larger families. Some variations, however, were related not only to family size but also to birth order, as fathers appeared to be less involved when children had a larger number of older siblings, but were more involved when there were more younger siblings.

In terms of parental characteristics, we explored how fathering varied by fathers’ and mothers’ educational attainment, and by fathers’ mental health, age and ethnicity (whether they mainly spoke a language other than English, and whether Indigenous).

These analyses showed that more highly educated fathers were more likely to be involved in various personal care tasks, although they did not differ on the amount of time spent with their children. Higher paternal education was also associated with some aspects of parenting, with these fathers showing, on average, less hostility and less over-protection, and more inductive reasoning and consistency. There were, however, no differences in warm or angry parenting according to fathers’ educational attainment.

Throughout the analyses, fathers’ mental health was very often significantly correlated with their fathering. For example, fathers who reported better mental health were more likely to talk with their child about the day and to share an evening meal with children. On the other hand, mental health was not related to the amount of time fathers spent with children, or in fathers’ involvement in personal care activities. Fathers’ mental health was also strongly related to children’s socio-emotional outcomes. In addition, better mental health was associated with a stronger co-parental relationship and more positive parenting practices. These findings point to the salience of fathers’ mental wellbeing for their fathering.

Variation in fathering according to other characteristics, such as ethnicity and age, were less consistent, and often such differences were not significant. Similarly, differences in fathering by mothers’ education were generally not significant.

Finally, variation in fathering was explored by children’s characteristics, including their age, gender, temperament and health status.
There was considerable evidence that fathers’ involvement varied as children grew in terms of the amount of time spent with children and the types of activities undertaken. Looking at involvement in particular activities such as talking with their child about the day and sharing an evening meal with them, fathers were most involved at the older ages (6–7 and 8–9 years). In the analyses of the amount of time children spent with their father, the total time appeared to peak when children were of preschool age and then decline once they were of school age. In the report, this was explored further by making use of the longitudinal nature of the data to consider how fathering changed across the three waves.

In the analyses of co-parenting, there were certainly differences in the amount of time parents spent on unpaid household tasks according to the age of LSAC children; however, no differences were apparent on the degree of support parents gave their partners in child rearing. Clearly, differing elements of fathering come to the fore or become less central as children grow. The analyses of parenting styles showed very little change (difference) in the parenting styles of either mothers or fathers at differing child ages. The exception was hostility, which was much lower at 0–1 years than at later years. There was also some evidence that parenting warmth declined slightly as children moved through childhood.

The fathering of girls as opposed to boys differed in some respects. For example, there were some differences in the activities fathers undertook with boys versus girls, with fathers spending more time with boys and more likely to be involved in their personal care activities. In terms of parenting styles, less warmth, over-protection, more hostile or angry parenting and more consistency and was found among fathers of boys. Differences, however, were not always apparent, suggesting that the child’s gender is more relevant to certain aspects of fathering.

This report found several associations between fathering and child temperament, especially in relation to parenting styles. For example, less positive/more negative parenting behaviours were evident among fathers of children with a more reactive temperament style (i.e., children who were more volatile and feisty). Also, among these children, fathers less often ate an evening meal with them, or talked to them about their day. These findings add to the sparse literature on connections between children’s temperament style and fathers’ parenting.

The analyses rarely found differences in fathering according to child’s health status.

In all the analyses in the report, despite finding that a range of variables was important in explaining variation in fathering, there was nevertheless considerable unexplained variation in the data. That is, the characteristics included in the analyses did not capture fully the determinants of father involvement, fathers’ parenting styles and co-parenting. No doubt, some of this unexplained variation relates to different levels of motivation of fathers, with some being very committed to being highly involved with their children, and others less so, as well as fathers’ personality or family experiences while growing up.

Some other findings regarding fathering

The report showed that in Australia, when children are young, fathers rarely withdraw from the labour market to take over caring responsibilities for children. In fact, the breadwinner or provider role appears to be central to many fathers’ lives in Australia. A very gendered picture emerged, with fathers spending much more time, on average, in paid work than in unpaid work, compared to mothers (see Table 3. The breadwinner model was also evident in that fathers contributed more than two-thirds of the parental income in these families (Table 8).

On many measures of fathering, fathers who were more involved on one dimension (e.g.,

| Table 8 Fathers’ income as a percentage of total parental income, by cohort and age of child |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|                                               | B cohort     | K cohort     |
|                                               | 0–1 year     | 2–3 years    | 4–5 years     | 4–5 years     | 6–7 years     | 8–9 years     |
| Fathers’ income as % of parental income       | 72.5         | 70.3         | 69.9          | 68.4          | 68.4          | 67.7          |
| Sample size                                   | 3,774        | 3,858        | 3,598         | 3,424         | 3,531         | 3,328         |

Note: Income is the total from all sources, so includes government benefits and allowances, if applicable. Child-related government payments are usually attributed to mothers. Results are calculated for respondents who provided income information for both mother and father.

Source: LSAC, primary carer interview, Waves 1–3, B and K cohorts

Fathers who reported better mental health were more likely to talk with their child about the day and to share an evening meal with children. Fathers’ mental health was also strongly related to children’s socio-emotional outcomes.
time spent doing child care tasks) were also involved on another dimension (e.g., having higher parental warmth). For example, fathers’ warmth and inductive reasoning were associated with fathers spending time with their children, with fathers who showed fewer of these parenting behaviours also found to spend less time with their children. Also, when fathers showed less warmth, inductive reasoning or consistency, or greater hostility or anger in interactions with their LSAC child, they tended to be seen by mothers as being less of a resource or support in child rearing. Thus, there seemed to be considerable overlap in the elements of fathering examined, reinforcing that fathering is a “package”. Of course, individual fathers will exhibit unique trends, perhaps being highly involved on one aspect of fathering but less involved on another. Nevertheless, the differing elements of fathering are correlated, as would be expected.

On various measures, there was evidence that fathers who had higher levels of involvement at the beginning of the study remained more involved as children grew. Levels of coparenting appeared to be relatively consistent across waves, as the correlations found were positive and moderate. Also, parenting practices and styles were positively correlated across waves; that is, fathers who exhibited more positive parenting styles continued to do so as children grew. These findings suggest that helping fathers get off to a good start when children are born will pay dividends later on, as patterns established early persist to a certain degree.

In Australia, the behaviour of fathers is clearly different to mothers when measured in a number of ways, but especially in terms of what each parent does with their children. Mothers spend more time with children at all ages, but especially at the ages before school commencement. They are therefore also more often involved with children’s personal care, social and educational activities. The parenting styles of mothers and fathers also differ. Despite these underlying differences, there is, within couples, correspondence between mothers’ and fathers’ involvement, such that children with fathers who are more involved (or have more positive parenting practices) tend to have more involved mothers (or mothers with more positive parenting practices). The similarity of parenting behaviours of mothers and fathers within couples has implications for children, given parents’ involvement is associated with children’ outcomes. Some children may experience a compounding of negative parenting, while others may be doubly enriched through the positive parenting behaviours of both parents.

The great majority of fathers (as well as mothers) saw themselves as average or better than average parents (see Table 9). Only a very small percentage rated themselves as “not very good” or “has some trouble” at being a parent. Within couples, mothers’ and fathers’ self-efficacy were correlated, such that when mothers rated themselves as being better parents, fathers tended to also do so. Relatively high proportions of fathers of very young children, compared to older children,
rated themselves as being a very good parent. For example, of fathers of 0–1 year old children, 36% gave themselves this rating, compared to 24% of fathers of 8–9 year olds. The percentage of fathers reporting themselves as being average parents increased over the cohorts/waves.

Across the waves, there was considerable stability of perceptions of self-efficacy—those who were more positive about their parenting ability at Wave 1 were likely to also be more positive at Waves 2 and 3.

Fathers’ parenting self-efficacy was related to their involvement with their children and family, although this appears to be unrelated to the “provider” role. A higher rating of fathers’ parenting self-efficacy was also positively associated with children’s socio-emotional and learning outcomes. These links remained after the effect of mothers’ parenting self-efficacy was included.

### Implications for policy, program development and service delivery

A critical aspect of analyses such as these is identifying ways in which the findings could be used to develop or enhance policies, programs and services for fathers. Ultimately, we would hope that such improvements would not only help fathers, but also help the families in which these experiences of fathering are most keenly felt.

Fathers’ parenting can be influenced by the supports they have available to them. This includes support from their partner as well as support from other family members, friends, colleagues and the wider community. At particular times, fathers as well as mothers may benefit from the support of professionals, or through participation in educational programs.

### Table 9 Mothers’ and fathers’ parenting self-efficacy, by cohort and age of child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B cohort</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0–1 year</td>
<td>2–3 years</td>
<td>4–5 years</td>
<td>4–5 years</td>
<td>6–7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Father</strong></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very good at being a parent</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A person who has some trouble being a parent</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An average parent</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A better than average parent</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A very good parent</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sample size</strong></td>
<td>3,613</td>
<td>3,111</td>
<td>2,710</td>
<td>3,318</td>
<td>2,930</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                  | K cohort |         |         |         |         |
| **Father**       | %        | %       | %       | %       | %       |
| Not very good at being a parent | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.1 | 0.3 |
| A person who has some trouble being a parent | 1.7 | 0.8 | 2.4 | 2.3 | 0.9 | 2.8 |
| An average parent | 25.2 | 24.3 | 33.3 | 32.3 | 27.1 | 34.5 |
| A better than average parent | 32.1 | 38.8 | 37.9 | 33.0 | 35.3 | 35.9 |
| A very good parent | 40.8 | 36.1 | 26.3 | 32.1 | 36.6 | 26.7 |
| **Total**        | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| **Sample size**  | 4,576 | 3,973 | 3,367 | 4,208 | 3,644 | 3,122 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parenting self-efficacy (mean score)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fathers</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Correlation mother–father</strong></td>
<td>0.21***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The mean parenting self-efficacy score is the mean, from 1 to 5, of the ratings parents gave themselves on this one item—1 equating to the lowest rating (not very good at being a parent) and 5 the highest rating (a very good parent). The correlation was calculated on paired mother–father data; that is, when the self-complete was returned for both mother and father in a family. *** p < .001. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0% due to rounding.

**Source:** LSAC, self-complete questionnaires, Waves 1–3, B and K cohorts

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The great majority of fathers (as well as mothers) saw themselves as average or better than average parents.
LSAC fathers are unlikely to be at the extreme end of the spectrum in terms of disengagement, neglect or harm, and of course such fathers and their families are the ones who are likely to benefit the most from outside support. However, even within the spectrum of fathering observed in this report, the results suggest several ways in which programs or services might offer opportunities for fathers to increase their involvement in families. These include addressing parenting skills and self-efficacy, and addressing parents’ approaches to co-parenting. Attention to specific problems such as relationship difficulties and mental health issues is also important.

Programs and services for fathers need to be developed such that they do engage fathers, and the inclusion of fathers needs to be considered across a range of services previously considered the domain of mothers, including health services (both during pregnancy and after the birth) and children’s health care.

As employment consumes a significant amount of time for many fathers, a key issue is whether workplace policies might be developed or improved to better address the needs of fathers. Workplace policies that might be beneficial to fathers include those that allow fathers to better share with mothers the responsibilities of caring for children. Such policies may address working hours, provision of leave for particular circumstances, and access to other family-friendly work arrangements. For fathers, a particular issue is the take-up of such measures, since mothers are much more likely to make use of these policies than fathers.

Family law is another policy context in which the role of fathers is receiving considerable attention. Policies relating to child support and the sharing of care are particularly relevant to fathers with more complex family arrangements, and potentially applicable to fathers in more unstable relationships.

**Conclusion**

The report, *Fathering in Australia Among Couple Families With Young Children*, confirmed that Australian fathers play a vital role in their families. This role is sometimes different, but complementary to, the role of mothers. The analyses showed that fathers made a major contribution to the family income, were supportive of their partners, participated in unpaid work within the home (albeit at lower levels than mothers), spent time with their children (although again, at lower levels than mothers), and were generally parenting well and felt they were doing a good job in their fathering role. Many of these qualities were linked.

The report also sought to explore the characteristics or circumstances that facilitated or hindered fathers’ involvement. As summarised here, fathers’ working arrangements, their mental health and the quality of relationships between partners appeared to be particularly salient influences on different indicators of fathering. Associations between measures of fathering (co-parenting and parental warmth) and children’s socio-emotional and learning outcomes were found, even after taking into account the contribution of mothers. The report concluded that fathering “matters” for children and families and there are tangible benefits to be gained from fostering fathers’ involvement in their families.

**References**


*Dr Jennifer Baxter* is a Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. *Diana Smart* was formerly a General Manager (Research) at AIFS and is now a research consultant.

This paper uses unit record data from *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children*. The study is conducted in partnership between the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The findings and views reported in this paper are those of the author and should not be attributed to FaHCSIA, AIFS or the ABS.
Family law: Family violence

Peter Boshier

Family violence is one of the most serious problems facing New Zealand (Hughes, 2008). In 2008, New Zealand Police recorded 38,369 family violence related incidents, and 32,675 family violence related offences, making up a total of 71,044 family violence related occurrences. In addition, 16 of the 49 murders that occurred in that year were recorded as domestic violence related (Ministry of Justice, 2007). The continuing prevalence of domestic violence evident in New Zealand has seen the situation described as “an epidemic” (Hand et al., 2001), and horrifying statistics predict that one in four women and just under one in five men will be the victim of domestic violence at some point in their lifetime (Morris, Reilly, Berry, & Ransom, 2003).

In this paper, I will discuss how domestic violence legislation has evolved in New Zealand and how the New Zealand Family Court currently responds to the issue of family violence, before considering what more I believe we need to do to reduce the incidence of family violence in New Zealand.

Present practice in New Zealand

Domestic Violence Act 1995

The evolution of domestic violence policy in New Zealand mirrored international responses to this issue and reflected wider social trends (Newbold & Cross, 2008), with the late 1960s seeing the public vernacular associated with domestic violence grow to incorporate concepts such as “child abuse” and “wife battering” (Webb et al., 2007).

Consequently, legislation that specifically addressed evolving attitudes towards domestic violence was called for and the Domestic Protection Act 1982 was passed. At that time, the legislation was revolutionary, and significant numbers flocked to take advantage of the powers of protection that it offered. But as time progressed, it became evident that the law was too restrictive for the evolving society that it was servicing, and that services such as counselling and mediation that form part of the emerging conciliatory arm of the Family Court were not being effectively utilised.
in conjunction with the legislation of the day. In essence, the exercise of best practice was being hindered.

The catalyst for further legislative change came in 1994, in the form of an inquiry and legislative review following the tragic death of three children and their father as a result of the father’s violent actions. The end result was the *Domestic Violence Act 1995*. This Act, New Zealand’s present-day legislation, is a modern and robust tool that enables the court to respond to family violence. It builds on definitions of domestic violence found in previous legislation by recognising the enormously negative effects of psychological abuse (National Network of Stopping Violence Services, 2007) and widening the variety of relationships that come within the ambit of the Act. It further provides for protection orders alongside a raft of other orders—such as tenancy, occupation and furniture orders—and makes attendance at programs on stopping violence all but compulsory for perpetrators of domestic violence.

Following the entry into force of the *Domestic Violence Act 1995*, there was initially a high uptake of protection orders, but this has tapered off in recent years. While some have expressed concern at the decreasing number of applications and consequent orders made—suggesting that it represents a perception that female victims of violence do not have confidence that protection orders are worth applying for (Robertson et al., 2007)—it should be remembered that protection orders have no time limit and do not expire. A protection order remains in place until a successful application is made to discharge it. This means that once the protection order is in place, the applicant will have no need to seek a new order, and thus the pool of people in need of protection orders constantly decreases until new people in need of such orders enter the pool.

### Care of Children Act 2004

The Family Court’s response to family violence is not just limited to proceedings under the *Domestic Violence Act 1995*; a proportion of our child law cases have a family violence component to them.

With respect to our private child law cases, when an application under the *Care of Children Act 2004* for day-to-day care or contact is made, the court is required to undertake a risk assessment if there is an allegation that one party has perpetrated violence against the child or a child of the family, or the other party. If an allegation of violence is proven, the court may not make orders giving the violent party day-to-day care or unsupervised contact unless satisfied the child will be safe with the violent party.

I believe that when private child law disputes come before the Family Court it is essential to identify at an early stage whether the case involves pathological dysfunction such as violence.

**The future**

Despite all the work that has been done, recorded rates of violence in New Zealand have
continued to rise. In 2009, recorded crime in New Zealand rose 4.6%, with a total of 451,405 offences on record, and violent offending increased by 9.2%, driven largely by recorded family violence increasing by a massive 18.6% (New Zealand Police, 2010). Actual levels of offending would have been even higher.

Therefore, if we are to move forward and begin to affect these statistics I believe that, in addition to an efficient court process, we must facilitate victims’ access to a reasonable support system. With this in mind, I followed with interest the Family Court of Australia’s Mental Health Support Pilot Project in 2004, which looked at the needs of those who came to court and were unduly affected by the court process. It was felt that for people to merely be treated as “customers of the court” by the court filing and receiving applications, was short of what a court of excellence should be doing.

The pilot had four broad elements (Family Court of Australia, 2006):

1. a referral service to link clients in need of assistance directly to a professional counselling service through community based organisations;
2. a skilling programme to provide staff with the skills to deal with clients who present with mental health or emotional wellbeing issues;
3. protocols to guide staff when dealing with clients who present with mental health or emotional wellbeing issues, including those who threaten harm to themselves or others; and
4. a mental health literacy program to improve client and staff awareness of mental health and emotional wellbeing issues during separation. (p. ii)

As the pilot’s final report states: “the pilot was a success with performance measures showing that it achieved all agreed outcomes and most to a high level” (Family Court of Australia, 2006, p. ii). All this was achieved while recognising that the courts do not have a direct role in providing mental health services to clients, are neither resourced nor funded to do so, but do have a facilitating role in ensuring clients are able to access mental health services provided by external organisations. Specifically, the Courts acknowledged—through staff, judicial officers and court processes—that they should (Family Court of Australia, 2006):

1. identify those who may require assistance and refer them to appropriate agencies within the mental health support community;
2. ensure clients are aware of the mental health and emotional wellbeing services provided by community based and government organisations;
3. support clients with mental health illnesses by ensuring staff, judicial officers and processes do not (as far as can reasonably
be avoided) do harm or make worse any mental illness;

4. acknowledge that some court processes may present difficulties for those with mental health problems; and

5. develop a coordinated and cooperative approach in partnership with other organisations and initiatives within the community to assist clients who present with mental health issues. (p. 1)

There is a widely held belief in New Zealand that our protection of victims in the Family Court does not go far enough, notwithstanding the legal and judicial schemes. What is said is that victims are vulnerable and courts must go the extra mile in ensuring that victims regard the court as user-friendly, are encouraged to use it and have a raft of support services to which they can be referred. It is said that unless this occurs, there is a disincentive to use the court system and, further, that case enforcement alone does not ensure actual protection.

Conclusion

I conclude then by indicating that when family violence is alleged, it must be treated promptly and carefully, and that resolution of disputes where there is violence must, for the most part, be judicially undertaken. Alternative dispute resolution may well be inappropriate in family violence cases.

Equally important is the fact that a judicial system alone will not protect victims, and that support services, in addition to court relief, must be provided.

Endnotes

1 Domestic Violence Act 1995 (NZ), s4
2 Domestic Violence Act 1995 (NZ), ss56–69
5 Domestic Violence Act 1995 (NZ), s32(1).
6 In 2007, 19% of cases with a “case type code” of “guardianship” were cross-referenced to domestic violence cases that involved applications for protection orders (Ministry of Justice, 2009, p. 79).
7 New Zealand’s primary private child law legislation.
8 See the Care of Children Act 2004 (NZ), s60. In accordance with the Care of Children Act 2004 (NZ) s58, violence that triggers a mandatory risk assessment refers only to physical and sexual abuse.
9 See the Care of Children Act 2004 (NZ), s60.
10 Cases involving demonstrable violence are considered urgent.
11 These grounds are: reduction of time granted, enforcement proceedings (warrants, admonishment), repeat proceedings, unilateral relocation, suspension of contact and demonstrable violence issues.

References


His Honour Judge Peter Boshier is the Principal Family Court Judge of New Zealand. This article is an edited version of the presentation made by Judge Boshier at the 11th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, 7 July 2010.
How do pregnancy and newborns affect the household budget?

Jason D. Brandrup and Paula L. Mance

For most families, the birth of a child is a happy and positive experience, but the addition of a newborn baby to a household may also, in some ways, decrease parental physical and psychological wellbeing. There are many well-known factors that can increase pressure on a family when a newborn arrives, such as changes in the hours of unpaid and paid work and role adjustments. Of particular interest in this paper is how an “extra mouth to feed” can increase pressure on a family’s financial resources. While any increased burden on the household budget is likely to be an issue for affected families, it is also of key interest to policy-makers who are looking at ways of assisting these families to make a smooth transition through pregnancy and childbirth. While this paper does not attempt to evaluate any particular policy, research that contributes broadly to our understanding of family financial pressures and how expectant and new parents manage these financial demands is particularly important in the current policy climate, due to the recent significant changes to payments centred around the birth of a child.

In this study, we also focus on expenditure on electronic goods. This is because various media reports suggest that some families spend these payments on adult consumer products rather than on goods and services for the benefit of the newborn (see, for example, Haynes, 2008). International and Australian studies have examined the costs of children more generally (for example, see Henman, Percival, Harding, & Gray, 2007), but until recently there has been little research that specifically focuses on how newborns affect the household budget. In 2010, the authors used data from waves 6 and 7 of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics of Australia (HILDA) survey to examine how the arrival of first-born, second-born, and third- or subsequent-born babies affect household budgets for stable couple families (Brandrup & Mance, 2010). The current study extends the authors’ prior work by including wave 8 of the HILDA survey. The inclusion of these data has allowed the authors to refine the analysis with an increased sample size, but also created the opportunity to conduct a “skipped year”
analysis, whereby spending patterns of couples with newborns can be compared with their spending patterns before the study women were pregnant.

Does a newborn increase family expenditure?

The constraining effect of income

Intuitively, it might be expected that there would be a straightforward relationship between the number of consumers in a household and their expenditure, but prior studies indicate a range of family attributes that affect the expenditure patterns of families with children. While adding consumers to a household generally increases family expenditure, individual tastes, preferences and the amount of money that parents have available to spend on their children are also key influencing factors (McDonald, 1990). As income generally constrains expenditure, for a constant level of income, the costs of goods and services for extra children will need to be offset by reductions in expenditure on other household items (McDonald, 1990; Percival & Harding, 2005); although households may be able to use credit to some extent to smooth out expenditure patterns. As such, we would expect that when adults become parents, they would reallocate their financial resources to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter and education to their children. If demands on household expenditure are great, necessities would consume a higher proportion of the available resources (for a fuller discussion, see Brandrup & Mance, 2010).

When a newborn child enters a household, the relationship between pre- and post-birth expenditure and income may not be as straightforward as reallocating resources to meet essential baby-related expenditure demands. Valenzuela, 1999). These factors are covered in more detail in the authors' prior work (Brandrup & Mance, 2010), but for completeness, an overview is briefly provided here.

Expenditure on food has been associated with family size, employment status, marital status, ethnicity and consumption of takeaway food (Fan & Zuiker, 1998; Kaushal, Gao, & Waldfogel, 2007; Lee & Huh, 2004; Passero, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). On average, adding children to a household incrementally increases expenditure on food, as economies of scale do not apply to food in the same way as they might apply to other expenditure items (Valenzuela, 1999). At the same time, there appears to be an upper limit on the amount of groceries a family is able to consume (Percival & Harding, 2005).

In contrast, decreasing average expenditure on children's clothing has been observed with increasing numbers of children in the household (Valenzuela, 1999). For the first child, significant adjustments in expenditure on commodity items are required. For subsequent children, recycling of resources operate as clothing is passed down from older to younger children. Spending on clothes has also been found to increase with labour force participation and income (Kaushal et al., 2007; Percival & Harding, 2005) and, with increasing wealth, a higher proportion of clothing expenditure is found to be purchases of “comfort” goods rather than necessities. Carlucci and Zelli (1998) argued that although a basic level of clothing may be thought of as essential, wealthy families have more scope to increase their expenditure on clothes as a luxury item than on basic necessities such as groceries because, as stated previously, there is an upper limit on how much food an individual can consume.

Not surprisingly, the addition of a young child to a family may increase demand for child care. In prior studies, increasing costs of child care have been found to be associated with increasing family income, mother's employment hours, the number of children in care, service accessibility, the availability of relatives and partners, and service cost (Doiron & Kalb, 2005; Walker & Reschke, 2004). In contrast, there is unlikely to be additional demand for education expenditure associated with young children until they attain school age (Exter, 1992).

In terms of health, cross-sectional studies have found expenditure to decrease with the presence of children (Exter, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999). However, the results of Exter's study were based on comparisons between all couples with and without children, thus
the higher health expenditure for childless couples may reflect their older average ages in this study. In contrast, in Brandrup and Mance (2010), increased health expenditure was associated with the arrival of newborn children, regardless of whether they were first-born or subsequent births.

The cost of transport may also impose a significant burden on the household budget as a family increases in size (Valenzuela, 1999), but this depends on the extent to which the household uses private or public transport. Car-owning households have been found to spend substantially more on transport due to the purchase price of the car and ongoing expenses (Saunders et al., 1998); however, average spending on transport also tends to increase as children age, and with parents’ increasing labour force attachment and life-cycle stage (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2006; Kaushal et al., 2007; Lee & Huh, 2004; Passero, 1996).

In Australian studies, housing has been found to place a major strain on the family budget as the family grows in size, although economies of scale have been observed with increasing numbers of children (Exter, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999). Like many other expenditure items, housing expenditure is influenced by employment status (Passero, 1996) and life-cycle stage (Carlucci & Zelli, 1998; Percival & Harding, 2005). However, certain characteristics of housing expenditure set it apart from other essential expenditures, with expenditure on this category differing markedly between households that are similar in every other aspect apart from tenure type (Carlucci & Zelli, 1998).

The studies that examine expenditure on furniture and appliances, insurance, telephone and the Internet are limited. Often these categories are grouped, or are not the subjects of the research focus, due to them comprising a small proportion of total household expenditure. Valenzuela (1999) observed economies of scale with increasing numbers of children for household furnishings, while a US study by Kaushal et al. (2007) found increases in spending on insurance associated with labour force participation; however, this finding may be consistent with US retirement savings policy, which requires working people to contribute to their own retirement pension. The authors’ prior study (Brandrup & Mance, 2010) found little evidence of changed spending associated with the birth of newborns for these expenditure items.

In contrast, a prior Australian study has examined holiday spending in detail. Yusuf and Naseri (2005) found income, family life cycle (rather than family size) and ethnicity influenced holiday-taking behaviour. Families with preschool children were the most likely of all household types to take domestic holidays and the least likely to take overseas holidays, resulting in low overall combined expenditure on holidays. The authors did not find in their prior study (Brandrup & Mance, 2010) any significant evidence of changed holiday spending associated with the arrival of newborn children.

Similarly, in the authors’ previous paper (Brandrup & Mance, 2010), there was no significant evidence of changed alcohol and tobacco spending associated with the arrival of newborn children, although other studies have found that the presence of children moves expenditure away from “adult goods” such as alcohol and tobacco. Other contextual factors that have been associated with decreases in alcohol and tobacco expenditure include: decreasing social opportunities due to increasing demands of child rearing, reductions in consumption for health reasons relating to pregnancy, marital status, and the number of children in the household (De Leire & Kalil, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999). When these items are separately examined, it appears that expenditure on tobacco products remains relatively constant across couple families with and without dependent children, while alcohol expenditure decreases markedly when dependent children are present (ABS, 2006).

Not surprisingly, the addition of a young child to a family may increase demand for child care.
Finally, as discussed previously, of particular interest in Brandrup and Mance (2010) and the current study is expenditure on electronic goods. This is because various media reports suggest that some families spend the government’s baby bonus on electronic goods rather than on goods and services for the benefit of the newborn (see, for example, Haynes, 2008). In the authors’ prior study, while no evidence of increased expenditure on electronic goods was observed for couples experiencing a first or second birth, weak evidence of increased expenditure on electronic goods was observed for couples experiencing the birth of a third or subsequent child. In the current study, the authors were able to examine this item again with the benefit of additional observations contributed by births occurring in the year prior to the 2008 HILDA survey.

The analytic framework

The strength of this study lies in the methodology applied and the longitudinal nature of information collected in the HILDA survey. Specifically, this study employs fixed effects regression models in its methodology. By comparing expenditure reports of the same couple families over multiple years, fixed effects regression models are able to exploit the longitudinal nature of the data to control for the characteristics of each household that have not been explicitly collected by survey instruments—providing those characteristics have not changed over the study period. These time-invariant characteristics may, for example, include some personality characteristics of household residents. However, some characteristics that might normally be thought of as time-invariant over a short time frame may in fact vary over the study period as a result of a major life event, such as the birth of a child, and this could result in changes in spending preferences. Such changes would not be controlled for in fixed effects regression models and would instead manifest themselves in the coefficients estimated by the models.

The study sample includes data from 2006 through to 2008 relating to female HILDA survey respondents, aged between 15 and 47 years in 2008, who lived in a couple household in all three years, without any other persons besides their own children, and were in a married or cohabiting heterosexual relationship with the same person in all three years. The selection process therefore excluded women who were not living with the same male partner in all three waves. Household data were incorporated into each respondent’s record. This enabled the household to be the unit of analysis, because the selection process ensured that each respondent essentially lived in the same household throughout the period. Survey data prior to 2006 could not be used for this study because the HILDA survey spending categories were inconsistent with the categories used since that year (these spending categories are discussed later).

After dropping cases with missing expenditure data or a multiple birth, the final sample consisted of 1,199 households, of which 349 included women who had given birth to or adopted 411 babies between 2006 and 2008. One hundred and seventy-four of the newborns had no older siblings in the household (“first-born”), 159 had one older sibling in the household (“second-born”), and 78 had more than one older sibling in the household (“third-or subsequent-born”).

Two sets of fixed effects linear regression models were estimated to examine differences in expenditure associated with the arrival of a newborn:

- In the first set of models, spending reported in the survey in which a household experienced a birth was compared against spending reported by that same household in other years. For example, if a household in the 2007 survey reported that a newborn had arrived in the twelve months leading up to that survey, that household’s spending in the 2007 survey was compared against the household’s spending in the 2006 and the 2008 surveys. The effects of the birth of a first, second, and third or subsequent child were estimated separately. Strictly speaking, the first set of models do not estimate change in spending between years; the models
instead estimate elevated or reduced levels of spending specific to the birth year. The difference in concepts is subtle; however, transitory changes in spending that occur in the birth year would be very specific to that year, while a sustained change in spending is less strongly specific to the birth year because the sustained spending is related more to the presence of a child rather than the birth event itself.

In the second set of models, spending by households that reported in 2008 that a first-born child had arrived during the previous twelve months is compared against spending by the same households in the 2006 survey, with data from the 2007 survey being dropped from the models. Unlike the first set of models, the second set of models estimates changes in spending between two years. Although this approach poses methodological challenges, the second set of models allows for the removal of behavioural changes due to pregnancy, given that most mothers reporting a birth in the 2008 survey were pregnant when surveyed in 2007.

Dependent variables

The household spending section of the HILDA Self-Completion Questionnaires has, since 2006, listed 25 types of expenses on which Australians regularly spend their money. This study used the household spending items contained in the HILDA survey household file, which averaged the household spending responses if more than one person in a household provided responses (Watson, 2010). Respondents were asked to give their best estimates of the average amount that their households spent on 25 items—grouped into weekly, monthly and annual expenses. For annual expenses, respondents were asked to estimate how much the household spent on those items over the past 12 months. The 25 items were aggregated into thirteen spending categories, with each of those spending categories being the dependent variable in thirteen fixed effects linear regression models. Two other spending categories were created from household spending items found in the HILDA Household Questionnaire, thereby resulting in fifteen dependent variables in total. Summing these dependent variables does not equal total household expenditure because spending on many types of goods and services would not have been captured in the HILDA survey. The household spending responses in 2006 and 2007 were converted to 2008 dollars by adjusting for changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), using CPI figures broken down into the group of goods and services most closely corresponding to each expenditure item. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics on...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure category</th>
<th>2006 Mean</th>
<th>2007 Mean</th>
<th>2008 Mean</th>
<th>2006 SD</th>
<th>2007 SD</th>
<th>2008 SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Groceries</td>
<td>9,871</td>
<td>10,088</td>
<td>10,602</td>
<td>4,313</td>
<td>4,405</td>
<td>4,649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals eaten out &amp; takeaway</td>
<td>2,882</td>
<td>3,013</td>
<td>2,947</td>
<td>2,317</td>
<td>2,495</td>
<td>3,138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults’ clothing</td>
<td>1,502</td>
<td>1,612</td>
<td>1,712</td>
<td>1,390</td>
<td>1,605</td>
<td>2,308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s clothing</td>
<td>658</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>905</td>
<td>1,013</td>
<td>1,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care (typical week)²</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>1,125</td>
<td>1,310</td>
<td>2,353</td>
<td>2,795</td>
<td>3,275</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>2,329</td>
<td>2,495</td>
<td>2,576</td>
<td>2,239</td>
<td>2,624</td>
<td>2,574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>9,373</td>
<td>9,786</td>
<td>9,141</td>
<td>12,858</td>
<td>13,372</td>
<td>14,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>23,209</td>
<td>23,086</td>
<td>24,186</td>
<td>31,403</td>
<td>27,853</td>
<td>25,540</td>
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<tr>
<td>Furniture &amp; appliances</td>
<td>1,632</td>
<td>1,626</td>
<td>1,473</td>
<td>2,562</td>
<td>2,853</td>
<td>2,768</td>
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<td>General insurance</td>
<td>1,420</td>
<td>1,537</td>
<td>1,503</td>
<td>1,094</td>
<td>1,645</td>
<td>1,165</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electronic goods</td>
<td>952</td>
<td>1,114</td>
<td>1,323</td>
<td>1,326</td>
<td>1,554</td>
<td>1,779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone &amp; Internet</td>
<td>1,821</td>
<td>2,092</td>
<td>2,163</td>
<td>1,720</td>
<td>2,080</td>
<td>2,366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holidays</td>
<td>2,842</td>
<td>2,940</td>
<td>3,202</td>
<td>4,630</td>
<td>4,568</td>
<td>4,858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol &amp; cigarettes</td>
<td>2,384</td>
<td>2,345</td>
<td>2,297</td>
<td>2,690</td>
<td>2,637</td>
<td>2,548</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: ² Not annualised, as data on the number of typical weeks was not available.
Source: HILDA (2006–08), release 8.0

It appears that expenditure on tobacco products remains relatively constant across couple families with and without dependent children, while alcohol expenditure decreases markedly when dependent children are present.
the fifteen dependent variables used in this study.

It can be seen from Table 1 that for most households the largest spending items were housing, groceries and transport. Spending on child care and education varied a great deal across households because most families reported spending nothing or small amounts on these services, while other families spent substantial amounts. Spending on furniture and appliances, electronic goods and holidays also varied considerably across households.

It is expected that the estimates of expenditure on these household spending items are subject to substantial measurement error, as they are self-reported and spending diaries are not kept (Gibson & Kim, 2007). For example, Headey (2008) found that the means of several 2005 HILDA survey expenditure items (clothing and footwear, health care, holidays, hobbies, and child care) differed by more than 10 per cent from the means of comparable items in the ABS 2003–04 Household Expenditure Survey (HES), which was based on spending diaries. More reassuringly, Headey also found that the other HILDA survey expenditure items, when totalled, differed by less than 4 per cent from the HES items after adjustment for inflation. As stated in the authors’ prior study (Brandrup & Mance, 2010), model efficiency would be adversely affected by measurement error in the HILDA survey expenditure data. However, this only means that false negatives are more likely (i.e., the measurement errors are likely to lead to fewer statistically significant results), and any findings that some spending categories are significantly different in a birth year would remain valid. Nonetheless, some bias in the results is expected, and, when interpreting the study’s results, more emphasis should be placed on whether some types of spending are significantly higher or lower in birth years, with less emphasis placed on the dollar estimates.

Independent variables

A range of time-varying independent variables were used to develop the models. The variables of interest in the study were: birth of first-born child, birth of second-born child, and birth of third- or subsequent-born child. These variables were used in preference to the option of using a single birth variable for the purpose of capturing birth order effects. All three birth variables were included in each model as it was important to control for the not-unusual situation of households reporting births in two consecutive surveys. Other control variables included: education, employment, income support and health status of women and their partners; household disposable income; geographical remoteness; and housing tenure.

Although not reported in detail here, descriptive statistics based on 2008 survey data differ to some extent from the 2007 survey descriptive statistics reported in the authors’ previous study (Brandrup & Mance, 2010). Although both the 2007 and 2008 surveys generally indicate that households reporting the arrival of a third- or subsequent-born baby had a higher prevalence of characteristics normally associated with socio-economic disadvantage, none of those associations were statistically significant in the 2008 survey. Another difference emerged in relation to the growth in disposable incomes of households experiencing the arrival of newborn babies. The authors’ previous study found that survey households experiencing the arrival of newborns in the 12 months prior to the 2007 survey had experienced higher disposable income growth between 2006 and 2007 than did other survey households, and had significantly higher disposable incomes than that of other households in 2007. However, the 2008 survey revealed a different picture—households that reported the arrival of a newborn child in the 12 months prior to the 2008 survey had disposable incomes that were not significantly different from that of other households in either 2007 or 2008.

Results

First set of models: All births over three years

The results for the first set of models are presented in Table 2. Each coefficient reported in the table is an estimate (in 2008 dollars) of how much spending in a birth year differed from spending in other years. The coefficients are not estimated levels of spending in the birth year—they are estimates of how much spending differs from “normal” spending in other years. A significantly positive coefficient of $100, for
instance, would indicate that spending specific to the birth year was estimated to be $100 more than spending in other years. The results relating to control variables are not presented, but are available from the authors on request.

Regardless of birth order, spending specific to the birth year was not significantly elevated or reduced for the categories of: groceries; meals eaten out and takeaway; education; furniture and appliances; general insurance; electronic goods; and telephone and Internet. There was a significant reduction in adults’ clothing expenditure ($274 per annum) associated with the arrival of a second-born baby; and there was a significant elevation in children’s clothing expenditure ($435 per annum) associated with the arrival of a first-born baby. There was a significant reduction in child care expenditure ($31 in typical weekly expenses) associated with the arrival of second-born babies.

Spending on health care was significantly elevated for each birth order, with the estimated elevation ranging between $532 and $641 per annum. Transport expenditure was at a high level with the arrival of first- and second-born babies, but these estimates were not significant. However, there was a significant elevation in transport spending ($4,922 per annum) associated with the arrival of third- and subsequent-born babies. A significant reduction in housing spending ($3,064 per annum) was associated with the arrival of first-born babies. There were also significant differences in holiday expenditure. The arrival of a first-born baby was associated with a reduction in holiday expenditure of $787 per annum, while the arrival of second-born babies was associated with a reduction in holiday spending of $470 per annum. A reduction in alcohol and cigarette spending associated with the arrival of first-born babies was observed, but this did not reach statistical significance.

For most spending categories, control variables had no effect on which coefficients were significant at the 95% level. However, the reduction in holiday spending associated with the arrival of second-born babies only became significant after controlling for the arrival of first-born babies in the preceding year. This implies that the reduction in holiday spending associated with the arrival of first-born babies tended to mask the reduction associated with the arrival of second-born babies if the arrival of newborns was reported in two surveys in a row. In relation to housing expenditure, the reduction in spending associated with the arrival of first-born babies only became significant once mothers’ employment status was controlled for. Closer investigation revealed that this was because of a marginally significant ($p = .051$) positive association between spending on household renovations and women moving out of the work force.

### Table 2: Change in annual household expenditure specifically associated with a birth year, by birth order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure category</th>
<th>Birth order</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>3rd and subsequent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groceries</td>
<td>32.07</td>
<td>395.75</td>
<td>−117.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals eaten out &amp; takeaway</td>
<td>−121.60</td>
<td>207.51</td>
<td>32.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults’ clothing</td>
<td>83.90</td>
<td>−274.48</td>
<td>−78.61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s clothing</td>
<td>434.66 **</td>
<td>57.17</td>
<td>−118.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care (typical week)</td>
<td>−7.69</td>
<td>−31.01 **</td>
<td>−6.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>−162.39</td>
<td>−118.93</td>
<td>22.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>574.27 **</td>
<td>531.68 **</td>
<td>640.69 **</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>1,998.94</td>
<td>1,746.14</td>
<td>4,921.92 **</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>−3,063.88 *</td>
<td>2,558.24</td>
<td>32.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture &amp; appliances</td>
<td>174.78</td>
<td>−205.78</td>
<td>−75.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General insurance</td>
<td>−38.21</td>
<td>−51.42</td>
<td>−38.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic goods</td>
<td>−140.26</td>
<td>40.39</td>
<td>246.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone &amp; Internet</td>
<td>−62.59</td>
<td>18.15</td>
<td>209.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holidays</td>
<td>−786.79 **</td>
<td>−469.89 *</td>
<td>−227.72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol &amp; cigarettes</td>
<td>−144.78</td>
<td>142.16</td>
<td>81.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. * Not annualised, as data on the number of typical weeks was not available.

Source: HILDA (2006–08), release 8.0
Second set of models: First-born newborns in 2008

Table 3 shows changes in annual household expenditure (in 2008 dollars) associated with first-born babies by comparing 2006 spending (the pre-pregnancy year) with 2008 spending (up to twelve months after the birth event). As stated earlier, this allowed for comparison of expenditure prior to pregnancy with expenditure after the birth of a newborn, which eliminated changes in expenditure behaviour that might be due to pregnancy rather than the arrival of a newborn. Again, the results relating to control variables are not presented, but are available from the authors on request.

The birth of a first child was associated with an increase in grocery expenditure of $1,993 per annum, an increase in children’s clothing expenditure of $875 per annum, and an increase in child care expenditure of $44 in a typical week. A large and significant increase in expenditure on health care associated with the birth of a first baby was also observed ($755). A significant decrease in housing spending ($5,315 per annum) was associated with the arrival of first-born babies. There were no significant changes in expenditure associated with the birth of a first-born child for any of the other spending categories.

For all but one of the spending categories, control variables had no effect on which coefficients were significant at the 95% level. The one exception was housing expenditure, in which the decrease in spending associated with the arrival of first-born babies only became significant once mothers' employment status was controlled for (as was the case in the first set of models).

Discussion

As mentioned earlier, due to study limitations, more emphasis should be placed on whether some types of spending are at significantly different levels in birth years, and less emphasis should be placed on the dollar estimates when interpreting the study’s results.

Reports of actual expenditure by couple households between 2006 and 2008 indicate that families adjust their spending when a new baby is born. Spending on particular categories was found to vary with birth order, whether the item was discretionary or essential in nature, and was in response to expenditure demands and lifestyle changes associated with the arrival of a newborn.

Turning first to grocery expenditure, consistent with the authors’ prior study (Brandrup & Mance, 2010), there were no elevations or reductions in spending observed in Table 2 specific to a birth year for any of the birth order groups. However, large increases were observed in Table 3 when comparing pre-pregnancy expenditure with post-birth expenditure for parents of first-born babies, suggesting that behavioural change had occurred during

### Table 3: Change in annual household expenditure associated with first-born newborns, 2006 compared with 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure category</th>
<th>$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Groceries</td>
<td>1,993.16 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals eaten out &amp; takeaway</td>
<td>-237.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults’ clothing</td>
<td>-24.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s clothing</td>
<td>874.92 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care (typical week) a</td>
<td>44.40 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-71.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>754.66 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>1,973.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>-5,315.36 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture &amp; appliances</td>
<td>60.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General insurance</td>
<td>154.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic goods</td>
<td>472.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone &amp; Internet</td>
<td>733.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holidays</td>
<td>-612.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol &amp; cigarettes</td>
<td>-333.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * p < .05, ** p < .01. a Not annualised, as data on the number of typical weeks was not available. Source: HILDA (2006, 2008), release 8.0
pregnancy. When considered alongside expenditure on eating out and takeaway food, it appears that formerly childless couples spent more on groceries in the pregnancy year and/or were consuming more meals at home in the year of pregnancy, and this level of expenditure continued into subsequent years.

While increases in grocery expenditure might not be expected in relation to second or subsequent newborn children, due to the low consumption of food by babies, the authors did expect baby-related “supermarket” products to increase grocery spending. It is possible that parents experiencing higher order births may have adjusted their expenditure to purchase lower cost grocery items to offset new baby-related expenses. However, it is also possible that parents did not include expenditure on nappies and formula when reporting expenditure on this item because the HILDA survey questionnaire instructs respondents to “include food, cleaning products, pet food and personal care products”, but provides no guidance on whether to include other items that might be considered to be part of grocery spending. If respondents did not include spending on baby products such as disposable nappies and formula, or they used cloth nappies, grocery consumption would not be expected to increase.

The significant reduction in adult clothing expenditure in Table 2 specific to the birth year of a second child possibly reflects reduced shopping opportunities or couples shifting expenditure away from adult-focused goods. A reduction in spending was not observed for couples having first-born children, possibly because women may have been purchasing maternity clothes, replacing normal expenditure on adult clothes, during their first pregnancy. Some of these maternity clothes may have been used again for subsequent pregnancies. In contrast, consistent with the authors’ prior study (Brandrup & Mance, 2010), children’s clothing expenditure was significantly elevated with the birth of a first child, as formerly childless couples purchased essential clothing items for the new baby. There were no significant elevations in spending on children’s clothing for couples having second or subsequent children, suggesting there was recycling of clothes for such children.

Table 2 indicates that there were no significant elevations or reductions in spending on child care specific to the birth year for a first child; however, in Table 3 there is a significant increase between 2006 and 2008 for families who reported the arrival of first-born children in 2008. Although the two estimates look as though they are in conflict, they are not directly comparable. As discussed earlier, the two sets of models are based on subtly different concepts. The first set of models (Table 2) estimated elevated or reduced spending specific to the birth year, and a sustained change in spending is less strongly specific to the birth year because sustained spending is related more to the presence of a child rather than the birth event itself. A close examination of the data showed that child care spending tended to be sustained, rather than transitory. Although this type of spending was zero for most families with a first-born newborn, a minority of families with a first-born newborn incurred child care expenses for the first time, and these expenses typically continued at a positive level for some years after the birth. However, the second set of models (Table 3) estimated change in spending between 2006 and 2008, and the sustained nature of child care spending had no effect on its significance. The results in Table 2 showing a reduction in child care expenditure specifically associated with the birth year for second-born newborns most likely reflect employed mothers taking up maternity leave or withdrawing from the workforce, and therefore having less need for paid child care when they have a second child.

Large and consistent elevations in health expenditure were observed in Table 2 for each additional birth, and are likely to reflect increased out-of-pocket health care expenses associated with pregnancy, birth and care of a newborn. When the pregnancy year is removed in Table 3, the expenditure change associated with pregnancy and childbirth is larger, implying that health care expenses must have already been at an elevated level during pregnancy.

Large but non-significant elevations in expenditure on transport for couples experiencing the birth of a third and subsequent child observed in the authors’ prior study (Brandrup & Mance, 2010) became significant when an extra wave of data was included (Table 2); this is likely to be due to purchases of larger vehicles. Given the large average amount of transport expenditure increases observed for the other birth orders, a significant result was expected for all birth orders. However, the large variability in reports of expenditure indicates that transport costs vary greatly between individual households. For example, such expenditure may depend on whether older children attend school, the number of cars in the household, the availability of public transport, and the workforce participation of each parent (Kaushal et al., 2007; Passero, 1996).
There were also large average elevations and reductions observed for housing expenditure in Table 2, including a large and significant reduction in spending associated with the arrival of first-born newborns. A significant and even larger decrease associated with first-born newborns is reported in Table 3. Closer examination of the data reveals that reduced housing expenditure reported by parents of first-borns largely reflects formerly childless couples decreasing the amount they spend renovating their family home. However, as in previous studies, there is a large amount of variation in housing expenditure when individual study couples are examined (Carlucci & Zelli, 1998). The large amount of variation is the most likely explanation as to why changes in housing expenditure in the authors’ prior study (Brandrup & Mance, 2010) failed to attain significance.

Similarly, in line with Brandrup and Mance (2010), no significant results were observed in Table 2 for expenditure on education, furniture and appliances, general insurance or telephone and Internet. In contrast, marginally significant results for expenditure on electronic goods became non-significant with increased sample size, dispelling media reports that couples spend their baby bonus on adult-focused consumer goods.

In Table 2, the amount of discretionary spending on holidays was at a significantly reduced level for couples experiencing the birth of a first- or second-born child, with childless couples reducing expenditure in the post-birth year compared with the pregnancy year. In line with expectations, spending may have been adjusted because of reduced opportunities for holidays due to the arrival of a newborn, or because of the need to purchase baby-related goods.

Finally, no significant results were observed for expenditure on alcohol and cigarettes in Table 2, although the large decrease observed in the skipped year model (Table 3) was—if disaggregated into separate alcohol and cigarettes spending—entirely due to a significant reduction in alcohol spending.

Conclusion

Information on the expenditure patterns of parents of newborns is important to a range of current policy debates, including those that seek to determine the required level of family assistance, influence women’s attachment to the labour force and fertility rates, and the utility of and need for additional financial support around the birth of a child. Although expenditures in this study do not total to provide an estimate of the complete costs associated with the arrival of a newborn, these results do provide some indication of how parents in stable married or cohabiting relationships adjust their spending to meet the financial demands of pregnancy and newborns, and where these pressures may lie. For this large subset of families, this study shows that parents of first-born children report increased or elevated expenditure on groceries, health and children’s clothing, but reduced levels of spending on holidays. Parents of second-born children report elevated expenditure on health, and reduced levels of spending on child care, adults’ clothing and holidays. Parents of third- and subsequent-born children report elevated expenditure on health and transport. When considered together, these results indicate that parents adjust their discretionary spending to meet new demands for essential expenditures related to the birth of their newborn child. While this study does not comment on the merit of any particular policy it does provide evidence for the need for government support for parents around the birth of a child, particularly with respect to increased requirements for expenditure on health.

This study is restricted in its scope to stable couple families. Further research could examine whether lone parents and other parents not in a stable married or cohabiting relationship change their spending in different ways on the birth of their children.

Endnotes

1 This paper uses unit record data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. The HILDA Project was initiated and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and is managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (MIAESR). The opinions, comments and/or analysis expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Minister for Families, Housing, Community...
Services and Indigenous Affairs or the MIAESR and cannot be taken in any way as expressions of government policy.

2 On 1 January 2011, the Australian Government introduced a Paid Parental Leave scheme for employed new parents while retaining the Baby Bonus for those parents who do not meet the eligibility criteria or opt to apply for the new scheme.

3 It was not possible to determine if a newly married woman was cohabiting with her husband-to-be in the previous year. In these cases, the women were dropped from the sample.

4 Selecting and separately analysing households with women who have had other relationship histories, including those who were a lone parent in any of the survey years, was not viable due to small sample sizes.

5 Earlier HILDA Self-Completion Questionnaires had collected data on 18 household spending categories, 8 of which did not appear in the 2006 and 2007 surveys. Consequently, this study did not use data collected in the earlier surveys because only 10 of the 25 household spending categories used in 2006 and 2007 were used in the earlier surveys.

6 Models for households reporting higher order births in the 2008 survey were not developed because older siblings may have arrived in any—or none—of the previous two years, and this could not be adequately controlled for due to the sample size.

7 Each variable includes both birth and adoption of children.

8 Education status being measured by whether the respondent was enrolled in a course of study at the time of the survey.

9 Equivalised income scales are not used in the models. These scales are conceptually inconsistent with this study because they are based on assumptions about the cost of raising children.

10 Non-significant results could possibly be due to small sample sizes.

References


Jason D. Brandrup is Assistant Section Manager, Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children, and Paula L. Mance is Section Manager, Policy and Analysis, Money Management Branch, at the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.
Grandparents are often important figures in children’s lives. They may provide their grandchildren with care, love and support, while simultaneously imparting a sense of family history. They may also provide financial support to their children’s families, especially in times of crisis. Indeed, Mutchler and Baker (2009) showed that children in single-mother families who lived with grandparents were less likely than other children in single-mother families to experience poverty.

Recent research by Horsfall and Dempsey (2011) suggested that around one-half of grandparents spend time with their grandchildren at least once a week, and just under three-quarters spend time with them at least once a month. This time can take several forms; for example, many grandparents provide child care, especially for children under the age of five years (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2006), while some assume full responsibility for raising their grandchildren (ABS, 2008; Ochiltree, 2006).

When parents are separating, grandparents can provide their grandchildren with a sense of stability and continuity. This is especially the case when they have already developed a productive, meaningful relationship with their grandchildren. In such circumstances, grandparents are in a strong position to help their grandchildren understand that parental separation is not their fault, that both parents still love them, and that the disruptions in their lives are likely to dissipate or be significantly reduced with time.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that the dynamics of post-separation relationships between grandparents, grandchildren and the parents of these grandchildren can be complex. It is therefore not axiomatic that maintaining these inter-generational relationships will always be of benefit to the family. By ‘taking sides’, some grandparents add fuel to the conflict between the parents and thereby add to the distress of the grandchildren. In addition, not all grandparents have good relationships with their own adult children and not all
parents welcome the input that grandparents might provide at this time.

Previous research suggests that following the separation of their adult children, some grandparents have little opportunity to maintain or strengthen their bond with their grandchildren, and may even lose contact altogether. In particular, grandchildren whose parents have separated are more likely to have an ongoing relationship with their maternal rather than their paternal grandparents. This in turn reflects the fact that grandchildren usually live mostly with their mother after separation (Weston et al., 2011) and are also likely to have established stronger relationships with their maternal rather than paternal grandparents prior to separation (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Lussier, Deater-Deckard, Dunn, & Davies, 2002; Weston, 1992). Analysis of data from the General Population of Parents Survey, conducted in 2009 (GPPS 2009), confirmed these findings, revealing that while separated parents typically reported that the relationship between their own parents and their children was not affected by separation, non-residents fathers were more likely than resident fathers and mothers to report that this relationship had become distant (Weston & Qu 2009).

One of the aims of the 2006 family law reforms was to lessen the potential for parental separation to diminish or sever the relationship between children and their grandparents and other people who play a significant and beneficial role in children’s lives. The Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006 (Cth) recognises that “children have a right to spend time on a regular basis with, and communicate with, both their parents and other people significant to their care, welfare and development (such as grandparents and other relatives)” (s60B(2)(b)). The legislation recognises the important role that grandparents (and other significant individuals, including relatives) can play in children’s lives following the separation of their parents. The Government’s stated objective

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**Box 1**

Datasets

The analysis in this article is based on several datasets:

- The General Population of Parents Survey, conducted in 2009 (GPPS 2009), was a nationally representative survey of 5,000 randomly selected parents with at least one child under the age of 18 years.

- The Longitudinal Study of Separated Families (LSSF 2008) and the Looking Back Survey 2009 (LBS 2009) were national surveys. LSSF 2008 randomly selected 10,000 parents who had separated after the introduction of the 2006 family law reforms came into force in July 2006, and LBS 2009 randomly selected 2,000 parents who had separated between January 2004 and June 2005. Parents in both surveys had at least one child under the age of 18 years at the time of interview and had registered with the Child Support Agency.

- The Grandparents in Separated Families Study 2009 (GSFS 2009) was an online national survey of grandparents with at least one grandchild aged 2–10 years whose parents had separated between 1 January 2004 and 31 December 2008. A total of 526 grandparents participated in the survey but it is important to note that the sample may not be representative of the Australian population of grandparents in this position. The survey was first conducted in Victoria in order to derive the necessary information to select focus group participants. It was subsequently decided that the survey should be extended nationally (with minor changes made, including omission of the invitation to participate in focus groups that had been extended to participants in Victoria). Recruitment was achieved through the placement of advertisements in the Herald Sun, The Age, The Australian, and a number of seniors’ publications, including state-based newsletters of the Council on the Ageing (COTA) and The Senior, a national newspaper for those aged 50 or more years. A sub-sample of grandparents who had completed the online survey then participated in one of a series of focus groups.

- An online survey of Family Relationship Services Program (FRSP) Staff was conducted in 2008 (Survey of FRSP Staff 2008). The study tapped the views of FRSP staff members of services that commenced operation prior to 1 July 2007 (including 40 Family Relationship Centres that were in operation at the time of the survey) in relation to various aspects of the 2006 family law reforms.

- The Family Lawyers Survey, conducted in 2008 (FLS 2008), was an online survey. It focused on views of family lawyers on the 2006 family law reforms, with 319 family lawyers participating in the survey.
This article addresses the following questions:

- What are parents’ views in general about children maintaining contact with each set of grandparents after their parents separate?
- How common is it for parents to consider grandparenting time when developing their post-separation parenting arrangements?
- To what extent have family lawyers and relationship service practitioners noticed any change in the number of grandparents seeking their advice about issues in relation to the time they spend with their grandchildren?
- What impact do grandparents believe the 2006 reforms have had on their capacity to remain involved with their grandchildren?

Attitudes concerning children maintaining contact with their grandparents after parental separation

In the GPPS 2009, parents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: “It is important for children to maintain the same level of contact with their grandparents on both sides after parental separation”. The response options were: “strongly agree”, “agree”, “mixed feelings”, “disagree”, and “strongly disagree”. Some parents expressed uncertainty, and these responses have been combined with the “mixed feelings” category.

Nine in ten fathers and mothers agreed (either strongly or moderately) with this statement, with slightly more mothers than fathers reporting strong agreement (45% vs 39%). Few fathers and mothers disagreed (about 3%), and small proportions had mixed feelings (6–7%).

Figure 1 shows the patterns of answers provided by parents (both non-separated and separated with different care-time arrangements) regarding whether they considered that if parents separate it is important that children continue to maintain the same level of contact with their grandparents on both sides.3

Strong agreement was expressed by 37–51% of parents across the groups, with the proportions being highest among fathers who had equal care time arrangements (51%) and non-resident fathers (48%), and lowest for fathers who had not separated (37%) and resident fathers (40%). Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of parents in all groups agreed either strongly or moderately with the statement (between 85% and 94%).

These results suggest that attitudes of Australian parents, including those who have separated, are very consistent with the objective of the reforms: to facilitate the continued involvement of grandparents in the lives of their grandchildren after parental separation.

Consideration of spending time with grandparents when making parenting arrangements

Three surveys—the 2008 Longitudinal Study of Separated Families; the 2009 Looking Back Survey; and the 2009 Grandparents in Separated Families Study—included questions on whether their focus child spending time with grandparents was taken into account when the parents were sorting out their parenting arrangements. It should be noted that parents in LSSF 2008 had separated after 1 July 2006, when the 2006 family law reforms commenced their roll-out, while those in LBS 2009 had separated 1–2.5 years before the reforms came into force. The questions asked are listed in Box 2.

In developing their parenting arrangements, it appears that consideration of children’s time...
with their grandparents was by no means uncommon for parents who separated 1–2.5 years prior to the reforms (reported by 40% of parents in the LBS 2009). However, this percentage is somewhat lower than that reported by parents who had separated post-reform (53% of parents in the LSSF 2008). In the LSSF 2008, a similar proportion of fathers and mothers indicated that time with grandparents had been taken into account during the process of sorting out parenting arrangements for their child (52% and 53% respectively). In the LBS 2009, on the other hand, a higher proportion of mothers reported this than fathers (48% compared to 38%).

Grandparents in the GSFS 2009 also commonly indicated that their time with the grandchild was taken into account when the parents of this child separated. Specifically, 53% of grandparents reported that their time with the grandchild was taken into account either fully or to a fair extent, while 34% said that this was not the case, and 13% expressed uncertainty.

Parents in LSSF 2008 and LBS 2009 were also asked to indicate whether their arrangements were mainly reached through: (a) counselling, mediation or dispute resolution services; (b) a lawyer; (c) the courts; or (d) discussions with the other parent; or whether the arrangements (e) “just happened”.

The extent to which grandparenting time was considered in the development of post-separation parenting arrangements by these main pathways is shown in Figure 2. Parents

Box 2

Questions about consideration of time with grandparents

In the LSSF 2008, parents who had sorted out the parenting arrangements for their focus child were asked: “When you were deciding the parenting arrangements for [focus child], was spending time with grandparents, on either side, taken into account?”

In LBS 2009, parents were asked: “When you were deciding the parenting arrangements for [focus child] in [year separation took place], was spending time with grandparents, on either side, taken into account?”

Response options for questions in both LSSF 2008 and LBS 2009 were "yes" or "no".

In the GSFS 2009, grandparents were asked: “At the time your grandchild’s parents separated, to what extent did they take the needs of this grandchild to have a continuing relationship with you into account?” Response options were: “fully taken into account”, “to a fair extent”, “a little”, and “not at all taken into account”.

Parents in LSSF 2008 and LBS 2009 were also asked to indicate whether their arrangements were mainly reached through: (a) counselling, mediation or dispute resolution services; (b) a lawyer; (c) the courts; or (d) discussions with the other parent; or whether the arrangements (e) “just happened”.

The extent to which grandparenting time was considered in the development of post-separation parenting arrangements by these main pathways is shown in Figure 2. Parents
who had separated post-reform were more likely than their ‘pre-reform counterparts’ to report that time spent with grandparents had been taken into account, regardless of the main pathway taken. The difference was most pronounced with respect to the “discussions with the other parent” pathway and least pronounced with respect to reliance on lawyers.

In short, although some grandparents go to considerable lengths to see their grandchildren, the above-mentioned figures suggest that there may be more willingness among post-reform separated parents to include grandparents in the post-separation parenting equation. The trend is not linked to one resolution or decision-making pathway, though it is least pronounced when lawyers were nominated as the main pathway.

Although a substantial proportion of the separated parents in the pre- and post-reform samples of parents (LSSF 2008 and LBS 2009) and grandparents (GSFS 2009) reported that time spent with grandparents was considered in developing their parenting arrangements, some grandparents who participated in the focus groups in the GSFS indicated that they had to fight through the legal system to have access to their grandchildren. For example:

I see him [the grandchild] more regular now … because I won … I see him once a fortnight … But I had to go through nine months’ court to do it because she said I wasn’t going to see him and we tried all the mediation. I went through everything I could. (Paternal grandmother, grandchild lived with mother)

I was adamant at the outset as [grandchild’s] grandmother that I wouldn’t lose any contact—I mean, I would have flown to the end of the earth if I had to. But it simply wasn’t viable and there was no … I wasn’t going to lose that contact. As a consequence of that, myself and my husband have a very close relationship with [the grandchild]. (Paternal grandmother, grandchild lived with mother)

It was clear from the discussion in the grandparents focus groups that there were also a number of grandparents who had no choice but to remain involved. At the most extreme end of the spectrum were grandparents who had become de facto parents to their grandchildren due to varied circumstances.

Family lawyers’ and family relationship practitioners’ perceptions of grandparenting under the 2006 family law reforms

The Family Lawyers Survey 2008 was designed in part to throw some light on the impact of the insertion into the Family Law Amendment Bill 2006 of the principle that recognised the child’s right to spend time and communicate on a regular basis with people, including grandparents, who played a significant role in their care, welfare and development. Two questions in the survey attempted to gauge whether family lawyers had noticed an increase in grandparents seeking advice and the tenor of the advice they may be given. These were: (a) “Since the reforms, more grandparents are seeking advice”; and (b) “Since the reforms, I am more inclined to advise grandparents that they are in a stronger position in relation to spending time with their grandchildren”.

The survey suggests that half the family lawyers surveyed thought that there had been an increase in the extent to which grandparents were seeking advice. On the other hand, 37% disagreed with this proposition, and the remainder were unable to say. The majority of family lawyers (57%) agreed that, since the reforms, they were more inclined to advise grandparents that they were in a stronger position in relation to spending time with their grandchildren. But again, 34% disagreed and 10% were unable to say.

In the Survey of FRSP Staff 2008, respondents were asked a series of questions to gauge the extent to which parents and grandparents were seeking to increase the time that children spent with their grandparents since the reforms came into effect. The results are summarised in Figures 3a–3c.

Substantial numbers of FRSP early intervention staff members felt unable to answer the three questions posed in Figures 3a–3c, but of those who did, most of them agreed or strongly
agreed that since the 2006 reforms, their service had seen an increase in fathers, mothers and grandparents (taken separately) wanting the children to spend time with the grandparents. Only small percentages disagreed or strongly disagreed.

About three-quarters of Family Relationship Centre staff members agreed (strongly or otherwise) that among their service’s clientele, the proportion of mothers and fathers wanting their children to spend time with their grandparents had increased, and 62% agreed that there had been an increase in the proportion of grandparents wanting to spend time with their grandchildren. Only small proportions of Family Relationship Centre staff disagreed (strongly or moderately) that there had been an increase in the proportion of mothers and fathers wanting their children to spend time with their grandparents; but almost a third disagreed that there had been an increase in the proportion of grandparents among their clients wanting to spend time with their grandchildren.

Staff from family dispute resolution services appeared to be less inclined than their counterparts from FRCs to report having experienced an increase among their clients (fathers and mothers) wanting their children to spend more time with grandparents (24–39%).

The discrepancy in responses from FRC and FDR staff suggests that, at the time of the survey, the services may have had quite different cultures and/or may have been attracting different clienteles. One obvious difference is that after the 2006 reforms, FDR services continued (as they had in the past) to charge a fee, whereas family dispute resolution that occurred in an FRC was free for the first three hours. In addition, it is important to note that Family Relationship Centres offer considerably more than family dispute resolution services, and not all FRC staff members are family dispute resolution practitioners.7 Responses of Family Relationship Centre staff are much more in line with those of Family Relationship Advice Line staff. This may reflect the fact that, unlike family dispute resolution services, both Family Relationship Centres and the Family Relationship Advice Line grew directly out of the 2006 reforms and may have been culturally more strongly connected with the reforms’ aspirations.

Of the other post-separation service staff, 45% agreed or strongly agreed that their service had seen an increasing proportion of fathers wanting their children to spend more time with their grandparents and 33% agreed that this was the case with mothers. Large minorities

![Figure 3a](image-url) Agreement by FRSP staff that since the reforms an increasing proportion of fathers wanted their children to spend time with their grandparents, by service type, 2008

![Figure 3b](image-url) Agreement by FRSP staff that since the reforms an increasing proportion of mothers wanted their children to spend time with their grandparents, by service type, 2008

![Figure 3c](image-url) Agreement by FRSP staff that since the reforms an increasing proportion of grandparents wanted to spend time with their grandchildren, by service type, 2008
(40% and 44% respectively) were unable to say, while 15% and 22% respectively disagreed or strongly disagreed with these propositions. Half of this group agreed or strongly agreed that there had been an increase in grandparents wanting to spend time with their grandchildren, but 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this proposition and 32% were unable to say.

Grandparents’ perceptions and knowledge about the 2006 family law reforms

Grandparents who participated in the GSFS 2009 were asked whether they were aware of the 2006 changes in the Family Law Act that recognise the right of children to have a relationship with their parents and others important to them, including grandparents. They were asked to indicate whether they were “fully aware”, “to a fair extent”, “a little” or “not at all aware”. They were also asked if, in their opinion, the legislative changes would make any difference in helping children to maintain contact with their grandparents, by indicating if they thought the reforms would be: “a great deal of help”, “some help” or “no help at all”. In interpreting the patterns of responses, it should be kept in mind that the sample of grandparents is not representative of those who filled the criteria adopted for recruitment (having at least one grandchild aged 2–10 years whose parents separated between 1 January 2004 and 31 December 2008) (see Text Box 1 for details about the sample recruitment).

At least four in ten of these grandparents indicated that they were aware of the explicit reference to grandparents in the legislation, with 17% indicating that they were fully aware of the reference and 27% stating that they had some knowledge of it, while 54% were either a little or not at all aware of the reference and a small number (2%) were not sure about this issue. Grandparents tended to welcome the legislative changes, with 42% reporting that the explicit reference to grandparents would greatly help grandchildren to maintain contact with their grandparents, 38% considering that this would be “some help”, and only 13% indicating the change would provide “no help at all”. Eight per cent expressed no opinion on this issue.

At the same time, the focus group discussions with grandparents revealed that although they may have heard or read about them, almost all of the grandparents had only a rudimentary understanding of the 2006 family law reforms or of the services that had been established or expanded. For example:

I thought there were some changes to the financial side of it and, as you said, the amount of time you spend—whether it’s 50–50, 60–40—but the contribution from the father, money coming from the father, was actually
less now than it was before. (Maternal grandmother, grandchild lived with mother)

The only thing I recently read was they are actually reviewing 50–50 custody. Is that currently happening? (Maternal grandmother, grandchild in shared care time)

I only heard that grandparents now have rights; that’s all I heard. I didn’t hear how you had rights, but I just hear that grandparents now have rights. (Maternal grandmother, grandchild with shared care time)

I don’t know a lot about them. I remembered when they were talked about and I read a little bit about [them]. I asked my son what was going to happen. He said that he felt it was going to be a fairer system between him and his ex-wife. (Paternal grandmother, grandchild lived with mother)

A few grandparents had been proactive in their search for service options.

If I find things in The Age about family violence or children, separate parents or—and they’ve usually got a web page or they’ve got a contact number—I’ve chopped those out and I fold them into a little thing and I say here’s some compulsory reading. We laugh. Other things as well that I think are interesting for child rearing. But at the library, it has the pamphlets on all manner of things. I’ve seen things there on your role as a parent and grandparent and children and those sorts of things, so I think that’s a source. (Maternal grandparent, child living in shared care arrangement)

The extent to which such searches were inspired by the reforms was not clear. Certainly there was very little evidence of direct knowledge of the non-legal services that were available for these grandparents, their adult children or their grandchildren. For example, few grandparents in the focus groups were aware of the existence of more than one of a list of relevant services shown to them at the time and many seemed inclined to continue to see child and relationship issues arising out of separation within the more traditional framework of being essentially legal problems.

Discussion

The data reported in this paper suggest that there is a widely held view among parents that it is important to maintain the same level of contact with grandparents as was occurring before parental separation. This is consistent with the recognition in the 2006 family law reforms that children have a right to maintain their relationship with their grandparents and other people who play a significant and beneficial role in their lives.

A majority of post-reform parents who had sorted out their parenting arrangements felt that time spent with grandparents had been taken into account, and most grandparents confirmed this perception. Pre-reform separated parents, on the other hand, were less likely to have taken grandparents into account. This change is consistent with the aspirations of the reforms. In addition, there is evidence from family lawyers and family relationship practitioners (especially those working in Family Relationship Centres and the Family Relationship Advice Line) that following the 2006 family law reforms, more parents and grandparents had sought advice about the time spent between grandchildren and grandparents as a result of separation.

It is also important to recognise that the data reported here speaks to changes in attitudes and practices that were taking place quite soon after the 2006 reforms had been put in place.

While most grandparents who elected to participate in the survey of grandparents attested to the fact that that their relationship with their grandchildren had been considered, there was also evidence that they had very little knowledge of the services available to assist them in achieving their goals in this respect, and only a rudimentary knowledge (if at all) of the aims of the reforms that refer to grandparents.

In addition, although the data suggest that grandparenting issues are more prominent in the post-reform environment, it also remains the case that the pragmatics of post-separation child care arrangements continue to have a flow-on effect for many grandparents and grandchildren. By this we mean that because mothers continue to be the major post-separation carers of their children in most cases, there is likely to be less time available for paternal grandparents to spend time with their grandchildren. Of course, some mothers with major care obligations will nonetheless encourage continued paternal grandparenting involvement, but the practical as well as emotional difficulties that pertain in such circumstances can be considerable. It also needs to be acknowledged that, like all relationships, grandparenting covers a wide range of activities and levels of commitment.

Finally, it seems likely that if the legislation continues to act in the direction detected in the research to date, new generations of grandparents will become increasingly knowledgeable about family law systems and services and will increasingly be willing to pursue their grandchildren’s rights, under normal circumstances, to maintain and continue to develop relationship with their grandparents.
always work with families in which a separation has already occurred, pre-separation service practitioners may find themselves working from time to time with families in which a separation has occurred, is about to occur, or occurs during the delivery of the service. It should be noted that the qualitative data suggest that Family Relationship Centres are also seeing estranged grandparents whose grandchildren have not experienced parental separation.

7 The 2008 Survey of FRSP Staff included staff from the 40 Family Relationship Centres that were in operation at the time. While all Family Relationship Centres were included in the 2008 FRSP staff surveys, the questions on grandparenting issues were not asked of all participating staff members.

8 The services listed include: Family Relationships Centres; Family Relationship Advice Line (telephone service); telephone dispute resolution service; Family Relationship Services Online (web-based service); family dispute resolution services; family relationship counselling services; Children’s Contact Services; Parenting Orders Program; Post Separation Cooperative Parenting; Supporting Children after Separation Program; Mensline Australia; Men and Family Relationships Services; Specialised Family Violence Services; Family Relationship Education and Skills Training.

References


Dr Lixia Qu and Professor Lawrie Moloney are Senior Research Fellows, Ruth Weston is Assistant Director (Research), and Kelly Hand, Julie Deblaquiere and John De Maio are Research Fellows, all at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
Shared care time
An increasingly common arrangement?

Ruth Weston, Lixia Qu, Matthew Gray, John De Maio, Rae Kaspiew, Lawrie Moloney & Kelly Hand

Just how common is shared care time for all children under 18 years of age, regardless of their parents’ timing of separation? Is this arrangement becoming increasingly common?

One of the objectives of the 2006 changes to the family law system was to encourage greater involvement of both parents in children’s lives following separation, provided that the children are protected from family violence, child abuse or neglect (see Kaspiew et al., 2009). Parental involvement entails such matters as: (a) taking primary or immediate care of children for significant periods of time (care time), including overnight stays where possible; (b) making a significant contribution to decisions affecting children’s general lifestyle and welfare; and (c) providing financial support for the children.

While the changes were designed to encourage parental involvement generally, they were also specifically designed to encourage shared care time where such arrangements are reasonably practicable and in the child’s best interest (see Box 1). The term “shared care” typically refers to circumstances in which children spend a

Box 1
The aim of encouraging greater parental involvement is reflected in the 2006 changes to the Family Law Act 1975 (Cth) (FLA), including the introduction of a presumption in favour of “equal shared parental responsibility” (FLA s61DA(1)), with a nexus between the application of the presumption and considerations in relation to time arrangements (FLA s65DAA). The presumption may be rebutted by evidence satisfying a court that it would not be in a child’s best interests for both parents to have equal shared parental responsibility (FLA s61DA(4)), and it is not applicable where there are reasonable grounds to believe that a parent has engaged in child abuse or family violence (FLA s61DA(2)). Where orders for shared parental responsibility are made pursuant to FLA s61DA(1), the courts are obliged to consider whether making orders for children to spend equal or substantial and significant time with each parent, would be reasonably practicable and in the child’s best interests (FLA s65DAA).
similar number of nights with each parent. In the new Child Support Scheme, introduced in 2008, shared care is defined as the child spending 35–65% of nights with each parent. This threshold of time is used in the present article and is called “shared care time” to emphasise the fact that caring involves more than just spending time with children. For example, supporting children financially and making decisions affecting them are clearly important aspects of parental care. Prior to the 2008 changes, shared care time was usually taken to represent at least 30% of nights with each parent.²

The 2006 reforms to the family law system were introduced in the context of the changing roles of parents in intact families, with mothers increasing their participation in paid employment and many fathers playing a more active role in their children’s lives. For example, among parents with a child under five years old, the time fathers spent on child care increased between 1992 to 2006, although the time they spent on domestic tasks such as shopping, cleaning and laundry did not change (Craig, Mullan, & Blaxland, 2010).

This article examines the extent to which there have been changes in the proportion of separating families experiencing shared care time since 1997. Given that the question of the impact of equal or near equal care on children’s wellbeing has been hotly debated, especially for very young children (see Burrett & Green, 2008; McIntosh & Chisholm, 2008), particular attention is given to trends in equal care time for children of different ages (here defined as the child spending 48–52% of nights with each parent). Addressing this question entails the challenge that there are few comparable datasets covering different periods.

Data sources

There is now a small number of datasets that can be used to address the question regarding changes in shared or equal care time. These include survey data collected by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), administrative data from the Child Support Agency (CSA), and from court files.

Data on the care-time arrangements developed by parents who separated after the 2006 law reforms were collected in the first wave of the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families, undertaken by AIFS in 2008 (LSSF 2008).³ This survey was conducted as part of the AIFS evaluation of the changes to the family law system.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics collected data on care time in its Family Characteristics Surveys, undertaken in 1997 and 2003, and its Family Characteristics and Transitions Survey in 2006–07 (for details, see ABS, 2005; 2008). The 1997 and 2003 surveys were conducted prior to the 2006 changes to the family law system, and the 2006–07 survey at around the time the changes took effect or shortly after. The care time data derived from the three ABS surveys are comparable with each other, but are not directly comparable with the information derived from the LSSF 2008. For example, the ABS surveys focused on children under 18 years old whose parents were not living together, regardless of how long they had experienced this situation, whereas the LSSF 2008 focused on parents who had separated after the introduction of the reforms.⁴

Trends in shared or near-shared care time (30–70% of nights with each parent) (Smyth, 2009)—based on the CSA administrative dataset for the period 2003 to 2008—are reported below. Finally, rates of different care-time arrangements apparent in court files for children’s matters that were initiated and finalised pre-reform and those that were initiated and finalised post-reform are compared.⁵

Trends apparent in the datasets

The Longitudinal Study of Separated Families (Wave 1)

Children who stayed overnight with each parent for 35–65% of nights per year were classified as experiencing shared care time. However,
this classification includes children who spend considerably more time with one parent than the other, as well as those who spend close to half the nights with each parent. The experiences of children with these two arrangements may differ markedly. We therefore also examined trends in the proportion of children spending 48–52% of nights with each parent (here called “equal care time”).

Parents in the LSSF 2008 had been separated for an average of 15 months at the time of the interview. In total, 16% of the children were in a shared care-time arrangement, with 7% experiencing equal care time. Children were, on average, relatively young: 59% were under 5 years old and only 5% were 15–17 years old. Equal time was most commonly experienced by children aged 5–11 years and 12–14 years (11–12%), followed by those aged 3–4 years (9%), then teenagers aged 15–17 years (6%). Equal time was in place for only 2% of children under the age of 3 years.

The ABS Family Characteristics surveys

The three ABS Family Characteristics surveys conducted between 1997 and 2006–07 are the only national surveys in Australia with comparable samples, thereby allowing assessment of change. They suggest that the proportion of children experiencing shared care time was increasing before the reforms were introduced, albeit from a very low base (from 3% in 1997 to 8% in 2006–07). Indeed, a much higher proportion of children in each survey rarely or never saw one parent than experienced a shared care-time arrangement.

Figure 1 shows the proportion of children in four different age groups with equal care-time arrangements in 1997, 2003 and 2006–07. The proportions with equal care time in the 1997 survey were very low, with negligible differences apparent across the age groups (all less than 1%). The largest increase in equal care time between 1997 and 2003 was for children aged 5–11 years (from 1% to 5%) and the smallest was for children aged 15–17 years (from less than 1% to 2%). In other words, equal care-time arrangements, although very uncommon, appeared to be increasing before the 2006 reforms were introduced.

Between 2003 and 2006–07, there was overall a relatively small increase in the proportion of children with equal care time, with a greater increase being apparent for children aged 0–4 years (0.3% to 3.7%) and children aged 5–11 years (2.5% to 5.4%).

As noted above, these trends refer to all separated families with a child under the age of 18 years, some of whom may have been separated for many years. The parents of the vast majority of children represented in the 2006–07 survey would have been separated prior to the 2006 changes. However, the younger the child, the shorter would have been the duration since the parents’ separation. Indeed, parents of children under 12 months old would have been separated post-reform (assuming they had been living together when their child was born).

The Child Support Agency administrative database

Using the CSA’s earlier and broader definition of shared care time (30–70% of nights with each parent) and data provided by the CSA, Smyth (2009) found that the proportion of existing cases entailing this care-time arrangement increased by one percentage point each year from June 2002 (6%) to June 2008 (12%), while the proportion of new cases with shared care-time arrangements increased by one to two percentage points each year (from 9% by June 2003 to 17% by June 2008). Specifically, Smyth derived the following proportions of new cases in the CSA system entailing the child being in the care of each parent for 30–70% of nights: 9% in June 2003, 11% in June 2004, 13% in June 2005, 14% in June 2006, 16% in June 2007, and 17% in June 2008.
These results suggest that, during the period in which the reforms were rolled out (from July 2006 to June 2008), there was no evidence that the increase in such care-time arrangements had gained momentum. It remains possible, of course, that a lagged effect becomes apparent in the future—that is, the effect may be slow to develop.

**Court data**

The vast majority of parents organise their arrangements without using the court system. Only 3% of parents in the LSSF 2008 sample who had sorted out their arrangements nominated courts as the main pathway used to make their parenting arrangements (Kaspiew et al., 2009, p. 66). Indeed, another key aim of the reforms was to encourage parents to come to an agreement themselves on the best arrangements for the children, perhaps with the support of family relationship services if they could not achieve this alone.

Table 1 shows the prevalence of different care-time arrangements apparent in two samples of court files for children’s matters: those initiated and finalised prior to the 2006 reforms and those initiated and finalised after these reforms were introduced. It should be noted that some of court files had no reference made to the number of hours that the child was to spend with the other parent, while arrangements were unclear in some other files (e.g., the file notes containing the specification, “live with mother—time spent with father as agreed”). Given this lack of clarity, two sets of statistics were derived for each dataset: (a) the number of children who were allocate shared care time as a proportion of all children whose time with each parent was clearly specified; and (b) the number of children who were allocated shared care time as a proportion of all children.

A higher proportion of children’s matters cases resulted in orders for shared care time post-reform than was the case pre-reform. When calculated as a proportion of cases where

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<th>Table 1 Care-time arrangements for children subject to proceedings with final arrangements, pre- and post-reform</th>
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<td><strong>Pre-reform</strong></td>
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<td>Care-time arrangements (% of cases where contact hours specified)</td>
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<td><strong>Number of contact hours specified</strong></td>
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<td>Live with mother—spend 0–34% with father</td>
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<td>35–65% time with each parent</td>
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Notes: Time arrangements based on future arrangements in last order or judgment on file. Weighted percentages. Pre-reform figures are sampled from the Melbourne and Perth registries. Post-reform figures are sampled from the Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and Sydney registries. Percentages may not total 100.0% exactly due to rounding.

Source: Court files from Family Court of Australia, Federal Magistrate Court and Family Court of Western Australia
contact hours were specified, shared care time increased from 16% pre-reform to 23% post-reform and, when calculated as a proportion of all cases, increased from 9% to 14%.

However, court files on children’s matters include cases in which the parents agree on parenting arrangements and are seeking a consent order (here called “pure consent”), cases in which parents come to an agreement after proceedings have commenced, and cases requiring judicial determination. Some judicially determined cases may involve two otherwise well-functioning and involved parents being unable to agree about care-time arrangements. On the other hand, the AIFS evaluation suggested that parents who enter the court system are more likely than other parents to allege violence and other dysfunctional behaviours and are more likely to be in high conflict (Kaspiew et al., 2009). It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that shared care time would be less commonly appropriate for cases requiring judicial determination than for cases in which the parents reach agreement by consent (“consent cases”).

A key question, then, is whether the increase in shared care time applies more to consent cases than judicially determined cases. In fact, the data suggest that a greater increase in shared care time has occurred for judicially determined cases than for those in which parents reach agreement by consent.

The proportion of judicial determination cases resulting in shared care time increased from 4% pre-reform to 34% post-reform, when calculated as a proportion of cases where contact hours were specified. When calculated as a proportion of all judicial determination cases, shared care time increased from 2% pre-reform to 13% post-reform.

When calculated as a proportion of consent cases in which contact hours were specified, shared care time increased from 17% pre-reform to 22% post-reform, and when calculated as a proportion of all consent cases, shared care time increased from 10% to 15%.

Conclusions

Several sources of data suggest that the prevalence of shared care-time arrangements, including equal care time, has been increasing, although such arrangements remain the minority. According to administrative data from the CSA, among parents who have registered with the CSA, shared care-time rates increased slightly but progressively between 2002 and 2008, and the increase did not gain momentum after the 2006 reforms were introduced. In addition, surveys conducted by the ABS suggest that such arrangements, including equal care time, had been increasing since the late 1990s (when equal care time in particular was rare).

Future monitoring of trends will throw light on whether the increase in shared care time has begun to gain momentum since these sets of data were collected and whether the reforms have led to changes in the proportion of children who never see one parent.

A comparison of pre- and post-reform court files concerning children’s matters suggests that the proportion of children who are allocated shared care time has increased considerably. This increase has been greater where the orders have been judicially determined than where they have been made by consent. Given the small, incremental increases in shared care time among the separated population at large, this legislatively driven trend may have significant implications for the children in such arrangements. To date, shared care time appears to be mostly, but by no means...
entirely, selective of families for whom such arrangements work well. This could change. Although most parents who choose shared care time believe that it worked for them, this arrangement does not work for some families (Weston et al., 2011; Cashmore et al., 2010).

It is important that such trends and their associated implications for children continue to be scrutinised, so that policies can be established or modified to protect and promote the wellbeing of children.

Endnotes

1 In this article, the term “care time” is used to describe the face-to-face contact that separated parents have with their children and includes both overnight stays and daytime-only contact.

2 For details, see ‘2.2.1 Basics of care’ in the online guide of the Child Support Agency (CSA; 2011): <http://guide.csagov.au/part_2/2_2_1.php>

3 This survey involved telephone interviews with 10,002 parents (with a child under 18 years old) who separated between July 2006 and September 2008 (with only 4% having separated in 2008). Interviews took place between August and October 2008, up to 26 months after separation (average duration of separation = 15 months). The sampling frame for this survey was parents who were registered with the Child Support Agency and included both agency collect and private collect customers.

4 Additional differences between the ABS and LSSF surveys included the following: (a) unlike the ABS samples, the LSSF sample was drawn from the CSA database; (b) the parents in the ABS surveys indicated the care-time arrangements of all their children under 18 years who were in their household, whereas the LSSF parents focused on one child only, regardless of the living arrangements of this child; (c) the ABS surveys involved face-to-face interviews whereas the LSSF involved a telephone interview; and (d) the questions used in the surveys differed slightly from each other.

5 The pre-reform sample covered the two-year period prior to the implementation of the Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006 (SPR Act 2006) (739 files), while the post-reform sample covered matters filed and determined after 1 July 2006 (the date the amendments came into effect) (985 files).

6 Where parents had more than one child, they were asked to indicate the care-time arrangements of the first child listed in the CSA database (here called the “focus child”). The ABS surveys, on the other hand, derived information about the arrangements in place for all children living in the household.

7 According to the three ABS surveys, the proportion of children who never saw one parent (or saw this parent less frequently than once per year) ranged from 27% (in the 2003 survey) to 30% (in the 1997 and 2006–07 surveys), and there was no evidence of consistent change over the ten-year period.

8 The percentages for 2004–07 were provided by Associate Professor Bruce Smyth through personal communication. We are grateful to him for providing these data.

9 The pre-reform figures are from cases sampled from the Melbourne and Perth registries. The post-reform figures are from cases sampled from the Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and Sydney registries. The sensitivity of the estimates to the inclusion of the additional registries for the post-reform estimates has been tested by comparing the pattern of care-time arrangements from just the Melbourne and Perth registries with the patterns when arrangements from all registries are considered. The estimates from the restricted number of samples are broadly similar to those derived when all of the registries are used. Therefore the data from all of the registries were used when examining the extent to which care-time arrangements had changed.

References


Ruth Weston is Assistant Director (Research). Dr Lixia Qu, Dr Rae Kaspiew and Dr Lawrie Moloney are Senior Research Fellows, and John De Maio and Kelly Hand are Research Fellows, all at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Professor Matthew Gray is Director of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University.
Adolescence is an important period of growth in which, ideally, a healthy transition from dependence on family occurs, particularly in Western societies. This may be perceived, however, as meaning that young people are increasingly less likely to need family involvement and support in their lives. As a consequence of this, there is no consistent approach to the involvement of family members in treatment and intervention options for young people in need of support. This article examines recent literature regarding adolescent–parent relationships, and explores the evidence for family-based interventions that address problems occurring in adolescence.

There is little doubt that the relationship between children and parents changes during adolescence. A shift from a dependence on parents to increased involvement with peers and others occurs during this period, with the timing of such changes being dependent on the cultural expectations of the environment (Christie & Viner, 2005). In this sense, adolescent relationships with parents move to inter-dependence, resulting in reciprocally supportive and connected networks not just with family members, but also friends, partners, colleagues and others (Daniel, Wassell, & Gilligan, 1999).

The role of parents in an adolescent’s life, however, remains important and is often underestimated (Schofield & Beek, 2009). A growing body of literature indicates that many family-related protective factors—such as providing a secure base, being caring, providing a feeling of connectedness and being valued, providing support and giving a sense of belonging—are linked to positive outcomes in adolescence and beyond (e.g., Luthar, 2006; Paradis, Giaconia, Reinherz, Beardslee, Ward & Fitzmaurice, 2011; Rayner & Montague, 2000). For example, one longitudinal study in the US showed that adolescents who felt highly valued and were able to confide in family members at age 15 had substantially reduced risks for mental illness at age 30 (Paradis et al., 2011). The benefits of parental monitoring and limit-setting are also emphasised within the literature (Luthar, 2006), with poor parental monitoring clearly linked to negative outcomes.
Many family-related protective factors—such as providing a secure base, being caring, providing a feeling of connectedness and being valued, providing support and giving a sense of belonging—are linked to positive outcomes in adolescence and beyond.

in adolescence, such as antisocial behaviour, substance use and sexual risk-taking (Hayes, Smart, Toubournou, & Sanson, 2004). The limits set by parental monitoring, however, may provoke tension as the adolescent negotiates the struggle between developing their autonomy while continuing to have close bonds with their parents (Luthar, 2006).

This tension may also be evident in service provision to young people. Changes in the levels of autonomy and control in the parent–adolescent relationship can be mirrored in the shifting balance between parents’ and minors’ rights regarding issues related to health and wellbeing, including the young person’s safety, his/her level of competence to make decisions and the decision-making process itself (Larcher, 2005). Responsibility for decision-making around these issues is further complicated by the fact that adolescents have developing, yet often immature, cognitive capacities (Patton & Viner, 2007). For example, structural and functional changes in the brain in adolescence indicate that the ability to synchronise emotion and cognition improve over the course of adolescence. In early adolescence, parts of the brain that deal with reward processing are more easily aroused, but those that deal with harm avoidance and self-regulation are still comparatively immature (Steinberg, 2009). This has been described as having the ability to start the engine before being skilled at driving (Steinberg, Dahl, Keating, Kupfer, Masten & Pine, 2006).

Family risk and protective factors

There has been an increased understanding of the role of family-based risk and protective factors for adolescent risk behaviours. For example, there is extensive research that highlights the link between the family environment and adolescent depression (Micucci, 2009). Characteristics of such family environments may include physical and sexual abuse, neglect, attachment problems, parental mental illness, and family conflict, stress and breakdown (Larner, 2009). Research also indicates that characteristics of family environments—such as family breakdown, conflict, poor communication, lack of emotional warmth, abuse and neglect—can lead to homelessness (Hyde, 2005; Suk-Ching Liu, 2005; Thompson & Pillai, 2006). Chamberlain and McKenzie (2004) talked about “critical junctures”—defining moments, such as bitter family disputes or violence, on the “career path” of youth homelessness.

In contrast, close relationships with parents can be a protective factor against poor outcomes. Part of this protective relationship is the “secure base” function that parents continue to play in the adolescent years (Daniel et al., 1999), particularly by mothers (see Markiewicz, Lawford, Doyle, & Haggart, 2006). While the secure base serves a physical and psychological role in early childhood, the emotional and psychological support offered via a warm and communicative child–parent relationship plays an even more important role in adolescence (Allen et al., 2003; Schofield & Beek, 2009). Gilligan (2006) termed this a “scaffolding” role; that is, support is provided when needed and withheld when not. While parents are ideal to play this role, other significant adults can also play a part (Rayner & Montague, 2000), including members of the extended family (Luthar, 2006).

The importance of having supportive relationships between parents and young people continues into early adulthood. Vassallo, Smart, and Price-Robertson (2009) found that parents continued to play the role of adviser and supporter to young adult children, while moving away from the more tangible and practical support offered in childhood. Interestingly, in that study, parents often underestimated the level of support they actually provided to young adult children, which was highly valued by the young people themselves. Parents therefore continue to be a vital presence in young people’s lives. This is contrary to popular beliefs around the diminishing role of parents in late adolescence/early adulthood—a view that many parents themselves held in that study.

Family also remains important for young people who are removed from the family home. Being an adolescent doesn’t necessarily diminish a desire for young people in care to be adopted or to have a permanent family connection (Charles & Nelson, 2000). These young people need the same family connections as other young people. This is supported by research on young people who leave care, which shows that contact with non-abusive family members can assist with a successful transition out of care (Maunders, Liddell, Liddell, & Green, 1999). Dwyer and Miller (2006) likewise suggested that family relationships remain an enormous source of pain for young people who have run away or been removed from family, and the desire for connection remains deeply held. Physical separation over many years, they suggested, rarely equates to emotional separation.
Family involvement in interventions for adolescents

If there are risk factors within the family that influence outcomes for adolescents, it makes sense that family should be seen as part of any intervention addressing adolescent problems. Interestingly, Steinberg (2009) argued that although scientific evidence on adolescent brain development is more advanced and more consistent than early brain development, policy investment tends to lie with early childhood development. Equally, in terms of service delivery, parents and families are seen as being vital to successful early childhood interventions; however, far fewer programs focus on families when late childhood and beyond is reached (Ryan, 2003). For example, Dwyer and Miller (2006) argued that while fewer and fewer services are mandated to work with young people and families together, family work is essential to assisting recovery from trauma.

Traditionally, youth services have often focused on young people’s rights to individuation, autonomy and confidentiality; to the extent that family factors known to be important in healthy development are overlooked (Robinson & Pryor, 2006). Garfat (2003) suggested that youth work has historically cast the family as irrelevant, then, more recently, as being relevant in a negative sense, such as being the cause of the problem or the “enemy”. This may be potentially detrimental where workers are only involved in young people’s lives for a limited time without working on more enduring connections. As such, including or at the very least working with an awareness of family and/or other significant adults, would seem essential (Robinson & Pryor, 2006). In the case of psychiatric treatment, it has been suggested that, as a minimum, good clinical practice would include the involvement of family, especially to contain suicide risk (Bickerton, Hense, Benstock, Ward, & Wallace, 2007).

What works?

If we adopt the view that working jointly with families and adolescents is a logical response to the outcomes of recent research, what do we know about what works? While there are a growing number of studies that are evaluating the use of family-based interventions1 for problems in adolescence, the evidence is tentative in many areas at this stage. (See Box 1 for a discussion about types of family therapies.)

Box 1: Examples of therapies involving family members

Family therapy is a type of psychotherapy that is based on family systems theory, which considers the family as its own system and not just the sum of its individual members. Therapists work with all family members (where possible) to bring about change in issues that are having an effect on family functioning and the home environment. There are a number of different types of family therapies, some of which are outlined below.

**Brief strategic family therapy**

Brief strategic family therapy is a time-limited and family-based approach to adolescent substance use and similar problems. It is based on the fundamental assumption that the foundation of child development is the family, and highlights the importance of family interactions in the development of adolescent problem behaviour. Interventions are short-term but flexible to meet the diverse needs of families, and consist of three intervention processes: joining, diagnosing and restructuring (Austin et al., 2005).

**Functional family therapy**

This is a variant of family therapy that incorporates elements of behavioural and cognitive theories and practice, but also focuses on the functional nature of problems within a family; for example, the problems of an adolescent that regulate distance to or from other family members (Cottrell & Boston, 2002).

**Multisystemic therapy**

This therapy is a strengths-based family intervention that considers problems as having multiple determinants (Carey & Oxman, 2007). It comprises detailed assessment of the factors involved in behaviours, followed by a combination of therapeutic interventions drawn from strategic and structural family therapy, parental training, marital therapy, and social skills training. As such, multisystemic therapy encompasses more than family therapy, but family therapy remains a key element. Families and other societal systems are at the core of multisystemic therapy (Cottrell & Boston, 2002).

**Structural family therapy**

This form of family therapy focuses on family structure and how it relates to “good” or “bad” functioning. The individual is seen as being interdependent with the surrounding social structure, which affects behaviour and expression (Aponte & VanDeusen, 1981). Therapy aims to change the structure and interactional patterns in families so that problems are not maintained. The therapist works with issues in the “here and now” and coaches family members regarding different ways of behaving. A typical goal might be to address unhelpful coalitions between family members in order to strengthen the parenting team.
As a starting point, existing evidence that has been considered in reviews by the Cochrane Collaboration\(^2\) are mixed in their endorsement of family therapy/interventions, with most areas examined needing further research. The strongest evidence exists for the effectiveness of family and parenting interventions in reducing time spent by juvenile delinquents in institutions (Woolfenden, Williams & Peat, 2001). Family therapy for anorexia nervosa shows some evidence of effectiveness compared to “treatment as usual” in the short term, although this is based on a small number of trials (Fisher, Hetrick & Rushford, 2010).\(^3\) Family therapy for depression in general shows promise (Henken, Huibers, Churchill, Restifo & Roelofs, 2007), although young people are not specified in this review of depression. It would appear that the effectiveness of family-based interventions for problems in adolescence is an area of research that is comparatively in its infancy, and caution needs to be adopted in embracing any particular approach.

However, there appears to be promise in the wider body of research to date on family-based approaches. In particular, family-based therapies are increasingly considered to be among the most effective current treatments for adolescent substance abuse (Austin, Macgowan & Wagner, 2005; Carr, 2009; Carey & Oxman, 2007; Cottrell & Boston, 2002; Diamond & Josephson, 2005; Hogue & Liddle, 2009). In Australia, evaluations of the BEST-Plus program, a whole-of-family therapy option for families of adolescents drug abusers, indicate that the program is effective in helping families to redevelop positive family environments that encourage recovery from drug abuse. The program has also been shown to have a similar positive impact on other adolescent behaviours, indicating that the behaviours are symptoms, rather than causes, of difficult family relationships (Bamberg, Findley & Toumbourou, 2006).

Evidence supports the use of family-based therapies to address other problems in adolescence. A review of a decade of randomised clinical trials, which compared interventions that included parents in the treatment of child and adolescent psychiatric disorders with other types of therapy (such as individual therapy), concluded that family interventions are effective (Diamond & Josephson, 2005). Carr (2009) argued that family-based therapies are as effective as individual cognitive behavioural therapy and psychodynamic therapy in the specific treatment of major adolescent depression. Larner (2009) similarly called for the integration of family therapy into treatments for adolescent depression, due to “limited, but encouraging” support for a family therapy approach (see also David-Ferdon & Kaslow, 2008). Some of the suggested features of family interventions for depression include:

- improving communication skills;
- promoting systemic family-based problem-solving;
- promoting attachment and disruption of negative and critical interactions between parents and adolescents; and
- building family resilience and hope and helping families manage depression and contain suicidal risk (Carr, 2009; Larner, 2009).

Family-based treatment is also increasingly being used with adolescents who have eating disorders. Randomised controlled trials and case studies indicate that family-based treatment is showing promising results for adolescents with anorexia nervosa, particularly with younger patients who have a shorter duration of illness (Varchol & Cooper, 2009). Support has also been found for family-based treatments for co-morbid behaviours (e.g., delinquency and drug abuse), externalising behaviours (e.g., aggression) and internalising behaviours (e.g., anxiety), although the evidence base is limited (Hogue & Liddle, 2009). Family-based treatments have also been used to address conduct disorders (Carr, 2009; Cottrell & Boston, 2002), school refusal, obsessive-compulsive disorder, grief, bipolar disorder, attempted suicide and somatic problems such as recurrent abdominal pain (Carr, 2009).
Types of therapies

There are various forms of family therapy, some of which are highlighted in Box 1. The evidence on which is the most effective therapy, and under what circumstances it is most effective, is limited.

A systematic review by Austin et al. (2005) found that two interventions (multidimensional family therapy and brief strategic family therapy) have demonstrated efficacy in treating adolescent substance abusers, with other therapies (e.g., functional family therapy, multisystemic therapy) showing promise.

Multisystemic therapy has been extensively researched in other studies and is regarded as one of the few empirically tested treatments for young people (Littell, 2005). Long-term reductions in aggressive criminal behaviour were found in a 1-year follow up of a randomised clinical trial of multisystemic therapy with juvenile offenders (Henggeler, Clingempeel, Brondino & Pickrel, 2002). It has also been described as a promising intervention for the treatment of adolescent substance abuse (Carey & Oxman, 2007), and has been used to address delinquency, with outcomes such as improved family relations, decreased behavioural problems and decreased out-of-home placements (Utting, Monteiro & Ghate, 2006). However, questions have been raised regarding the evidence base for the efficacy of multisystemic therapy (Littell, 2005; 2008; Littell, Campbell, Green & Toews, 2005), and more rigorous and independent evaluations are needed to support the existing evidence.

It has been suggested that work in this area is at the point where “implementation science” is needed (Hogue & Liddle, 2009). In other words, there is a growing urgency to work out how to implement favourable findings, given that family-based therapies are not used widely in working with adolescents. There is also a need to determine how to export validated treatments to “real world” clinical settings (Diamond & Josephson, 2005). This includes considering the best methods of delivering empirically supported family therapy in a range of settings to address a range of problems, and creating clinical/policy guidelines to support this work. Hogue and Liddle (2009) suggested a “core elements” approach, using a small number of overlapping practice elements that clinicians can mix and match to suit client presentation. Similarly, interventions that are delivered using standardised manuals to maintain treatment integrity are supported by the literature (Cottrell & Boston, 2002).

Engaging families of adolescents in treatment

When the focus is on individual treatment for adolescent problems (Brown, 2008; Robinson & Pryor, 2006), it may be difficult to engage parents in a therapeutic process, not least if they fail to recognise or are threatened by suggestions of their possible role in the problem. This is, however, an under-researched area. Brown (2008), in an article on child and adolescent mental health services, highlighted the dilemma for therapists in these situations. She suggested that the request to “fix” the child can lay the blame and onus for change on the child. If therapists otherwise choose to expand the family’s view to include the part they might play in the child’s symptoms, the risk is that the family will drop out of therapy.

There has, unfortunately, been little written on how parents can be helped to see their own role in how their child’s problems have emerged (Brown, 2008). A therapeutic alliance with both adolescents and parents is the key to successful treatment, yet this may be difficult to balance in practice.

A practice example

Resources for Adolescents and Parents (RAPS)

RAPS is a program of Relationships Australia (NSW), and is funded by the Commonwealth Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) under the Family Support Program. RAPS is based in Parramatta and serves the Sydney Metropolitan Area. The program description below provides an example of the way in which a family-based intervention program for adolescent problem behaviours operates.

Established in 1990, RAPS is a preventative service working with both adolescents and their parents on issues that may lead to youth homelessness, including violence, substance abuse, truancy, running away, self-harm and family conflict. In addition to family therapy, a joint parent–teenager group has been developed to assist parents and teenagers to strengthen their relationship and assist parents with skills such as setting boundaries. RAPS also runs seminars for parents that cover understanding adolescence, the importance of adolescent–parent connectedness and the importance of boundary-setting. The seminars also serve as a “soft” entry point for the family therapy services offered by RAPS.

Multisystemic therapy is regarded as one of the few empirically tested treatments for young people.
There are seven principles behind the work of RAPS, which are derived from the relevant literature on adolescent–parent relationships and treatments for problem behaviours in adolescence:

1. Adolescents are in a unique developmental stage between childhood and adulthood that takes over a decade to complete. It is a common misconception that this is a time of separation when, in fact, the role of parents in supporting, empathising, guiding and setting boundaries for adolescents is crucial.

2. Workers can assist parents to maintain the balance between them having a connected relationship with and being in a hierarchical position in relation to their adolescent.

3. Effective work with adolescents includes also involving parents and other family members, as relationships are interconnected and affect each other.

4. As well as family, a broader “systems perspective” locates an adolescent’s problem behaviours within other systems, such as school, peer groups and community.

5. Early intervention in problem behaviours is preferable. This will help to avoid escalation into more serious problems from which recovery becomes more difficult, such as homelessness and its associated poor health and wellbeing outcomes.

6. Experienced workers with training in family therapy are needed, as they must be competent in handling the challenges of engaging with and managing both parents and adolescents in the same space.

7. Workers need access to good consultation and supervision.

Evaluation

RAPS routinely evaluates their work with every family. At the end of counselling, an evaluation form with a reply paid envelope is sent to every family member aged 12 and over. The results are collated and used to revise the program every 6 months.

In 1999, RAPS was evaluated as part of an independent evaluation of all 12 existing services that were funded under the then Department of Family and Community Services Adolescent Mediation and Family Therapy program. RAPS was cited in the evaluation as a model of best practice. In 2008, RAPS was included in an independent evaluation of all Relationships Australia’s (NSW) counselling programs, in which clients reported there was “high counselling service benefit” across all these programs.

Summary and conclusion

Evidence regarding risk and protective factors that exist in the family domain for adolescent problem behaviours is now well established. While one of the primary goals of adolescence is to individuate from family, this has often been construed as there being a dwindling need for parental involvement in adolescents’ lives. Research suggests the contrary, with parents continuing to play an important role for adolescents as they move through a period of intense and prolonged growth (e.g., Vassallo et al., 2009).

Alongside this, there is an emerging body of evidence that suggests that family-based interventions are potentially effective for a range of problems in adolescence, including eating disorders, depression, conduct disorder and substance abuse. Therefore, the time appears right for increasing the number of programs that utilise family-based treatment for adolescent risk behaviours, accompanied by appropriate training for workers and rigorous evaluation.

The evidence outlined in this paper indicates that funding of programs to address problems in adolescence should be contingent on what strategies will be undertaken to include families, or if family is unavailable, other adults who are currently or could play a significant role in the adolescent’s life. This will help to build the “scaffolding” (Gilligan, 2006) that will be available to the adolescent once they leave the comparative safety of any service provision and the guiding hand of transient workers. Evaluation needs to be an essential part of service delivery to assist in growing the evidence base in this area. Lastly, the message that family remain an integral part of an adolescent’s life needs to be reinforced with schools, organisations and families and, equally importantly, with adolescents themselves.

Endnotes

1. “Family-based interventions” can be defined as those based on family systems theory, but may also include principles from other sources, such as cognitive behavioural theory, attachment theory and developmental theory (Austin, Macgowan & Wagner, 2005).

2. Based on the best available information about health care interventions, the Cochrane Collaboration reviews explore the evidence for and against the effectiveness and appropriateness of treatments (medications, surgery, education, etc.) in specific circumstances. For more information, visit: <www.cochrane.org/reviews/clibintro.htm>.

3. Treatments considered “as usual” in Fisher et al. (2010) included nutritional rehabilitation, psychological (e.g., cognitive behavioural)
therapies and pharmacological (e.g., antidepressant medication) therapies.

4 Multidimensional family therapy is a treatment system for families that attempts to use a number of therapeutic approaches to help family members to deal with problems. See Dakof (2010) for a more detailed description of the types of therapies involved.

References


**Elly Robinson** is the Manager, Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse and a Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. **Lyndal Power** is a Clinical Supervisor at RAPS Adolescent Family Therapy and Mediation Service, and President of the New South Wales Family Therapy Association. **David Allan** is the former Manager of RAPS Adolescent Family Therapy & Mediation Service.
Child Support and Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Budget and Other Measures) Act 2010

Commencing from 1 July 2010, the Child Support and Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Budget and Other Measures) Act 2010 (the Amendment Act) has made several amendments to the child support and family assistance law. These amendments are principally in relation to the calculation of the percentage of care for child support and family assistance and estimations of income for child support purposes.

Calculation of the percentage of care for child support and family assistance

The amount of direct care a parent provides for their child is an important factor in determining their assessment of child support and their entitlement to Family Tax Benefit (Part A).

Prior to 1 July 2010, there were different rules for calculating the percentage of care for child support and family assistance purposes. These different rules meant that a parent could, quite correctly, have different decisions made about their level of care for the purpose of calculating their child support assessment and family assistance entitlement.

From 1 July 2010, the rules for calculating the level of care for child support and family assistance were aligned. Parents are now able to seek one decision, from either the Child Support Agency or the Family Assistance Office, about their level of care and have that decision applied to calculate their child support and family assistance. This means parents only need to tell their story once, removes duplication of decision-making and simplifies the service delivery arrangements between the Child Support Agency and the Family Assistance Office.

In order to align the two sets of rules, the Amendment Act made some changes to how the percentage of care is calculated. In general terms, the calculation of the percentage of care reflects the former family assistance rules and is based on the actual care arrangements that are likely to continue for the foreseeable future. These arrangements are determined on information provided by parents to the Child Support Agency or Family Assistance Office.

In many families, care will occur in accordance with an oral or written agreement made between the parents, a parenting plan or a court order. Where that is the case, the percentage of care will be calculated by reference to that agreement, parenting plan or order.

Sometimes parents will be unable to agree on what care arrangements are in place for their child(ren), or the parents or child(ren) will cease to comply with a written agreement, parenting plan or order. If this occurs, the Child Support Agency or the Family Assistance Office will make a new determination of the percentage of care to be used for child support and family assistance purposes.

In most circumstances, the new determination of the percentage of care will be based on the actual care arrangements for the child(ren). These new actual care arrangements will be determined on information provided by the parents to the Child Support Agency or Family Assistance Office. This may mean that one parent is assessed, for child support or family assistance purposes, as having less care than is otherwise provided for in their written agreement, parenting plan or order.

However, if a parent who has reduced care is taking reasonable action to have their written agreement, parenting plan or order complied with, their child support assessment or family assistance may continue to reflect the terms of that agreement or order for a period of up to 14 weeks, or 26 weeks in special circumstances. This interim period is intended to give parents some flexibility to either make a new agreement, or get their former arrangements back on track, before the child support assessment or family assistance payments are affected.
What will be considered reasonable action depends on the circumstances of the case and may include, but is not limited to:

- initiating court action for contravention of a court order;
- initiating mediation, through a Family Relationship Centre or other service, to re-establish the care arrangement; or
- negotiating with the other parent with a view to re-establishing the care arrangement.

There are also new rules about the date of effect where care arrangements change. If parents notify either the Child Support Agency or Family Assistance Office within 28 days, the changed percentage of care may have effect from the date the change occurred. If a parent delays in making a notification that the care arrangements have changed, the change may only be applied to a more limited period. For child support purposes, if a change is notified after 28 days have passed, that change may only be applied from the date of notification.

For family assistance purposes, if a change in care is notified more than 28 days after the care change occurred, the date of effect is the date the change occurred, subject to arrears being limited to the start of the previous financial year.

As was the case prior to 1 July 2010, parents continue to have the right to seek an internal review of a decision about a percentage of care and may then appeal that review to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal. However, to promote finality, once a parent has sought a review of the decision through either the Child Support Agency or the Family Assistance Office, they will be unable to seek another review of the decision by the other agency.

**Estimate of income**

In order to make an assessment of child support, the Registrar must determine a parent’s child support income. In most, but not all, circumstances the Registrar will make a determination of a parent’s child support income with reference to that parent’s taxable income for the last completed financial year. Once made, the child support assessment will be issued for the child support period, which is a varying period lasting up to 15 months.

Where a parent’s most recent taxable income does not provide an accurate reflection of the current income, the child support legislation provides that a parent may elect to have their child support assessed using a prospective estimate of their income. The parent’s estimated income is then later reconciled against their actual taxable income for the same period.

Prior to 1 July 2010, a parent who elected to provide an estimate of their income was required to do so in relation to the remainder of the 15-month child support period. The practical effect of this requirement was that the parent’s estimate would span as many as three financial years. This was complicated for parents and could result in long delays in the reconciliation of their income as they waited for tax returns from up to three financial years to be assessed.

From 1 July 2010, estimate periods were aligned with financial years. This means parents who elect to estimate their income do so in relation to the remainder of the financial year in which they make the estimate. When making the estimate, parents are required to provide their year-to-date income, and an estimate of their income for the remainder of the financial year. These figures are then annualised to calculate a new estimated taxable income for child support purposes.

**Example**

Alex has a change to his work hours and elects to provide an estimated income for child support on 4 September 2010. Alex notifies a year-to-date income amount of $10,000 and estimates an income for the remaining period of $40,000.

Alex’s remaining period estimate is annualised by dividing $40,000 by the number of days in the remaining period ($40,000 divided by 300 days for the period 4 September to 30 June inclusive), and multiplying the result ($133.33) by 365 days. The annualised amount is $48,667 ($133.33  365 days). This income amount is then used to calculate Alex’s child support assessment for the remainder of the financial year.

As was the case prior to 1 July 2010, a parent may make an estimate of their income if:

- there is no income amount order in force for any period covered by the estimated income;
- an adjusted taxable income for the last relevant year of income has been notified by the Australian Taxation Office, the parent or an overseas authority; and
- in the case of a first election for a year of income, if the estimated income is 85% or less than the adjusted taxable income for the last relevant year of income.

A parent may make a subsequent estimate election any time within that year of income, and the election may be higher or lower than the previous estimate.

At the conclusion of the financial year, the parent’s estimated income will be reconciled against their assessed taxable income for that same year. If the assessed taxable income is higher than the estimated income, the child support assessment will be adjusted
to reflect the higher income for the duration of the estimate period. The parent will be liable to pay any additional child support that becomes due in respect of this period, or in the case of a receiving parent, to repay any overpaid child support.

If the assessed taxable income is 110% or more of the parent’s estimated income, the parent will also be required to pay a penalty equal to 10% of the difference between the liability under the estimated income and the liability under the assessed taxable income. The estimate penalty is a debt due to the Commonwealth.

Legislation introduced to increase emphasis on protection-from-harm principle in family law children’s cases

A Bill seeking to increase the emphasis placed on protecting children from harm in family law parenting cases has been introduced into Parliament. Key measures in the Bill include provisions specifying that protecting children from harm should receive greater emphasis than maintaining meaningful involvement with each parent in cases where these two principles are in conflict. It also introduces a wider definition of family violence that explicitly recognises emotional and financial abuse, among other behaviours.

The Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill 2011 responds to the findings and recommendations of three reports released last year. The Australian Institute of Family Studies Evaluation of the 2006 Family Law Reforms (Kaspiew et al., 2009), the Family Courts Violence Review (Chisholm, 2009) and the Improving Responses to Family Violence in the Family Law System report (Family Law Council, 2009) all indicated that there was room for improvement in the way in which the family law system dealt with matters involving family violence and child abuse.

Other measures in the Bill, which was introduced into the House of Representatives on 25 March, include:

- placing obligations on advisers to inform clients that the child's best interests are paramount, and where a meaningful relationship with both parents is inconsistent with protecting them from harm, greater weight should be given to protection from harm;
- repealing the provision that requires courts to consider the extent to which one parent has facilitated the child’s relationship with the other; and
- repealing the provision that requires courts to make a costs order against a party found to have knowingly made a false statement in proceedings.

The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee (the Committee) has called for nationally consistent approaches to the regulation of donor-assisted conception in Australia (The Committee, 2011). In a report on Donor Conception Practices in Australia, tabled in February 2011, the Committee expressed concern that only four of the eight state and territory jurisdictions had legislation regulating the issue, and these regimes were inconsistent in a number of key areas, including requirements for counselling, the information available to donor-conceived people about their donor, and limits on the number of children any one donor may conceive.

While Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Western Australia have legislation governing medically assisted donor conception, the issue is addressed in the ACT, the Northern Territory, Queensland and Tasmania through the non-enforceable National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Ethical Guidelines on the Use of Assisted Reproductive Technology in Clinical Practice and Research 2007 (NHMRC, 2007).
The Committee has called for the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General to work towards a nationally consistent approach as a matter of priority.

According to data cited in the report, statistics provided by reproductive technology clinics indicate that there have been some 4,446 live births in Australian and New Zealand as a result of medically assisted donor conception between 2002 and 2008 (The Committee, 2011, ¶1.7). However, there is no data available on children born as result of non-medically assisted private arrangements. Nor is there comprehensive information available on the types of families (heterosexual, single-parent, same-sex) that use medically assisted reproductive technology (ART).

The Committee identified the following areas of concern on the basis of submissions:

- anonymous donations being used in clinics in breach of the NMRC guidelines, which provide that ART practices should uphold the right-to-know of genetic parents and siblings (NHMRC, 2007, 6.1);
- the lack of tracking across jurisdictional boundaries means donors can donate in a number of states and territories, making any cap on the numbers of conceptions from one donor impossible to police;
- no regulation of the importation of sperm and oocytes (eggs) into Australia;
- no consistent limits on the numbers of conceptions in which a particular donor is involved;
- donor-conceived people having no consistent right to identifying or non-identifying information about their donor and siblings, with provisions in the state where legislation exists having varying approaches to these questions (The Committee, 2011, ¶7.4).

Of the 32 recommendations made by the Committee, the main ones are for:

- nationally consistent legislation to include:
  - “at a minimum” a prohibition on donor anonymity;
  - a limit on the number of families a donor is able to assist;
  - rights of access for donor-conceived people to identifying and non-identifying information about donors and siblings;
  - protection for the “welfare and interests” of donor-conceived people (Recommendation 3);
- consideration to be given as to how private donor conception arrangements can be regulated to ensure appropriate protection for donors, recipients and donor-conceived individuals (Recommendation 4); and
- the establishment of a national register of donors and donor-conceived individuals (Recommendation 5);

When does family dispute resolution begin? A decision from the Federal Magistrates Court

Information collected by family dispute resolution practitioners and agencies as part of intake and assessment procedures are admissible as evidence in court, according to a first instance decision of the Federal Magistrates Court.

In Rastall and Ball and Ors [2010] FMCAfam 1290, Federal Magistrate Reithmuller held that intake and assessment procedures conducted prior to the family dispute resolution process did not attract the protection of s10H (confidentiality) and s10J (inadmissibility) provisions of Family Law Act 1975 (Cth). These provisions respectively provide that communications made in family dispute resolution are confidential and inadmissible as evidence in court, except in certain narrow circumstances, mainly relating to situations involving child abuse or a risk of harm.
The question arose in the case because Reithmuller FM had previously made orders providing that the parties should attend family dispute resolution in relation to a parenting dispute, given that there “were no issues apparent on the material filed that this was not an appropriate process” (par. 3). However, a family dispute resolution practitioner subsequently determined that the matter was not suitable for family dispute resolution, after two of the three parties in the case attended appointments at the centre. Rejecting the centre’s arguments that communications made in the lead-up to the FDR practitioner’s assessment that the matter was not suitable for FDR, Reithmuller FM held that “to put it colloquially, the cone of silence” under s10H and s10J “only descends after an assessment by an approved person, and only covers the specific process then conducted by an approved person” (par. 33).

In brief: Addressing violence against women

Three developments in the national program to address violence against women have occurred.

National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children

Most significantly, the multilateral 12-year National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children has received endorsement from the Council of Australian Governments. The Federal and all State and Territory governments have committed to the plan, which involves the implementation of measures designed to contribute to six national outcomes:

- communities are safe and free from violence;
- relationships are respectful;
- Indigenous communities are strengthened;
- services meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence;
- justice responses are effective; and
- perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account.


National register for family violence orders

The second development, a national register for domestic and family violence orders, is part of the set of initiatives to be implemented as part of the National Plan. It has been endorsed by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General and will mean that protection orders obtained under state and territory family violence legislation will be recognised nationally. Rather than requiring people protected by such orders to register the order with a court if they are in another jurisdiction, recognition will occur automatically.

For more information, go to: <www.attorneygeneral.gov.au/www/ministers/mcclelland.nsf/Page/MediaReleases_2011_FirstQuarter_4March2011-Newnationalregisterfordomesticandfamilyviolenceorders>

Family violence training package for family law system professionals

Third, the Attorney-General’s Department has released a free, multidisciplinary training package about family violence for use by professionals across the family law system. The AVERT Family Violence training package was developed by Relationships Australia South Australia and is available online at <www.avertfamilyviolence.com.au>, or it may be requested through <FLSIsection@ag.gov.au>.

Endnotes

1 Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008 (Vic).
3 Assisted Reproductive Technology Act 2007 (NSW).
4 Human Reproductive Technology Act 1991 (WA).

References


Dr Rae Kaspiew is a Senior Research Fellow and Sharnee Moore is a Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
In a country as geographically large as Australia, disputes over relocation between separating parents potentially have serious consequences for their children, particularly where considerable distances are involved. Some argue that it is too easy for the courts to grant such relocations; however, Dr Rae Kaspiew presented evidence to the contrary in this seminar.

Dr Kaspiew, a socio-legal researcher with particular expertise in family law and family violence, presented the findings of an investigation, funded by the Australian Research Council, aimed at understanding more about the experiences of parents and children after court decisions about relocation. The study was commissioned following the *Every Picture Tells a Story* report, which highlighted a need for judges to have more information about the aftermath of family law court decisions.

The mixed methods research project examined all relocation cases that were decided by the Family Court of Australia (FCoA) in a two-year period prior to the introduction of the family reform package. Qualitative data was sourced from 38 in-depth interviews with separated parents who had a contested orders in relation to relocation, from either the FCoA, the Federal Magistrates Court or the Family Court of Western Australia, between 2002 and mid-2005.

It becomes clear that without legislative provisions, judges have a difficult job in deciding whether to grant relocations to some separating parents, particularly given the dynamic, complex and multi-layered reasons given by applicants to relocate. For example, FCoA data shows that only 8% of applicants’ primary reason to relocate was to escape violence and threats, yet for 27 of the 38 interview respondents, the relocation proposal was just one of many issues over which there had been parental conflict and/or court proceedings. In many cases, relocation disputes frequently occur in the context of highly conflicted inter-parental relationships, where family violence is a common occurrence. In this sense, the interview data suggests that relocation is often a product of conflict, rather than a cause of conflict.

Dr Kaspiew noted that while the complexities and multi-faceted reasons given for relocation are not necessarily reflected in the way in which matters are litigated, judges are in many cases getting it right in terms of protecting children from violence. This is demonstrated by the 64% of cases who were successfully granted relocation for reasons of escaping violence. While this satisfies the pre-reform case law principle that the child’s best interest be considered paramount, the principle of the right of children to have contact with both parents remained a contentious issue where conflict persists.

The pathways taken by separating parents before, during and after their relocation disputes offer some clues about the nature of their conflicts. Dr Kaspiew presented three patterns that surfaced from the analysis. First, most relationships were conflicted throughout the whole process, with parents experiencing “rough roads”; second, some parents had “smoother pathways”, where their relationships improved; and third, a small number of parents took “separate pathways”, where the relationship diminished completely.

It was emphasised that despite the commonalities evident from the patterns, the interview data also suggested that the circumstances of children vary widely, depending on a variety of factors: parental capacity, parents ability to “move on” and focus on the children, and the emotional and financial capacity of parents to sustain relationships with the children.

Given the complexity, dynamics and multi-layered nature of the issues to be considered, judges have a difficult task in making decisions over relocation disputes. While this study provides some links between pre-court situations and post-court developments, larger scale testing would contribute further to the debate over whether relocation matters should be subject to special legislative provisions.

### Short-term physical, emotional and financial well-being after separation: Does initiator status make a difference?

**Dr Belinda Hewitt, Senior Research Fellow, University of Queensland**

**Seminar held at the Institute on 15 March 2011**

**Report by John De Maio**

Dr Hewitt’s main research interests include investigating the different consequences of initiating separation...
for men and women and the health consequences of relationship transitions. In this seminar, she described research that she and her collaborators had undertaken examining differences in health and economic outcomes after separation and the extent of any differences in these outcomes between “initiators” and “non-initiators” of separation.

Dr Hewitt noted that the research in this area indicates that married people “do better” on a range of health and wellbeing indicators when compared with the unmarried. The previous research also shows that separation and divorce negatively impact on health outcomes and income, particularly for women with children. This project aimed to investigate whether these negative consequences of separation in terms of health and income are the same for everyone and if these differences depend on who initiated the separation.

The study was undertaken by analysing the longitudinal dataset from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) study. The project followed HILDA respondents who were legally married at the time of the first wave of data collection, and identified respondents’ transitions from marriage to separation over eight waves of data collection. Two separate analyses were conducted, with differences in key health and income outcomes according to which respondent initiated separation being explored within the framework of a random effects statistical model.

After controlling for a range of demographic and economic factors, the statistical modelling revealed that initiators had better physical and mental health outcomes when compared to non-initiators. Furthermore, men’s physical health was comparably worse than women’s after separation. Another interesting result that arose from this analysis was that people who reported jointly initiated separations were found to have the best health overall, and oftentimes better than married respondents.

In terms of the effects of separation on income, no relationship was found between income after separation and initiation status for men in their sample. The study also found an unexpected result, with women who initiated separation having lower household income immediately after the separation. Dr Hewitt hypothesised that this may be due to either a divergence between expected and actual income, or that factors such as life satisfaction or children’s wellbeing, rather than financial aspects, were the main consideration in separation. She also noted that for this group, income recovered to a similar pre-separation level by the following year.

Dr Hewitt concluded her seminar by highlighting that the consequences of marital separation are not the same for everyone, with outcomes being dynamic over time for those who separate. These outcomes, particularly key health and economic outcomes, vary depending on who initiated the separation and the time since separation.

Disadvantage across the generations: What do we know about social and economic mobility in Australia?

Professor Deborah Cobb-Clark, Director of the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research

Seminar held at the Institute on 14 April 2011

Report by Elaine Kong

In this seminar, Professor Deborah Cobb-Clark discussed the issues associated with inter-generational mobility. Inter-generational mobility is the extent to which children’s outcomes, such as health, education and career decisions, differ to those of their parents—the opposite of inter-generational persistence.

Professor Cobb-Clark’s presentation drew from the recent OECD report on the inter-generational transmission of
disadvantage, which provided evidence that children largely “inherit” their parents’ socio-economic status. She explored this finding further and related the OECD report’s conclusions to the Australian context by presenting results from the Youth In Focus study.

Professor Cobb-Clark began by explaining the importance of understanding inter-generational mobility, which has the potential to reduce inequality, promote social justice and distribute resources more fairly. It may also contribute to greater economic efficiency by ensuring that individuals’ talents are fully utilised. Income is a common measure of social and economic mobility and, theoretically, we usually link children’s incomes to those of their parents. If there is a high level of income inequality among parents, then children of high-income parents will have a substantial advantage. Therefore, intergenerational income persistence will be higher and income mobility will be lower when children “inherit” their parents’ financial status.

It was noted that Australia’s status on the elasticity of intergenerational earnings is average when compared to other OECD countries. However, education is one of the major determinants of whether economic disadvantage is passed on from one generation to the next. The family structure gap between single-parent households and couple households is significant in Australia; children of single parents obtained lower than average mathematical test scores (as a proxy of educational outcomes), when compared to the United States, Canada and Switzerland. Professor Cobb-Clark suggested that the government could reduce inter-generational persistence progressively by tailoring government policy to weaken the link between parents’ education levels and their children’s educational outcomes, through targeting resources to children.

Professor Cobb-Clark supported this suggestion by presenting findings from the Youth In Focus study, a longitudinal study of 18-year-olds that looks at the consequences of growing up in a family with a history of income support. Comparisons were made between mother and child reports on attitudes to work and welfare and its link to family income support. The study findings suggest that Australian children’s attitudes about income support receipt and being successful in life are clearly linked to those of their mothers. The study also shows that these attitudes appear to be influenced by the family’s history with the income support system. Children who grow up in families where members are welfare recipients are more likely to rely upon social assistance and income support as adults. However, only some of the link between attitudes and receipt of income support appears causal, as the study results alone do not demonstrate an emerging culture of welfare dependency in Australia. Professor Cobb-Clark stated that the Youth In Focus study provided a number of possible reasons as to why disadvantage may be passed from parents to children in Australia. Aside from income support, further research is needed to investigate whether other driving factors contribute to disadvantage.

Professor Cobb-Clark concluded that the optimal degree of socio-economic mobility is unclear. However, low mobility suggests that children’s outcomes are affected by factors over which they have no control and high mobility suggests that parents have little ability to influence their child’s outcomes. She emphasised that the way in which social policy is designed and delivered affects the degree of inter-generational mobility, and a broad approach is needed for the development of future policies.

**Investment in children in Australia: Do current patterns point towards increased intergenerational mobility in the future?**

**Professor Gerry Redmond, Senior Research Fellow, Social Policy Research Centre**

*Seminar held at the Institute on 10 May 2011*

Report by Cindy Tarczon

The main focus of Professor Redmond’s research at the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of
New South Wales is child poverty and wellbeing in Australia and internationally, with a particular focus on poverty and inequality, infant mortality and children’s perspectives on their wellbeing.

His seminar on investment in children in Australia and its impact on intergenerational mobility spoke to its effect on social policy in Australia over the past 30 years. Recognised as a key indicator of social inequity, government policy has increasingly recognised the importance of investment in children. Greater public investment in the early years has been found to produce more equitable outcomes, as the effects of early interventions disproportionately benefit the most disadvantaged children. Investment in the early years is one of the few public policies that do not have an equity/productivity trade-off. As such, both public and private investments have had a specific focus on early childhood interventions during the era of the current government, with spending on children viewed as an investment to secure profitable returns.

Australia is about average in terms of overall investment in children, but compares poorly in provisions aimed specifically at very young children. Nonetheless, it performs well on some indicators, particularly cash support for families with young children. Overall expenditure on children has been on the rise since the Hawke–Keating government famously launched its pledge to “eliminate child poverty” through increased family payments, encouraging parents—especially lone parents—into employment, with reduced tax-transfer disincentives and support for child care. Professor Redmond noted that it was also the first time that Additional Pension and Benefit rates for children were effectively indexed to inflation. One of the most important changes to occur in 1993 was payments for low-income families in work and on benefits, which were integrated into a single payment called the Additional Family Payment. It became one of the few systems of family assistance that provided integrated support for low income families in and outside the workforce. In addition, this meant that the principal carer in couple families—usually the mother—became entitled to payments, rather than the primary benefit recipient, usually the father.

During that same period, there were also significant increases in public expenditure on cash transfers for families and children, which were associated with a drop in child poverty rates and were further assisted by policies aimed at encouraging single parents into the workforce. Professor Redmond pointed out that growth in overall expenditure on welfare services was considerably greater than the increase in average government spending during the 1990s, and also greater than population growth, suggesting a real increase per head. Investment in primary and secondary education also benefited from significant investment, with the policy focus being on creating skilled and competitive workers for the labour market.

While Professor Redmond acknowledged that public investment in children appears to be equalising—in that they benefit children in low income households the most—it is a mixed story on what the drivers of intergenerational mobility actually are. As examination of this picture becomes broader, the causal relationships are less clear. Much investment in children comes not through direct provision of public services but is provided by parents and other relatives either through time spent with the child or through expending their own resources for the benefit of their children. We do not as yet appear to be in a position to understand the impact of these investments on child wellbeing, or on inequalities in child outcomes. However, when considering impacts, we need to consider that such investment does not take place in a vacuum, but can reinforce or moderate other demographic, social and economic developments.
Family violence: Towards a holistic approach to screening and risk assessment in family support services.

AFRC Briefing No. 17, Elly Robinson & Lawrie Moloney

Research suggests that family violence is not always recognised by practitioners working in family support services, and that even when it is recognised, appropriate actions aimed at creating or preserving safety are not always taken. This paper reviewed the current research and literature specific to family violence screening and risk assessment. The aim of the paper was to assist service providers and practitioners in developing and evaluating screening and risk assessment tools specific to family violence issues.

There are several issues that are relevant to the best methods of screening and assessing clients for family violence, including:

■ whether the same worker or two separate workers should screen and assess for family violence;
■ the formalising of screening and assessment procedures;
■ the limited evidence base for the most effective screening and assessment tools;
■ the ability of victims to predict future risk; and
■ what the tools are measuring.

Without information regarding the validity and reliability of the tools, it may also be difficult to confirm whether any of these things is, in fact, being measured, and to what extent.

A consensus regarding the best tools for the job may be ambitious. Anecdotal evidence does suggest that family relationship service providers, however, are drawing on an enormous wealth of experience and judgement to create a range of tools that meet the varied needs of their clients. This flexible approach gives credence to the different circumstances, including cultural factors, which will occur for different groups accessing services in multiple areas.

Evaluation in family support services

AFRC Issues No. 6, Robyn Parker

AFRC Issues No. 6 was developed as five resource sheets aimed at prompting family support service providers to think carefully and systematically about evaluation, and to guide and support them through the evaluation process. These papers are not intended to turn practitioners into expert evaluators. They aim to build the capacity of practitioners to design and conduct or collaborate on evaluations of their programs and services, and to:

■ feel reasonably confident in their ability to formulate and implement an evaluation plan in their agency;
■ be able to anticipate and address the practical requirements of the various stages of an evaluation, including the resources and infrastructure needed to support an evaluation; and
■ understand what needs to happen at each stage of the evaluation to the extent that potential obstacles can be anticipated and, if not overcome, at least managed or accommodated.

While the papers are related, each is also designed to stand alone. Related terms, concepts and sections are cross-referenced. The papers can be read in any order. An online Quick Reference Guide also allows the reader to navigate across the papers to find information quickly and easily.

The emphasis in these papers is on the practical task of designing, conducting, interpreting and reporting an evaluation. Where appropriate, references and links to other resources are provided.

Enhancing access to family dispute resolution for families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

AFRC Briefing No. 18, Susan Armstrong

This paper explores the extent to which federally funded family dispute resolution (FDR) services are accessible to families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. The paper draws extensively on literature identified for and the findings of a qualitative research project, conducted by the author in a research partnership with CatholicCare Sydney and Anglicare, which sought to develop a culturally responsive model of FDR.

While all federal family support services are required to offer accessible, equitable and responsive programs, it appears that CALD families are not using FDR at a rate proportionate to their presence in the Australian community. Recent reviews of FSP services indicated significant gaps in service provision to clients from CALD backgrounds, barriers limiting their access to the services and lack of confidence by staff to engage with CALD clients.

Like many separating families, those from CALD backgrounds may need assistance at, or following, separation. It is quite possible that the need of some CALD families will be acute because of their particular experience of migration and acculturation and the
resultant disadvantage and marginalisation they face. Most people will turn first to family and friends and non-legal professionals to resolve problems, particularly those people whose cultural norms are collectivistic, which may discourage approaching outsiders for assistance.

The paper concludes that there is no magic solution to encouraging a greater proportion of CALD clients to use mainstream FDR services. Family dispute resolution services wishing to attract a greater proportion of CALD clients need to acknowledge the complex socio-cultural and gender dynamics relevant to separations by CALD couples and to recognise that there may be more barriers to using FDR services—which may be perceived as facilitating separation—than to using more benign services. However, the strategies described in this paper have been shown to be successful in other contexts and, if appropriately adapted to FDR, may engage more CALD clients in mainstream family dispute resolution.

History of child protection services

NCPC Resource Sheet, Alister Lamont & Leah Bromfield

In Australia, there has been a variety of responses to protecting children and supporting families in need. Many of the early forms of child protection work in Australia were modelled on those seen in the United Kingdom and United States. The establishment of voluntary and non-government child protection societies were followed by the introduction of legislation to protect children and, by the end of the 19th century, children's courts.

Although the Commonwealth of Australia was established in 1901, the provision of children protection services remained a state responsibility, which meant that legislation and practice differed somewhat between each state and territory—something that continues today. In the early 1960s, the child protection landscape changed significantly, with increased public and political awareness of child protection issues. Sustained debates and dramatic changes to approaches in protecting children soon followed. Significant social change, particularly in relation to family structures (i.e., more families of single parents and families where parents had divorced or remarried), also broadened the scope of families in the child welfare system and added to the complexities of providing child protections services.

Mandatory reporting laws of child abuse and neglect were introduced in most states of Australia during the 1970s. Definitions of child abuse and neglect were also expanded so that by the late 1980s, definitions in each state included emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse and physical abuse.

The focus on professionalising child protection services also saw most states move to a more legalistic approach to child abuse and neglect during the 1990s. This approach meant that for child protection workers, investigative and administrative work took up a significant amount of time. Together with reduced government funding at the time, child protection systems found it increasingly difficult to meet demand. Seeking an alternative solution, the 21st century saw most states and territories in Australia adopt new models of child protection and family support. New child protection models sought to achieve a balance—this has lead to child protection services and family support services working more collaboratively in order to assess family need.

Today, most state child protection services are part of a broader department of human services and there is a growing acceptance that applying a public health model to child protection may help meet demand. The central tenet of such an approach is prevention—the framework expands the service continuum, which is likely to deliver better outcomes for children and their families.

Are social marketing campaigns effective in preventing child abuse and neglect?

NCPC Issues No.32, 2010

Briony Horsfall, Leah Bromfield and Myfanwy McDonald

This Issues paper undertook a systematic literature review to examine the evidence for the effectiveness of social marketing campaigns in preventing child maltreatment. Media-based social marketing campaigns aim to contribute to the prevention of child maltreatment by raising public awareness of the issue and educating...
and fostering prosocial behaviours within families. Behavioural change can range from encouraging people to change a specific behaviour on their own (self-regulation) to seeking professional help about a difficult problem.

In the past, social marketing campaigns in Australia have targeted issues such as drink-driving, heart disease prevention, use of car seatbelts and anti-smoking. However, there is little evidence regarding the effectiveness of such campaigns in Australia. Of particular importance, is the need to evaluate campaigns that relate to child maltreatment, especially those depicting hard-hitting content, because they have the potential to be harmful to vulnerable members of the community, including children and maltreatment survivors. Only 12 campaigns relating to child maltreatment were identified as having published evidence of impact and/or outcomes evaluation in the review.

Several other important issues are identified for optimising future social marketing campaigns that aim to address child maltreatment in Australia. The integration of both mass media and community-level strategies appreciates that attitudes and behaviours are complex and that a campaign is unlikely to produce long-term change without broader social reinforcement. Community-level strategies recognise that individual behaviour does not occur in isolation. For child maltreatment, pairing mass media with a community-level component would help reinforce the message that child protection is everyone’s responsibility.

While television advertising continues to be a key medium for social marketing campaigns, consideration needs to be given to its effectiveness, especially when community advertising is often televised during non-peak viewing times. Furthermore, other means for accessing information are becoming more popular, especially among younger age groups. However, any use of new technologies needs to also consider access and equality issues in the population.

Social marketing campaigns related to child maltreatment must also offer ways to access further information and support that are tailored to the needs of the target audience. In turn, an increased need for assistance, information and support services is to be anticipated if the mass media has the intended effect of generating a public response.

Assessing the attitudes and beliefs of the target audience has also emerged as a key process to undertake when deciding which social problem should be the subject of a campaign. Finding out what needs to be understood from the perspective of the target population is likely to increase the impact of a campaign. Finally, underpinning the campaign with a theory of change guides the development, implementation and evaluation of the intervention. A theoretical framework provides a strategy to conscientiously tackle complex individual behaviour associated with child maltreatment and community-level change and assess its efficacy.

Issues for the safety and wellbeing of children in families with multiple and complex problems.

NCPC Issues No.33, 2010, Leah Bromfield, Alister Lamont, Robyn Parker and Briony Horsfall

Families with multiple and complex problems are no longer a marginal group in service delivery. In fact, they have become the primary client group of modern child protection services. The challenge for child protection services is to respond holistically to address inter-related problems, in order to better support families to make and sustain changes to better meet the needs of children.

This paper investigates the separate effects of parental substance misuse, domestic violence and parental mental health problems. These parental problems are commonly associated with child protection involvement and are described as “key risk factors” for child abuse and neglect. Individually, parental mental health problems, substance misuse and domestic violence represent significant risk factors for child abuse and neglect, but the reality is that parenting problems rarely occur in isolation. They also often occur within the context of social exclusion, disadvantage and past histories of trauma. Children are
particularly vulnerable to cumulative harm in families with multiple and complex problems. While this paper explores the structure and capacity of the child protection system, several implications for practice are offered. When making assessments of families with complex problems, practitioners are encouraged to go further than diagnosing parental problems such as substance addiction and mental health problems. Completing a functional assessment of the impact of parental problems of parenting behaviours is important for identifying the risks for children. Practitioners will also find it worth exploring, as part of the assessment, the extent to which children are aware of these problems. This will inform the assessment, and may also be a powerful motivator for parents to change. An effective intervention is planned and purposeful, based on a comprehensive assessment and staged to meet the family’s needs and capacities over time. Practitioners are likely to have to try and support a parent who is dealing with multiple and complex problems on a number of different fronts. For example, families with multiple and complex problems are often situated within a broader context of poverty and disadvantage. Practitioners may need to assist parents in meeting the survival and safety and security needs of their family first before they will be ready to attend any form of parenting intervention. Once these basic needs are met, interventions that deal with relational or self-esteem needs, such as good parenting skills, can begin. At times, the effects of parents’ other problems may influence their ability to take in and apply knowledge and information, and to read, solve problems or follow complex instructions. It is therefore vital that the factors that may diminish a parent’s capacity to learn new skills are attended to so that parents have the best possible chance of developing good parenting skills. Redressing damage from witnessing or experiencing abuse and neglect in the family takes time. Parents need to have reached a point at which they can acknowledge that their parenting or the home environment has had a negative impact on their child. Practitioners making assessments should include a thorough family history to identify whether current problems, such as domestic violence, mental health problems and substance misuse, are symptomatic of past trauma. Parents responding to trauma need to develop adaptive coping strategies that will not impede their parenting capacity.
The following selection of books on family-related topics are recent additions to the Institute’s Library. They are available through Libraries, through the Institute’s Library via the Inter Library Loan system, or for purchase from good book shops. Prices are given as and when supplied.


Bullying Interventions in Schools looks at six methods to address cases of bullying in school and explains when and how they can best be applied. The six major intervention methods looked at are: the traditional disciplinary approach; strengthening the victim; mediation; restorative practice; the support group method; the method of shared concern. Each method is described in detail. The strengths and limitations of each method are described in regards to their efficacy and applicability in various types of bullying encountered in schools. Aimed at school leaders, decision-makers and teachers, this is an accessible, practical and highly relevant resource.


This research paper was commissioned by Benatas to examine views about respect towards older people in society, and also what respect means to older Australians. This was the first study to investigate respect for older people within the Australian population. The results of the study showed that there is a belief that the expressions of respect valued by older people are different to those valued by younger members of society. The results also suggested that respect for older people has changed over time, with respect moving from submissive forms to shared or mutual ones. The research identifies the reasons for this change. This paper is aimed at policy-makers and researchers.


In recent years a number of ‘integrated responses’ to domestic violence have been developed and an increasingly important element is the delivery of interventions for the male perpetrators of violence. This book describes and discusses the provision of these programs and services designed for known perpetrators. Outcome data, theoretical and clinical issues relevant to program delivery are looked at in detail. Contents: Part I: Context; Part II: System Responses; Part III: Broader Practice Approaches; Part IV: Research; Part V: Commentary. This resource is aimed at researchers and health-care practitioners.


In his latest book, Steve Biddulph revisits the subject of manhood and explores the elements of a man’s life that often cause him unhappiness such as sex, marriage, children and work. He explores the idea that modern men have confused identities, resulting in a lack of true connections. According to Biddulph, it is not until a man discovers his true self and is able to adopt a complete idea of manhood, will he be able to be happy and content. With powerful, real-life stories, this is a practical book aimed at men of all ages and also for the women in their lives.
Community safety in Australian Indigenous communities: service providers’ perceptions


This study investigates measures and perceptions of safety in Indigenous communities in Australia. It details the development of a questionnaire designed to capture perceptions of community safety in Indigenous communities, which it is hoped will be utilised by organisations and service providers in their work. It also presents findings from a survey of 159 workers from service providers in remote, regional, and urban areas. The results presented are intended to be illustrative, rather than representative, and include community strengths; crime and social problems; community services available; perceived safety of personnel/respondent; reasons for feeling safe or unsafe; perceived safety of Indigenous people; times and places considered unsafe; community safety initiatives; perceived level of need for change; crime reporting and disclosure by victims; and who victims of violence turn to for support, for men, women, children, and female sexual assault victims.


Doing early childhood research: International perspectives on theory and practice


This book provides a detailed introduction to techniques and issues of research with young children. It is divided into three sections: the nature of research; analysis and design; and the research process in action. Chapters are written by Australian and international authors.

Making ends meet: Financial stress is not just about money


This report examines the current state of household finances in New South Wales. In particular, it looks at the impact of financial stress on broader issues such as housing, utility costs, health, and relationships, and the worrying aspects of credit debt and low money management skills. The report draws on interviews with counsellors from the Wesley Mission’s Financial Counselling Service, case studies with metropolitan clients, a literature review, and a household survey of 621 people across New South Wales. It discusses the results and the implications for policy.


Protecting children from sexual violence: A cultural approach


This book has been published as part of the Council of Europe campaign to stop sexual violence against children. It provides information on the existing legal framework; abuse prevention and reporting; sexual violence and the internet; children who sexually abuse other children; and the role of public and private partnerships in stopping abuse. It also highlights the lack of data on the prevalence and nature of sexual abuse and argues for a co-ordinated pan-European approach to research and data gathering so that policy making and programme design can have a sound base in research.

This collection of Booknotes was compiled by Katherine Browne, Library and Information Management student on a work placement, and the Library Team at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
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