The Australian Institute of Family Studies is a statutory authority which 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;
- promoting improved support for families, including measures which 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.

For further information about the Institute and its work, write to Australian Institute of Family Studies, 300 Queen Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000, Australia. Phone (03) 9214 7888. Fax (03) 9214 7839. Internet www.aifs.gov.au/
Diversity and change in Australian families

Statistical Profiles

David de Vaus

Australian Institute of Family Studies
This book is testament to the scale of changes that families have experienced over the last century and over the last 25 years in particular. There is hardly any aspect of family life that has not changed in one way or another. Relationship patterns, fertility, gender roles, relationship breakdown, the work and family interface, and the growth of particular family types are but a few of the major changes to families that we have seen in recent decades.

In the face of so much change it is easy for myths to develop and for misunderstandings to emerge. It is easy to dwell on the dramatic and eye-catching changes – the changes that might suggest crisis – and to ignore the ongoing strengths of families. Statistics are frequently quoted about families and family change. As we know, statistics can easily be misinterpreted and used to mislead.

Thus, as author David de Vaus points out, one of the main purposes of *Diversity and Change in Australian Families* is to provide statistical information about Australian families and family change from reliable sources, and to place these statistics within a context that makes them easier to interpret accurately.

The extent to which families are changing and the “mainstreaming” of family forms that were once regarded as marginal has led to concerns in some quarters about the decline of the family. There is certainly reason for concern about some of the changes and the difficulties that family members can face. There can be no doubt that even in these relatively prosperous times families face enormous pressures. Some families manage these pressures but other families struggle, and do so against the odds.

Frequently, at least in the public discourse, the failings in families are attributed to the moral failings of the individuals involved. But families and individual family members do not live in a vacuum. Family change is, in part, a function of changes in the wider society. As a fundamental institution in society, the family cannot escape the impact of these broader social changes. Where families struggle it is important to attend to the structural factors that contribute to these difficulties and not simply blame the individuals.

While it is easy to dwell on troubles in families, there are a number of areas where families are doing well, and where family lives are, on average, improving. David de Vaus has been at pains not to attend only to the negatives, but also to document the strengths of families and the improvements in family lives.

*Diversity and Change in Australian Families* covers a very wide range of topics. Yet inevitably there will be topics that have been left out. The book does not aim to be a microscope through which to view the inner workings of families or the daily lives of individuals who live in families. Rather it aims to provide windows through which to catch glimpses of the landscape of Australian families and family change. It is our hope that it will contribute to informed debate about family diversity and change and will inform family policy development.

Alan Hayes
Director
Australian Institute of Family Studies
About the author
David de Vaus is Professor of Sociology and Head of the School of Social Sciences at La Trobe University and former Research Manager and Senior Research Advisor at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. He has written or edited 14 books, mainly on methods of social research and in family studies. He is author of Letting Go: Relationships Between Adults and their Parents, published by Oxford University Press, 1994; and co-editor (with Ilene Wolcott) of Australian Family Profiles: Social and Demographic Patterns, published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, 1997. He has published research on cohabitation, fertility patterns, changing patterns of partnering, the changing living arrangements of children, intergenerational transfers, families and ageing, retirement, family values, and on many other areas of family life.

Acknowledgements
I have been assisted by many people in preparing this work. I owe special thanks to the Australian Institute of Family Studies for publishing the book. As Institute Director, David Stanton supported the book, as has Ann Sanson more recently, as Acting Director. The Institute’s demographic trends analyst Lixia Qu helped with the data sets and some of the analysis. And Ruth Weston, Matthew Gray and Bruce Smyth, Institute researchers, have been both encouraging and helpful by reading drafts of chapters and making numerous suggestions for improving the analysis and avoiding simplistic conclusions. Institute publisher Meredith Michie and editor Dianne Frey have improved the book by their expert advice and editing.

In particular, I am indebted to Peter McDonald, Head of the Demography and Sociology Program at the Australian National University, who read and reviewed the entire manuscript. I am particularly grateful for the time he spent on it, for his valuable comments, and for suggesting how to improve the analysis – picking up mistakes and pointing out where my interpretations were too simple. However, it is the case that I am entirely responsible for the faults that may remain.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, June, for her support and patience as the writing of this book has, once again, challenged our work–family balance.

David de Vaus
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Main surveys used

Much of the information in this book relies on information made available in national surveys conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), various universities and by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS). Access to the unit record files for many of these surveys has enabled new analysis to be reported. Access to the unit record files of the ABS was made possible by the Agreement between the ABS and the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee. (Organised by year of survey. Multi year surveys are listed last.)

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<td><strong>Australian Living Standards Survey</strong></td>
<td>Australian Institute of Family Studies</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>5000 households (parents and all children of secondary school age were eligible to participate)</td>
<td>5000 randomly selected households in 12 different Local Government Areas. Households were eligible for selection if they had responsibility for a child under the age of 20</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/fm/fm43dd.pdf">http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/fm/fm43dd.pdf</a></td>
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<td>1996 Women’s Safety Survey</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>6,333 women aged 18 years or more in private dwellings</td>
<td>National probability survey of women in private dwellings</td>
<td>ABS (1996d)</td>
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<td>National Survey of Mental Health and Well Being of Adults</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<td>10,600 people</td>
<td>Stratified, multistage probability sample of private dwellings</td>
<td>ABS (1999k)</td>
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<td>Negotiating the Life Course Survey, 1997</td>
<td>Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2231 individuals</td>
<td>National probability telephone survey. Persons in the household age 18-54 were eligible for selection. Only one eligible person was selected in each household.</td>
<td>Since the initial wave of the survey the study has developed into an indefinite life panel survey</td>
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<td>1997 Family Characteristics Survey</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>supplement to the Monthly Population Survey (MPS) which is based on a multi-stage area sample of private dwellings (currently about 30,000 houses, flats, etc.) and a list-sample of non-private dwellings (hospitals, hotels, etc.). Family characteristics survey was based on households in which there was a child under the age of 18.</td>
<td>ABS (1998a)</td>
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<td>Men’s Role in Parenting</td>
<td>G. Russell et al. for Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1,000 men and 250 partners of the sampled men</td>
<td>National random sample of men who had responsibility for children under the age of 18 years (whether they lived with them or not). Of the sample of men interviewed, partners of 25 per cent were also interviewed</td>
<td>Russell, G., Barclay, L. et al. (1999)</td>
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### Young Adults Aspirations Survey
Conducted by: Australian Institute of Family Studies  
Year conducted: 1998  
Sample size: 580 young adults aged 20–29 years  
Sample type: National probability telephone survey  

### 1998 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers
Conducted by: Australian Bureau of Statistics  
Year conducted: 1998  
Sample size: 36,951 persons were included in the household component and 5,716 persons for the cared accommodation component.  
Sample type: The survey consisted of two components— the household component and the cared accommodation component. The household component covered people in private dwellings and non private dwellings that were not classified as cared accommodation. The cared accommodation consisted of people in hospitals, nursing homes, hostels and the like. A probability sample of households was selected. From the selected households interviews were conducted in households in which there was a person aged 60 or over or there was a person with a disability.  
Further information: ABS (1999i)

### Household Expenditure Survey, 1998-1999
Conducted by: Australian Bureau of Statistics  
Year conducted: 1998-1999  
Sample size: 6093 households  
Sample type: National probability sample of Australian households  
Further information: ABS (2001k)

### National Gambling Survey
Conducted by: Productivity Commission  
Year conducted: 1999  
Sample size: A detailed questionnaire was administered to randomly selected sub-samples which yielded completed interviews of sub-samples of 1,225 regular gamblers, 1,290 non-regular gamblers and 983 non gamblers.  
Sample type: National telephone survey of the general adult population (18 years or older) covering all states and territories. The sampling strategy consisted of two phases. The first phase involved the administration of a brief screener questionnaire to 10,500 adults.  

### 1999–2000 Survey of Income and Housing Costs
Conducted by: Australian Bureau of Statistics  
Year conducted: 1999-2000  
Sample size: 15,500 persons from 8,289 income units  
Sample type: National probability survey of usual residents of private dwellings  
Further information: ABS (2001l)

### National Health Survey 2001
Conducted by: Australian Bureau of Statistics  
Year conducted: 2001  
Sample size: 26,862 persons in private dwellings  
Sample type: National probability sample of people in private dwellings. Within each selected household, a random sub-sample was selected as follows:  
- one adult (18 years of age and over)  
- all children aged 0-6 years  
- one child aged 7-17 years.  
Further information: ABS (2002n)
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<td>Transition from Education to Work survey</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
<td>2001</td>
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<td>Supplement to monthly Labour Force Survey. The population survey is based on a multi-stage area sample of private dwellings (currently about 30,000 houses, flats, etc.) and a list sample of non-private dwellings (hotels, motels, etc.), and covers about 0.45 per cent of the population of Australia.</td>
<td>ABS (2002f), ABS (2003k)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia</td>
<td>Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research under contract from the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services</td>
<td>2001 (Wave 1)</td>
<td>13,969 individuals from 7682 households</td>
<td>National multistage cluster probability sample of private dwellings</td>
<td><a href="http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/">http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/</a></td>
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<td>Australian Study of Health and Relationships</td>
<td>Funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, and the National Health and Medical Research Council</td>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>19,307</td>
<td>Telephone interviews were conducted with a disproportionate stratified two-phase sample of men and women aged 16 to 59 from across Australia. The sample was stratified by sex and then into 14 geographic regions for the female sample and 15 geographic regions for the male sample.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ashr">http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ashr</a></td>
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<td>Child Care Surveys</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
<td>Normally every 3 years</td>
<td>Varies but based on sample of 30,000 households</td>
<td>Supplement to the monthly Labour Force Surveys. Information is collected from private dwellings with children under 12 years of age.</td>
<td>ABS (2003k)</td>
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### Australian Temperament Project
- **Conducted by:** Currently conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies
- **Year conducted:** 13 waves of data have been collected since 1982
- **Sample size:** The initial sample comprised 2443 families from urban and rural areas of the state. Approximately two-thirds of the families are still participating in the study after 21 years.
- **Sample type:** Longitudinal study of children born in Victoria, Australia September, 1982 and January 1983.

### World Values Survey (Australian component) (1981 and 1995)
- **Conducted by:** Consortium (1981 survey)
  - Alan Black (Principal Investigator) (1995 survey)
- **Year conducted:** 1981 and 1995
- **Sample size:** 1,228 (1981 survey), 2,048 (1995 survey)
- **Sample type:** Repeated cross sectional surveys. National probability sample of individuals in private dwellings.
- **Further information:** Inglehart (2000)

### Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth
- **Conducted by:** Australian Council of Educational Research
- **Year conducted:** Annually
- **Sample size:** Approximately 13,000
- **Sample type:** Annual telephone interviews of a number of cohorts of Australian youth. Cohorts consist of approximately 13,000-14,000 year 9 students who are then tracked until the age of 25.
- **Further information:** http://www.acer.edu.au/research/LSAY/overview.html

### Labour Force Survey
- **Conducted by:** Australian Bureau of Statistics
- **Year conducted:** Monthly
- **Sample size:** 30,000 households
- **Sample type:** National probability sample
- **Further information:** ABS (2003)
Families are often talked about as if there was only one ideal template from which they are and should be shaped. But even a fleeting familiarity with family history, family demography and other family research makes it clear that families come in many shapes and sizes – they always have and always will. Not only does the nature of families change over historical time, any person’s family changes over their life course.

Families are embedded in the broader society. Inevitably, as social and economic structures change, so too will families. Although some people might decry this, it is critical that families do change. For were they to remain unresponsive to broad social influences then families would end up playing an increasingly marginal role in people’s lives, and in helping them live in an increasingly complex world.

Some of the new family forms work well while others are problematic. Family structures rarely work equally well for everyone so the changes often mean that there are winners and losers. Some family members benefit from new family forms while others struggle. The challenge for family policy is to assist families as they seek to find ways of adapting to the complex demands of the contemporary world.

One of the features of contemporary society has been the process of what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have called institutional individualisation. By this they mean that the traditional social institutions (family, gender, class, religion, community, ethnicity) that once provided the script for living and governed behaviour have lost much of their prescriptive power. Without institutionalised guidance or prescriptions, individuals have to work out their own life script. Baumann (2002) describes the historical process of individualisation as “transforming human identity from a ‘given’ to a ‘task’”. While this means that people are freed from many of the old constraints, they face an enormous range of choices and decisions. This broad cultural process has enormous implications for the way people now create families. Rather than simply following an agreed and well-established script for “doing family”, individuals increasingly have to work out how they will form and develop their own family biography.

We all have to make so many more choices than in the past. Will we partner? When? Will we stay with the same person for life “for better or for worse”? Will the partner be the same sex or opposite sex? Will we have children? How many? When? Which sex? By what means? Will I have children without being married? Will I even have a partner when I have children? How will my partner and I arrange our roles when we marry? Will we both work? Whose employment takes priority? Who does the cooking?

The list of choices and decisions that must now be made as individuals build their families could go on and on – an outcome of the nature of contemporary society. Inevitably, the range of choice and the do-it-yourself character of family making mean that there will be an enormous diversity of family forms. Although poor choices will be made by some people some of the time, people are now freer to make better choices than the constraints of yesteryear may have allowed. The challenge is to enable people to make good choices.

While some people will regard some contemporary family changes and diversity as evidence of family decline, others will see these trends as evidence of the resilience of families as they seek to adapt to a changing world.

The purpose of this book is to provide solid information about both the extent and the ways in which families have been changing, and to document something of the diversity of contemporary family forms. No particular argument is developed throughout the book. Rather it is a collection of excursions covering a wide range of diverse issues. The only implicit argument is that which is captured in the title – that families are ever changing and diverse, and there is little point in talking about the family.

The selection of chapters and topics within chapters is necessarily selective and is inevitably somewhat idiosyncratic. A different author would have selected many different topics and
questions. Five main criteria have guided the choice of issues addressed in this book. These are: the availability of good quantitative data; the types of questions that are frequently asked of the author and other family researchers; common myths and misunderstandings evident both in questions and arguments often heard in the popular media; information that is relevant for the development of informed family policy; and information that bears on some of the ongoing debates among sociologists of the family.

Every effort has been made to ensure the material in the book is widely accessible. While statistical information is not always easy to read, the goal has been to keep the analysis and presentation simple. The challenge has been not to simplify to the extent of oversimplifying and presenting a misleading picture.

The book will be of value to a wide range of readers, and the material should be of use to students and teachers in secondary schools and universities, to the reading public, to journalists and commentators, family researchers, and to people who work in family policy and service delivery to families.

This book draws together in the one publication statistical information about families from a wide and diverse range of sources. In Australia we are fortunate in having some very high quality data about families. Some of the material is available in one form or another in existing publications such as the statistical catalogues of the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Other material has been obtained by a new analysis of existing surveys and from the census, and has not previously been available. I have been fortunate in having access to a wide range of surveys made available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and the Australian Social Science Data Archive.

The value of this book depends on the quality of the data sources. Data reported in the book are restricted to quantitative data from large scale national surveys and data collections, and nearly always consist of complete data (for example, census or national data collections such as divorce, fertility statistics etc) or data that can be generalised to the population with a high degree of confidence. The data reported in this volume are from top quality sets of data and publications where the figures are both reliable and able to be generalised.

One of the difficulties in using data from such a wide range of sources has been that it has not been possible to impose uniformity on the way in which results are reported. Definitions and measures vary between surveys and the time periods for which data are available vary for different types of information. This means that for some issues we can examine trends over a very long period while for others we are restricted to just a few recent years. Methods of analysis and groupings (such as age groupings) are not always ideal but have been determined by the form in which the data are available.

David de Vaus
August 2004
1

Family and household types
1 Family and household types

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Australian families come in many shapes and sizes. Furthermore, the shape and size of a person’s family changes over their life course. We can even define our own family differently from different vantage points. From one vantage point our family might consist of our immediate family living in the one household while from a different vantage point it consists of family members scattered across a number of different households and generations. This diversity makes it difficult to talk about “the” Australian family.

This chapter describes some of this diversity. It also examines today’s family types within a wider historical context to see how today’s family types differ from those in the past. The main focus of this chapter is on families within the one household. However, it must be stressed that many families extend beyond a particular household. Extended family networks can be highly dispersed. The family of children whose parents have separated will extend beyond the one household. On the other hand, not all households contain a family. People who live alone, or those living in group households are examples of non family based households.

Care must be taken when reading family statistics because the base on which percentages are calculated can vary depending on the analysis. Some statistics are reported as percentages of all families; others as the percentage of families with dependent children while other statistics are reported as the percentage of households. Yet other statistics report the percentage of individuals that live in particular family or household types. Throughout this chapter statistics are reported for these different units so care should be taken when reading exactly what unit the statistics refer to.

The diversity of families reflects a range of factors. Some families include children while others are in the pre-child or post-child phase. Other families will remain childless. Many families are couple families but even couple families come in a variety of forms. Many couples are legally married but an increasing proportion live together in a cohabiting relationship. Some are based on two parents of the children in the household, and the children are natural brothers and sisters. Most couples are heterosexual but a small proportion are homosexual. Other couple families are “reconstituted” families which involve step children. An increasingly common family form is the lone parent family. Both couple and lone parent families vary depending on whether the children are dependants, students or financially independent yet still living in the family household.

---

**Figure 1.1 Family and household types, Australia 2001**

- **All households**: 6,744,795
  - **Households containing a family**
    - 4,866,031 (72.1% of households)
  - **Lone person households**: 1,616,213 (24.0% of households)
  - **Group households**: 262,551 (3.9% of households)

- **Other families**: 88,864 (1.8% of families, 1.3% of households)

- **Couple families**: 4,085,332 (82.8% of families, 60.6% of households)
  - **With dependants**: 1,904,122 (38.6% of families, 28.2% of households)
  - **With non dependent children only**: 417,043 (8.4% of families, 6.2% of households)
  - **No children present**: 1,764,167 (35.7% of families, 26.2% of households)

- **Lone parent families**: 762,632 (15.4% of families, 11.3% of households)
  - **With dependants**: 529,969 (10.7% of families, 7.9% of households)
  - **Without dependants**: 232,663 (4.7% of families, 3.4% of households)

---

*a* May also include non dependants.

*b* There are 4,866,031 households containing 4,936,828 families. Some households contain more than one family. Per cent of family in this diagram are based on total number of families not the number of family households.

How typical are couple families with dependent children?

Table 1.1 provides a graphical outline of some of the most common household and family types in Australia. Clearly within any one of the types outlined in this diagram, further distinctions could be made.

Table 1.1 shows how common a variety of different family and household arrangements are in Australia.

In 2001, there were 6,744,795 private dwellings in Australia of which 72.1 per cent (4.86 million) consisted of a family. The typical family household (97 per cent) consisted of just one family.

After the family household, the lone person household is the second most common type of household. The lone person household makes up 24 per cent of all households. While a significant proportion of households consist of just one person and are therefore not classified as a family for statistical purposes, many people who live alone have lived in a family household for much of their life. The death of a partner and marriage breakdown are the main reasons for living alone (p. 103).

Furthermore, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2002a), most people in lone person households are part of wider family systems and will be supported by and provide support to other family members (p. 69-72).

The third most common type of household is the group household (3.7 per cent of all households in 2001). A group household consists of unrelated individuals, none of whom are living in a marriage-like relationship. These households mainly consist of young men and women.
How many families consist of couples?

Despite changing patterns of family formation and demographic change, couple families are still by far the most prevalent type of family in Australia and certainly the main family type in which children live all or most of their childhood. Most families include a couple (82.8 per cent). Some of these also include dependent children, some include non dependent children and many include no children at all. The large majority of couples (83.6 per cent) are married couples but 12.4 per cent are cohabiting. In the following sections, no distinction is made between married and cohabiting couples.

What types of couple families are there?

There is a variety of couple families. One distinction among couple families is between those with children and those with no children in the household. In 2001, 2.3 million families consisted of a couple with children and a further 1.8 million consisted of a couple with no children.

Of couple families with children in the household a further distinction is frequently made between those containing dependent children1 (including full time students under the age of 25) and non dependent children. According to the 2001 Census, 46.6 per cent of all couple families had dependent children while 10.2 per cent contained only non dependent children. The balance (43.2 per cent) of couple families contained no children.

These couple families without children fall into three groups – those who have not yet had children (pre-child couples), those whose children have left the household (post-child couples) and the couples who are and will remain childless (p. 18-21). In the 2001 Census, 70 per cent of people in couple households without children in the household were aged over 45. These couples are mainly those whose children have left home but some have never had children (Chapter 2).

Other couple families contain children from previous relationships. These couple families are called step families or blended families (see chapter 5). A step family consists of a couple with at least one child under the age of 18 who is a step child of one of the couple and the biological child of the other partner. A step family does not contain biological children of the couple.

The 2001 Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA) found that 1.8 per cent of all families were step families and 4.4 per cent of couples with children under the age of 18 were step families. Blended families are those consisting of a couple with at least two children where one child under 18 is a step child of one of the couple and the biological child of the other partner. In addition, at least one child in a blended family will be the biological child of the couple. In 2001, 5.5 per cent of couples with children under the age of 18 children were blended families. This means that of couple families with children under the age of 18 almost 10 per cent were in a step or blended family in 2001. (See Chapter 5 for more detailed discussion of step and blended families.)

Couples can also be distinguished according to whether they are legally married or whether they are cohabiting. All western countries including Australia have seen a rapid rise in the proportion of couples that live together for at least part of their relationship (p. 115). In 2001 just over 12.4 per cent of all couples were cohabiting. A much larger number of couples will have at some point lived together in a cohabiting relationship, but many eventually marry. In 2001, 72 per cent of people who married, lived together before they married (ABS 2002d).

However, most cohabiting relationships are for a limited duration and less than 1 in 5 last for more than 5 years (p.122). Very few couple relationships are long term cohabiting relationships. For example, of couples who began to cohabit in the early 1980s just 2.3 per cent were still cohabiting by 2001 (p. 123).

One further distinction to be made is between heterosexual and homosexual couples. Only limited national data are available regarding the number of same-sex couples. The 2001 Census provides estimates based on an indirect methodology for identifying same-sex couples and the 2001 Australian Study of Health and Relationships provides national estimates for 16-59 year olds using a different methodology (see Chapter 7).
According to the Census methodology, of all couples living together just under half of one per cent were same-sex couples – 0.26 per cent were male couples and 0.21 per cent were female couples (see Chapter 7). Most homosexual couples did not have children living in the household. Of the female couples 19 per cent included children living in the household while just 4.6 per cent of male couples included a child. Based on the Australian Study of Health and Relationships 2.2 per cent of all partnered people aged 16-59 were living with a same-sex partner in the same household.

**Is the traditional nuclear family still the dominant family type?**

Family and household structures change over time along with changes in fertility patterns, longevity and social attitudes. Declining fertility and increased childlessness result in more couple families without children in the household (p. 190). Increased longevity increases the proportion of couple only and lone person households. Increases in the rate of relationship breakdown and remarriage can lead to the formation of more one parent families and step and blended families. Changing values and economic conditions can also affect fertility. Voluntary childlessness is an acceptable option and living together without being married is permissible. The broader social changes affect and reflect the shape of families and the prevalence of different family and household forms in Australia. Even over a relatively short period of 25 years there have been considerable changes in the prevalence of particular family types in Australia (Table 1.2).

**How common are lone parent families?**

While couple families are the most common family type, lone parent families have become an increasingly common family type in recent decades. Between 1986 and 2001 the number of lone parent families (including those only with non dependent children) increased from 499,300 to 762,600 (ABS 2003k) – a 53 per cent increase. In percentage terms lone parent families with dependent children were the result of marriage breakdown; 7 per cent were due to widowhood; and in 30 per cent were families in which the parents had never legally married. Of these 30 per cent we do not know what proportion were cohabiting relationships that subsequently broke down. (ABS 1998a). Between 8 and 11 per cent of lone parent families are currently formed as a result of a lone woman having a child outside of a couple relationship (p. 135).

Being a lone parent family is not a long term arrangement for all lone parent families – for some it will be a short phase while for others it will be a recurring status as the parent forms relationships that subsequently break down. Estimates from the HILDA survey indicate that, of children who ever live in a lone parent family, the average duration of living in such a family is 6.2 years by the time they turn 18. The same survey also indicates that, for children born between 1976 and 1983, 26.8 per cent spent some time living in a lone parent family by the time they were 18 years of age (de Vaus and Gray, 2003a).

**How small are families becoming?**

Families and households in general are becoming smaller (Table 1.3). The growth in lone person households now means that 24 per cent of all households contain only one person. A third of households contain just two people (couples without children, lone parent with one child and...
small group households). A further third of households consist of either three or four people. Only 10.6 per cent of households consist of more than four people.

There can be little doubt that families and households are becoming smaller. Figure 1.2 provides a long term overview of the steadily declining household size (including adults and children) in Australia over the 20th century. In 1911, the average household size was just over 4.5 but this had declined to 2.6 by 2001 (Figure 1.2). This decline reflects the rise in lone person households, one parent families and fewer children per family.

This decline in household size is predicted to continue. By 2011, the average household size is predicted to be 2.4. (ABS 1999b). By 2021, it is anticipated that the average household size will be about 2.2.

Couple families, not surprisingly, are typically larger than lone parent families. In 2001, of lone parent households:

- 41.9 per cent contained just one child.
- A further third had two children.

Of couple households with children:

- A quarter (25.5 per cent) contained just one child.
- 41.3 per cent had two children.
- 33.2 per cent contained five or more household members (normally two adults and three or four children).

**How common are couple only families?**

One of the notable changes in family types since the 1970s has been the decline in the percentage of families with dependent children. In 1976, 48.4 per cent of all families consisted of couples with dependent children. By 2001 this had declined to 38.6 per cent – a 20 per cent decline. This decline was mirrored by an increase in couple only families from 28 per cent in 1976 to 35.7 per cent of families in 2001 – a 27 per cent increase.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has projected an increase in couple families without children so that by 2016 couple only families will become the most common family type (see Chapter 2). Couple families with children are projected to continue to decline over the same period (Figure 1.3). Another anticipated trend is that while the number of lone parent families is projected to increase by between 29 to 63 per cent by 2026 (depending on the projection assumptions), the proportion of lone parent families is likely to remain stable at about 17 per cent of all families (ABS 2004b).

A further prediction by the ABS is that lone person households will increase more than any other household type by 2026. The number of lone person households is projected to increase by between 57 per cent and 110 per cent (depending on the projection assumptions). As a proportion of all households, lone person households are predicted to increase from 24.5 in 2001 to 30.2 in 2026 – a 23 per cent increase (ABS 2004b).

### Table 1.3 Changes in household size, 1981-2001

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Household size</th>
<th>1981 %</th>
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<tr>
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<td>18.0</td>
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<td>7.3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6+</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>-48.4</td>
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**Figure 1.3** Family type projections, Australia, 2001-2021, Series B

What are the family living arrangements of individuals?

The statistics discussed so far have mainly outlined how many families or households fall into particular family and household types. Since family and household types contain different numbers of individuals, these statistics can give a misleading impression in terms of the living arrangements of individuals.

Table 1.4 describes the family and household living arrangements of individual Australians. It shows that:

- While 24 per cent of all households are lone person households, only 9.1 per cent of individuals live in lone person households.
- 51.2 per cent of individuals live in a couple household containing children.
- Although 38 per cent of families are couple only families, just 19.7 per cent of individuals live in a couple only household.
- 11.3 per cent of individuals live in a lone parent household.
- 3.4 per cent of individuals usually live in an institution of one sort or another.

How do family living arrangements change over the life course?

Over a lifetime most people will live in a variety of family and household types. The living arrangement at any particular time will depend on many factors including age, relationship history and fertility. While it is predicted that by 2026 couples without children will be more common (3,108,100) than couples with children (2,610,300), this does not mean that the “typical” nuclear family of “mum, dad and the kids” is declining (ABS 2004b). As a means of rearing children this family form is likely to remain the dominant family form.

We can get a sense of the major transition points for individuals between household and family forms by examining the proportion of each age group living in a particular type of family or household.

Where do children live?

Figure 1.4 shows the percentages of children at various ages who live with their parents and the types of family in which these children live.

This graph shows that in 2001:

- Most children under the age of 15 (81 per cent) lived in a couple family (85 per cent of 0-4 year olds and 79 per cent of 5-14 year olds).
- Of children aged under 15, 19 per cent lived with a lone parent (15.4 per cent of 0-4 year olds and 20.6 per cent of 5-14 year olds).

How does the family type of adults change over their life course?

The type of family or household in which a person lives continues to change over the adult life course. Figure 1.5 maps changes in the number of family and household types at different stages of their life. It does not include those living in institutions. Details of the proportion of older people living in institutions is discussed in Chapter 16 (p. 253).

The living arrangements of different age groups in 2001 shows substantial differences in their living arrangements. While it is certainly the case that...
the living arrangements of individuals change as they move through the life course, the figures below do not describe these changes. That is, we cannot conclude from these figures that the living arrangements of those in their twenties in 2001 were the same types of living arrangements experienced by those now in their forties when they were in their twenties.

Figure 1.5 shows the living arrangements of people aged 15 or over.

15-24 year olds: While 65.9 per cent of 15-24 year olds live with parents, 34.1 per cent have moved out of home. Since Figure 1.5 combines 15-19 year olds with 20-24 year olds it masks the fact that there are important transition points within this age band (see Chapter 12). In fact, only 10 per cent of those aged 15-19 have left home. However among the 20-24 year olds, 49 per cent have left home (p. 144).

More people (9 per cent) in this 15-24 year old age group live in a group household than in any other age group. More often than not, group living is a transition between living with parents and living with a partner.

In 2001, only a very small percentage of 15-24 year olds were living with a partner – 8 per cent were living with a partner and an additional 4 per cent had a child and a partner.

25-34 year olds: Those aged 25-34 have substantially different living arrangements to those aged 15-24. This is the time when many people are now making a major transition away from the parental home, with only 12 per cent still living with their parents. Group households are marginally less popular than among the younger group with only 8 per cent living in group households. The majority of 25-34 year olds (61 per cent) live with a
partner and 44 per cent are parents. Relatively few (9 per cent) live on their own but 6 per cent are lone parents.

**35-44 year olds:** More of this age group than younger age groups are parents. (Chapter 14). There are fewer couples without children – just 10 per cent compared to 23 per cent of those aged 25-34. The percentage of couples in the 35-44 age band with children is 65 per cent compared with 38 per cent of 25-34 year olds. Relationship breakdown means that lone parenthood peaks at 9 per cent of people aged 35-44. Very few of this age group live with their parents or in a group household and only 8 per cent live on their own.

**45-54 year olds:** A proportion of this age group is in the post-parenting phase. Fewer people, especially those in their early fifties, have dependent children and more have no children at all in the household (Chapter 2). The percentage of couples with children in the home drops from 65 per cent of 35-44 year olds to 52 per cent. The percentage of lone parents drops marginally from 9 per cent to 8 per cent. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of this age group are couples without children in the home – up from 10 per cent among 35-44 year olds. The percentage of people living on their own is greater among the 45-54 year olds than among the younger age groups.

**55-64 year olds:** This age group is characterised by more people who are no longer in the active parenting phase of their life. Only 29 per cent of this age group have a child (either dependent or otherwise) living in the household. Over half live with a partner without any children in the home and the percentage of people living on their own begins to increase markedly from 10 per cent to 15 per cent.

**65-74:** Only 15 per cent of this age group have children in the home and most of these are adult children. Only 11 per cent of this age group live with a partner and a child. In 2001, 65-74 year olds were more likely than any other age group to be living as a couple without children in the home. (p. 17). Fifty-eight per cent of this age group live just with their partner. Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of 65-74 year olds were living on their own – up from 15 per cent of 55-64 year olds. This increase is largely due to the death of a partner and children departing the home of their lone parents.

**75 and older:** Beyond the age of 75 people fall into one of two main groups – those living only with their partner (42 per cent) and those living alone (40 per cent). The remainder of those not in institutional care live with other relatives, with an adult child3 or in a group household. By the time people reach their early eighties (and are still living in a private dwelling), just over a third are still living with their partner and 45 per cent are living alone. From the age of 85 onwards, of those who still live in a private dwelling, a quarter still have a partner and a half live on their own. Of those aged 85 or older, 31 per cent lived in an institution of some type in 2001 (mainly nursing homes, hostels and other aged care facilities).

**How much older is the population becoming?**

Population ageing occurs where the population, on average, becomes older. Population ageing is due to two factors operating at once – people are living longer and they are having fewer babies. This population ageing is one of the reasons behind the change in the profile of Australian families. Because of this ageing, couple families with children are becoming a smaller proportion of the population, partly because other family and household types are growing at a faster rate.

While a great deal of attention has been given to population ageing in recent times, population ageing has been occurring over the last century and a half. This can be seen from Figure 1.6 which shows the growth in the percentage of the population aged 65 and over since 1861. In 1861 only about 2 per cent of the population was aged 65 or over. By 2001, close to 13 per cent was aged 65 or over. Population ageing is also reflected in increases in the median age of the population:

![Figure 1.6](image-url)
• In 1901 the median age was 22.5 years.
• In 1947 the median age was 30.7 years.
• In 2001 the median age was 35 years.
• By 2021 the median age is projected to be 41.2 years.
• By 2051 the median age is projected to be 46 years.

Population ageing involves a change to the demographic “shape” of the population. Figure 1.7 presents a set of “population pyramids” that show the past and projected age profiles of the Australian population from 1911 to 2050. Over time, the shape has changed from a pyramid where there were far more younger than older people, to one which by 2051 is anticipated to resemble the shape of a beehive more than that of a pyramid (McDonald and Kippen 2000).

The profile in 2002 shows the post-war baby boomer bulge. This bulge is aged from 35-55. By 2051 the last of the baby boomers will be over 85 years old. Projected low fertility is reflected in the narrowing of the population base of young people.

How much is the working age population declining?

Traditionally people aged 15 to 64 have been defined as the working age population and those aged 0 to 14 and over 64 have been defined as being of non working age. Those in the non working age groups have been called the dependent populations because they do not generally directly contribute to the GNP through employment, and because they receive the benefits of government expenditure without contributing directly through paid work or taxation.

Changes in the relative sizes of the dependent and working age populations can have important implications for government policies and future expenditure. Assuming that there are no continuing productivity improvements, the shrinking size of the working age population is likely to challenge the capacity, or at least willingness, of governments to support the care, education, health and income support needs of the older population (Australian Government 2002).

Table 1.5 indicates the changing proportions of the young and older age groups over the 20th century.

Figure 1.7 Age and sex structure of Australia’s population (observed, 1911, 1961, 2002 and projected 2051)
and the predicted changes over the 21st century. The picture shows a steady decline in the relative size of the young populations over the two centuries. The under 15 age group has declined from 35 per cent in 1901 to 20 per cent in 2001 and is predicted to fall to about 14 per cent by 2101. The only exception to the general downward trend is that between 1947 and 1971 the post-war baby boom led to a small increase in the proportion of young people.

The pattern of change for those aged 65 and over is the reverse. In 1901 just 4 per cent of the population was aged over 65. By 2001 this had trebled to 12.4 per cent. Based on particular fertility and mortality assumptions, this is predicted to more than double again by the middle of this century after which the rate of growth in the older population could stabilise.

To some extent the growth of the older population is balanced by the decline in the younger group so that the relative size of the working age population does not change to the same extent as the young and older groups. Because of the post-war baby boom, the size of the working age population is expected to peak at around 68 per cent between 2001 to 2011 and thereafter gradually decline to about 59 per cent by 2051. Although this may not appear to be a large decline in the working age population, this decline, together with the increase in the aged population, has led to concerns among some policy makers and governments about a possible shortage of workers and a cost blow-out (Bishop 1999; McDonald and Kippen 2001). A further change, not evident from these figures, will be an ageing of the working age population over this period. That is, of those aged 15-65, the profile of this age group will increasingly be skewed towards older rather than younger workers.

How much longer are we living?

There have been dramatic rises in life expectancy of both men and women over the 20th century. Australia now has one of the longest life expectancies in the world.

Early in the 20th century life expectancy at birth was around 50 years for men and 55 years for women. At that time, when infant and child mortality was much higher than today there was a much more substantial gap between life expectancy at birth and life expectancy if a person reached the age of 65 (Table 1.6).

Today far more men and women reach the age of 65 and the life expectancy for these people is gradually increasing. This increased longevity has a number of implications for families. For example:

- More children will have grandparents and great grandparents.
- A large number of people can expect to live for many years beyond retirement. For couples, this changes the nature of the retirement phase of family life from a short time together to an extended time together.
- An extended retirement can have implications for governments and individuals in meeting the living costs of people for a long period of time when they are no longer in the workforce.
- There is a potentially large number of older people in the community able to participate in voluntary work and to help with younger family members.
- Increased longevity can affect patterns of inheritance as inheritances are delayed or spent in the post-retirement years.
Endnotes
1 A dependent child is a person under the age of 15 who does not have a partner or child of his/her own usually resident in the household.
2 It is likely, because of the way in which the Census collects information regarding same-sex couples, that these figures will underestimate, to an unknown extent, the number of same-sex couples.
3 Often the category “Other relatives” can include older people living with their children. This living arrangement is recorded where the child’s family type is recorded in the Census and the parent is recorded as a related person living with the child and the child’s family. A living arrangement described as living with “Adult children” is recorded when the Census records the household as the parent’s household with the adult child living in the parent’s household. The fact that older people living with adult children may be “hidden” in the category “Other relatives” means that the proportion of older people living with a child can be substantially understated.
4 However, this trend may be contained by the shift to having children at later ages.

Highlights
• Although couple families with dependent children are a minority of all families, they nevertheless represent the vast majority of families in which dependent children live.
• Australia is experiencing a steady decline in average household size.
• Lone person households represent a rapidly growing household type.
• Couples without children in the household is a rapidly growing household type.
• Australia is facing a decline in the percentage of people of “working age”.
Couples without children at home
## Couples without children at home

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This chapter focuses on what the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) classifies as couple only families — that is, couples who do not have children living with them. In this chapter these families will be called *child free* couples. As will be indicated below, these couples include those who have never had children and those whose children no longer live with them.

Child free couples are becoming an increasingly common feature of Australian households. In 2001 there were 1.8 million such couples – a substantial increase from 1.3 million couple only families in 1986. In 2001, 35.7 per cent of *all families* consisted of a couple with no children compared with 28.7 per cent in 1882. Of *couple families* in 2001, 43.2 per cent had no children living with them — up from 37 per cent in 1982.

**Different types of child free couples**

It is important not to equate child free couples with couples who have never had children. There are five types of child free couples: those who have not yet had children (pre-child couples); those whose children have left the household (post-child couples); couples who are and will remain childless (p. 190); couples in which either partner has a dependent child who lives elsewhere; and couples who have had a child who has subsequently died.

**The post-child couple**

The post-child couple is the most common type of child free family. In the 2001 Census the bulk of men and women in child free family households were aged 55 and over (Figure 2.1). Most of these older couples will be couples whose children have left home or died.

The 2001 HILDA survey indicates that in child free couples in which the female partner was aged 45 or over, just 7 per cent of these couples consisted of both partners who were childless. However, some other older child free couples will not have had a child together — some have had their children in a previous relationship. Both partners had had children in 88.8 per cent of the couples where the female partner was aged 45 or older.

Although census figures on this matter are not available for 2001, the 1996 Census gives details of the parental background of the older partnered, child free women (Table 2.1). Of partnered, child free women aged 45 and over, most (95.1 per cent) had previously had children and just 4.9 per cent had never had a child.

**Pre-child couples**

Figure 2.1 shows a cluster of partnered but child free people aged 25 to 34. Almost a quarter of partnered people in this age group have no children living with them. While we do not know how many of these couples will eventually have children we can establish whether they want to have children and whether they expect to have children.

**Do younger couples plan to have children?**

Of partnered men and women where the female partner is aged 20-39 and neither partner has had children, three quarters of both males and females indicated in the HILDA survey that they very much or probably wanted to have a child. Just 12 per cent of females and males definitely did not want to have a child (Table 2.2). Childless, partnered men and women in this age range had identical levels of wanting or not wanting children (not necessarily within the one couple but across all such couples in the HILDA survey).

The desire to have a child is strongly linked to age. More than 80 per cent of partnered, childless women in their twenties definitely or probably want to have a child; in the thirties under half do so; in the forties and fifties less than a quarter do so; and in the sixties, twenties and thirties are nearly all women childless. "Childless" is defined in this context as having children who have left the household (p. 190).
wanted a child, but the enthusiasm for a child is lower among those in their thirties. Of those in their early thirties three quarters wanted a child while 43 per cent of those in their late thirties definitely or probably wanted a child. Similar levels of enthusiasm for children were evident among men in each age group.

Less than 10 per cent of partnered but childless women or men where the woman was in her early twenties definitely or probably did not want a child. Among those where the female partner was in her early thirties, 18 per cent of women and 13 per cent of men did not want a child. Of childless but partnered men and women where the female partner was in her late thirties, almost 40 per cent did not want to have children.

The fact that partnered men and women where the female partner was in her late thirties were less enthusiastic about having children is hardly surprising. Unlike the younger group, many women who want children will already have had a child by their early thirties, so childless women in their thirties are more likely to be those who do not want to have children.

Do young couples agree about having children?

One of the factors that can contribute to a couple not having children is that partners do not share the same views about having children.

In couples without children where the female partner was aged between 20-39, almost three quarters (77.8 per cent) had similar views regarding wanting children. In just 7 per cent of couples there was a fundamental disagreement between partners where one partner wanted a child and the other did not want a child.

By far the most common situation was where both childless partners wanted to have children (67.9 per cent). Only 7 per cent of these childless couples agreed that they did not want to have a child (Figure 2.2).

It is sometimes argued that men are more reluctant than their partners to have children. Is there evidence to support this view? Table 2.3 shows the extent to which women who want children have partners who share the same desire. The evidence in this table does not support the reluctant male partner view. It shows that in 88.8 per cent of cases where the female partner wanted a child, her male partner also wanted a child. In only 3.6 per cent of cases he did not want a child. Where female partners definitely did not want a child, there were fewer male partners who were equally determined not to have children (59.6 per cent). Many male partners (21.3 per cent) of these childless women who did not want children were ambivalent about not having children. It appears that rather than women having their maternal desires thwarted by a reluctant partner, women and their partners who want children are largely in agreement with each other. Similarly, there is no evidence to indicate that reluctant female partners are thwarting the wishes of men to have children. Where childless men wanted children, 88.5 per cent of their female partners also wanted children (Table 2.3).

Do fertility desires match fertility expectations?

Overall, two thirds of childless, partnered people, aged 20-39, expected to have the number of children they wanted to have. However, there was some mismatch between wanting to have children and expecting to have children. This mismatch is

**Table 2.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does female partner want child?</th>
<th>20-24</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-34</th>
<th>35-39</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely not</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably not</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably want</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very much want a child</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (couples)</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does male partner want child?</th>
<th>20-24</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-34</th>
<th>35-39</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely not</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably not</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably want</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very much want a child</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>62.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (couples)</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a).

Coupled without children in household and female is aged between 20-39 where neither partner has previously had a child.

Note: Desire to have a child was measured on a scale of 0-10. In this table scores of 0-1 were classified as definitely not; 2-3 as probably not; 4-6 as ambivalent; 7-8 as probably want and 9-10 as very much want.
more in the direction of people saying that they expected to have fewer children than they wanted. Overall, partnered childless adults aged 20-39 were more likely to expect to underachieve than overachieve their fertility desires. Twenty-two per cent of partnered but childless adults expected to have fewer children than they wanted while 14 per cent expected to have more children than they wanted.

Of the partnered but childless adults, women in their thirties and men whose partner was in their thirties were the most likely to feel that they would have fewer children than they wanted. Overall, a third of these men and women expected to have fewer children than they wanted. This was especially evident among those in their late thirties (35-39) where half (49 per cent) expected to have fewer children than they wanted.

These expectations of having fewer children than desired is consistent with the reality – that is, women do tend to have fewer children than they say they want (p. 191).

**Childless couples**

Other couples without children in the home never have children. Such childlessness may be due to voluntary or involuntary factors although the line between these two routes to childlessness can be rather blurred. Although it is difficult to know whether childlessness is voluntary or involuntary it is estimated that approximately 7 per cent of couples are infertile. Naturally, the rate of involuntary infertility increases with age.

It is relatively simple to estimate the levels of childlessness among older couples where women are no longer of reproductive age (usually taken to be 45 or older). According to the 1996 Census, 10.7 per cent of women aged 45-49 had never had a child. Of partnered women of the same age 6.1 per cent had never had a child. The 2001 HILDA survey found that in less than 7 per cent of couples in which the female partner was aged 45-59 were both partners childless. However, it is much more difficult to estimate the proportion of younger, child free couples who will remain childless. Many younger child free couples may simply be waiting before having children. Indeed, many women are not having their first child until they are in their thirties (p. 195-99). For example, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), in 2000 a quarter of all births to women aged 35 and over were the woman’s first child and almost 23 per cent of births to women aged over 40 were first births (AIHW 2003a).

While estimates of eventual childlessness among women still of reproductive age vary depending on the estimation method used, most methods produce figures of between 22 and 28 per cent (p. 190).
However, these figures do not provide estimates of the level of childlessness among partnered women. Of childless couples where the female partner is still of reproductive age, we have seen above that 7 per cent consist of both partners who do not want children and a further 9.6 per cent consist of one partner who definitely does not want children (Figure 2.2). In addition, a significant number of couples (20 per cent) contain at least one partner who is ambivalent about having children. While it is impossible to estimate with any certainty how many of these couples will eventually remain childless, these figures suggest that a substantial proportion will remain child free (assuming they stay together in a relationship).

Why are couples without children in the home becoming more common?
Between 1976 and 2001, the percentage of child free couples increased from 28 per cent of all families to 35.7 per cent. This increase has occurred for a number of reasons. These include:

- Delays in childbearing (p. 195-99).
- An increase in childlessness (p. 190).
- Increased life expectancy which means that there are more older couples whose children have left home.
- Divorce and re-partnering following divorce where children are in a different household.
- An increase in cohabitation and the related reluctance to have children in cohabiting relationships (see Chapter 10).

Who are the child free couples?
Have they ever had children?
As indicated above, most older child free couples have, at some point, had children. The HILDA survey indicates that 84 per cent of couples where the female partner was aged between 45-59, consisted of two partners who had had children. Among child free couples where the female partner was aged 60 or over both partners had had children in 93 per cent of cases (Table 2.4).

Conversely, of those couples in the 45-59 age range without children in the home, 6.7 per cent consisted of both partners who had never had children. Of those where the woman was aged 60 or older, just 2.6 per cent of child free couples had never had any children.

Of the child free couples in the HILDA survey, where the female partner was aged between 20-34, almost 88 per cent consisted of both partners who had never had children. However, over 12 per cent of these younger child free couples contained a least one partner who had previously had a child but the child was no longer living with them (Table 2.4). Most of these couples are those in which the male partner has had a child that is not living with him. It is likely that many of these children will have been born in a previous relationship and the child is living with his or her mother. Just 2 per cent of these younger child free couples contained a female partner who has a child living elsewhere.

Are child free couples dual earner couples?
The employment profile of younger couples without children is very different to that of older couples without children.

Younger, child free couples (aged 20-34) have a high level of dual, full time employment. In 61.4 per cent of younger child free couples, both partners work full time – double that of older child free couples aged 45-59 (Table 2.5).

The lower rate of dual full time employment among the older (45-59) child free couples is due to three main factors. Firstly, it will reflect the lower rate of workforce participation among women in earlier generations. Second, it stems from the pattern of part time rather than full time return to work of many mothers after rearing children (p. 302). Finally, it is an indication of the declining full time workforce participation of many men in their fifties whereby they either retire early or shift to part time employment (p. 306).

While very few (2.7 per cent) younger child free couples without children had no jobs at all, almost a quarter (22.8 per cent) of the child free couples aged 45-59 were jobless (Table 2.5). While there will be various reasons for the lower workforce participation rate among the older child free couples, one factor will be that such couples can afford to reduce their work commitments as the costs of raising children are no longer as big an issue. Younger child free couples may still be planning to have children and may be still establishing themselves financially.

Almost two thirds of younger child free couples consist of both partners having the same level of workforce participation. In the other third of cases the traditional pattern of the male partner working...
more than the female partner predominated, even though no children were present in the household. In 22.9 per cent of child free couples where the female partner was aged 20-34, the male was employed more than the female partner. However, in 9.8 per cent of cases the female partner worked more than her male partner. While the traditional pattern of the male working more than the female predominated among the younger child free couples, this pattern was more pronounced among the older couples (Table 2.6).

**How much do child free couples earn?**

Since child free couples, especially those younger than 60 are freer to work, they have the potential to achieve relatively high household incomes. However, the income of child free couples varies between the younger and the older couples. Figure 2.3 contrasts the combined income of the younger and older child free couples. It shows that in 2001, child free couples of working age had an almost identical combined annual income of around $70,000 per annum, regardless of age. This graph also contrasts the income of child free couples with that of similarly aged couples with dependent children. This comparison shows that the child free younger couples have a considerably higher combined income than those with dependent children (an average of $70,223 compared to $50,500). However, for the older working age groups the couple income of the child free couples is very similar to that of those with dependent children. In other words, except for the younger couples, the absence of children in the home does not make much difference to the couple's total income.

**Are child free couples highly educated professionals?**

Do younger child free couples have a different educational and occupational profile than the older child free couples? Apart from frequently having two full time jobs and relatively high incomes do the younger couples have other characteristics typically associated with DINKS (Dual Income, No Kids)? In particular, do they also tend to be highly educated and come from professional backgrounds?

As far as occupation is concerned, younger partnered people without children were more likely than those with dependent children to have professional or associate professional occupations. For example, of child free, partnered women aged 20-34, 32.9 per cent had a professional occupation compared to 23.1 of their counterparts with children. The same pattern applied among younger men. The opposite pattern applied among older couples aged 45-59. Among these couples the child free couples were less likely than those with dependent children to have a professional occupation. For example, only 19.3 per cent of partnered, child free women in this age group had a professional occupation compared to 34.3 per cent of those with dependent children who were professionals. In other words, the younger child free couples tended to be professionals while the older child free couples tended not to be professionals.

A likely reason for this pattern is that those from lower level occupations tend to have children at a younger age and are thus more likely to be child free at an earlier age. Those undertaking professional training are more likely to delay having children which means that fewer of the 45-59 age group will be child free.

The educational profile of child free couples indicates that younger, child free partnered people were more highly educated than younger couples with children (Table 2.7). For example, 39.3 per cent of child free, partnered women aged 20-34 had at least a university degree compared to just 19.7 per cent of younger partnered women with children. Younger, child free partnered people were also more highly educated than older people who

---

**Table 2.5 Employment of child free couples by age of female partner**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment profile of couple</th>
<th>20-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-59</th>
<th>60+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both employed full time</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both employed part time</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither employed</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male partner has higher level of workforce participation than female partner</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male partner has lower level of workforce participation than female partner</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>697</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a).

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**Figure 2.3 Mean combined annual income from all sources of couples by male partner’s age and children in home**

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a).
had no children at home. The young, child free and partnered women were more than twice as likely as their older (aged 45-59) counterparts to have a university degree (39.3 per cent compared with 15.9 per cent).

Young, partnered parents (aged 20-34) were more than twice as likely as their child free peers to have left school at year 11 or lower (23.7 per cent compared with 11.3 per cent for males, and 27.8 per cent compared with 10.7 per cent for females). Similarly, older child free partnered adults had lower education than their age peers with dependent children. For example, of the older child free women (aged 45-59) 46.9 per cent had left school at year 11 or lower compared to just 26.7 per cent of those women with dependent children at home. Conversely, just 16.3 per cent of the older child free couples had a university degree compared to 31 per cent of partnered adults with dependent children (Table 2.7).

Are they married or cohabiting?
Younger childless couples have a very different marital status profile to younger couples with children. Child free younger couples (males aged 20-34) were more likely than those with children to be cohabiting (52.1 per cent compared with 23.4 per cent). Over three quarters (76.6 per cent) of those aged 20-34 with dependent children were married compared to less than half of those without children (47.9 per cent). Although the levels of cohabitation are lower among the older age groups a similar pattern holds – those with dependent children are more likely to be married than those without (Table 2.8).

Are child free families wealthy families?
Children represent a considerable expense to parents, especially in the child rearing years (p. 272-74). It is therefore reasonable to expect that child free couples will be relatively well off financially.

### Table 2.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household includes</th>
<th>Dependent children</th>
<th>No children</th>
<th>Dependent children</th>
<th>No children</th>
<th>Dependent children</th>
<th>No children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate professional</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate professional</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>334</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>641</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA 2001 (FaCS 2002a).
For full details of occupations included in each category see Australian Bureau of Statistics (1997b).

### Table 2.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>With dependent children</th>
<th>No children</th>
<th>With dependent children</th>
<th>No children</th>
<th>With dependent children</th>
<th>No children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree or higher</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma or certificate</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11 or lower</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>473</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree or higher</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma or certificate</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11 or lower</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>630</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>559</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a).
One way of examining the relative affluence of any group is to divide the whole population into 10 equal sized groups (deciles). The first group (the first decile) contains the 10 per cent of the population with the lowest incomes (or wealth). The second group (second decile) contains the 10 per cent of the population with the next lowest income. The 10th decile contains the wealthiest 10 per cent of the population.

If child free couples are wealthier on average than other families they will be concentrated among the higher or wealthier deciles (for example, 6th decile up). If they are poorer than the average family then child free couples will be concentrated in the lower deciles. If child free couples are spread evenly across the income/wealth spectrum then 10 per cent of child free couples will be found in each decile.

Table 2.9 provides information about the relative wealth of child free couples in 1986 and in 1998. These data are based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics 1986 Income Distribution Survey and 1998 Survey of Income and Housing Costs. The table shows that on average, child free couples are relatively wealthy. In each of the lowest four deciles child free couples are under represented (that is, less than 10 per cent). For example, 10 per cent of all families are in the lowest wealth decile but only 2.7 per cent of child free couples will be found in each decile.

Table 2.9 provides information about the relative wealth of child free couples in 1986 and in 1998. These data are based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics 1986 Income Distribution Survey and 1998 Survey of Income and Housing Costs. The table shows that on average, child free couples are relatively wealthy. In each of the lowest four deciles child free couples are under represented (that is, less than 10 per cent). For example, 10 per cent of all families are in the lowest wealth decile but only 2.7 per cent of child free couples are among the poorest 10 per cent of the population.

In contrast, in the higher or wealthier deciles (6 to 10) child free couples are over represented. For example, while 10 per cent of all families are in the highest wealth decile, 19.8 per cent of child free couples in 1998 were in this wealthiest 10 per cent of the population.

In other words couple families without children are wealthier, on average, than other families. This will be due to a number of factors. One important factor is that child free couples tend to be older than many other families and have had the chance to build up wealth over a lifetime (especially in the form of housing). The younger child free couples typically have two income earners and more than half have two full time incomes. Finally, since child free couple families do not have the day-to-day costs of child rearing they have a greater capacity to accumulate wealth.

Not only are child free couples wealthier than the average household but recent years have seen their relative position improve. This is especially evident among the wealthiest groups where the proportion of child free couples in the top two income deciles increased sharply from 1986-98. At the same time the proportion of child free couples in the poorest groups decreased a little.

Poverty

Poverty is generally measured not in terms of wealth, but in terms of income relative to costs. One way of measuring poverty is to set a poverty line at 50 per cent of the family income of the average person (adjusted for family size and composition)\(^2\). Families with an income below this level are defined to be living in poverty (Harding and Szukalska 2000b).

Table 2.10 shows the percentage of people living in poverty for a range of family types. The figures compare the poverty levels in each family type for 1982 and 1999. Although the information regarding differences between family types would be
more useful if it had been provided for family types at different points of the life course (for example, pre-child couple only and post-child couple only). Table 2.10 nevertheless provides some interesting information regarding changes. However, it should be noted that some of this change in poverty levels between 1982 and 1999 could be due to the changing age profile within each family type.

In 1999 couples with no children in the home were relatively unlikely to be living in poverty with only 8.4 per cent in poverty, which compares favourably with the 18.5 per cent of single people in poverty, the 23.6 per cent of lone parents in poverty and the 11.6 per cent of couples with children in poverty.

However, over this 17 year period, couples without children became relatively worse off in income terms. While the poverty rate of two of the other three main family types declined, the percentage of poor people living in child free families increased by 2.1 per cent. This change probably reflects the redistribution of taxation and benefits to support families with children and lone parent families and may also reflect changes in the demographic make up of child free families between 1982-99.

Are child free couples a cost to government?

Since child free households include families at very different stages of the life cycle, their needs for support, use of services and sources of income vary considerably. It is therefore useful to distinguish between younger and older child free households when examining income levels and government support for these families.

Table 2.11 reports the incomes earned by child free families (row one) at different stages of the life cycle. In addition to private income, individuals are eligible for a variety of direct income benefits from governments such as the aged pension (row two) to give them a total cash income (row three). This cash income is reduced by taxation (row four) to give a disposable income (row five). This disposable income is supplemented by non cash benefits such as education and health care. The average value of these non cash benefits is reported in row six and the value of indirect taxes is listed in row seven to yield a final income (row eight).

Row nine reports the value of benefits received by these families while row 10 reports the total taxes paid by child free couples. Row 11 indicates the difference between the value of taxes paid and the value of government benefits received by child free couples in each age group. The final row shows the value of benefits and taxes allocated to child free couples compared to families in general.

These figures reveal a number of important points regarding government support and the impact of benefits on the financial position of child free couples at different points in the life course.

Although the younger, child free couples have a much higher private income than the older child free couples, the effect of taxation and benefits does a great deal to reduce these differences (compare row one with row eight).

Table 2.11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of reference person</th>
<th>25 - 34</th>
<th>35 - 44</th>
<th>45 - 54</th>
<th>55 - 64</th>
<th>65+</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Row</td>
<td>&lt; 25</td>
<td>25 - 34</td>
<td>35 - 44</td>
<td>45 - 54</td>
<td>55 - 64</td>
<td>65+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Private income</td>
<td>$976</td>
<td>$1266</td>
<td>$1279</td>
<td>$1087</td>
<td>$557</td>
<td>$232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Direct government benefits</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$10</td>
<td>$19</td>
<td>$26</td>
<td>$93</td>
<td>$197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Gross income</td>
<td>$1001</td>
<td>$1276</td>
<td>$1299</td>
<td>$1114</td>
<td>$650</td>
<td>$429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Direct taxa</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>$307</td>
<td>$317</td>
<td>$274</td>
<td>$111</td>
<td>$30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Disposable income</td>
<td>$801</td>
<td>$969</td>
<td>$982</td>
<td>$841</td>
<td>$539</td>
<td>$399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Indirect benefits</td>
<td>$88</td>
<td>$82</td>
<td>$64</td>
<td>$75</td>
<td>$115</td>
<td>$224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Indirect taxesa</td>
<td>$77</td>
<td>$94</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$92</td>
<td>$75</td>
<td>$59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Final income</td>
<td>$812</td>
<td>$957</td>
<td>$946</td>
<td>$824</td>
<td>$580</td>
<td>$564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Total benefits allocated (row 2 plus row 6)</td>
<td>$113</td>
<td>$91</td>
<td>$84</td>
<td>$101</td>
<td>$208</td>
<td>$421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Total taxes allocated (row 4 plus row 7)</td>
<td>$277</td>
<td>$400</td>
<td>$417</td>
<td>$365</td>
<td>$186</td>
<td>$89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Net benefits allocated child free couples</td>
<td>$164</td>
<td>$309</td>
<td>$333</td>
<td>$265</td>
<td>$22</td>
<td>$332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Net benefits allocated all household families</td>
<td>$33</td>
<td>$35</td>
<td>$13</td>
<td>$119</td>
<td>$41</td>
<td>$295</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Since these figures were collected before the introduction of the GST, they do not reflect the taxation changes as a result of this tax reform.
• Older child free families gain from the tax-benefit mix. On average couples aged 65 or older gain $332 per week from government benefits and services. This is due to declining income and the receipt of direct and indirect government benefits (for example, age pension, health costs).

• Those aged 55-64 more or less break even.

• The child free couples aged 54 or younger contribute far more to governments through taxes than they gain from direct or indirect benefits.

Compared to families in general, child free couples where the reference person is under the age of 55 are heavy net financial contributors to society. On a weekly basis these child free couples make a net contribution of between $164-$333 (row 11). In contrast, families in general in the same age range, are either net beneficiaries or make far fewer contributions to government (row 12). This is due mainly to the fact that these child free couples have higher incomes because both partners typically are employed, do not receive government benefits for children (direct or indirect) and are not beneficiaries of lone parent allowances.

While child free couples where the reference person is aged under 55 are net contributors to government revenues, those who are older are net beneficiaries of government expenditures. Those aged 55-64 receive a net benefit of $41 per week while those aged 65 and over receive an average of $295 in benefits. The difference between the younger and older child free couples will be largely due to lower levels of workforce participation among the older couples, their access to the old age pension and greater benefits through subsidised health care.

Endnotes
1 Unfortunately the 2001 census did not ask women if they had ever had children.
2 There are many ways of defining poverty in families and there is no agreement as to which method is best. Readers should be conscious of the fact that the different measures of poverty can produce quite different estimates of poverty levels and trends (Harding & Szukalska 2000b; ABS 1998b). The 50 per cent of the family income of the average person (adjusted for family size) is used here as the figures here rely on the analysis of Harding & Szukalska 2000b who use this measure.
3 The reference person is the first or second person in the household. In child free couple households this will be either the male or female partner.

Highlights
• The large majority of child free younger couples both want and expect to have children.
• Younger couples largely agree about whether or not they will have children. There was little evidence of the “reluctant father” syndrome.
• Younger, childless couples are a substantial net financial contributor to government funds while older child free couples gain substantial transfers from government.
• Young child free couples have higher education and higher incomes than their age peers who have children.
• Couples without children have low levels of poverty.
Couples with children
3 Couples with children

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Changing demographic trends have challenged the dominance of the traditional couple family with children. Population ageing, delayed and declining fertility, increased rates of childlessness, a decline in rates of partnering, increased rates of relationship breakdown and the growth of lone parent families have all meant that couples with children represent a smaller proportion of all households.

While it has always been the case that many families and households did not consist of a couple with children, it is now the case that only a minority of households (28 per cent) are made up of a couple and dependent children. In 2001, couples with dependent children only made up a minority of families (39.5 per cent). Furthermore, of couple families only a minority (47.4 per cent) include dependent children.

Nevertheless, couple families are easily the single most common family form and dependent children are predominantly raised in couple households. Recent research has shown that the large majority of children spend the bulk of their childhood living in an intact couple family (de Vaus and Gray, 2003a). Among children born between 1976-83, 70 per cent spent all their childhood until they turned 18, living in an intact family. In this same cohort of children 82 per cent of the combined years of life of all the cohort members was lived in an intact couple family and a further 8.2 per cent of the total time of this cohort of 18 year olds was spent in a step or blended family. This means that even though couple families with dependent children are a minority family and household form, this type of family is nevertheless by far the dominant experience in which children are raised.

How common are couple families with children?

Are most families couple families?

Couple families make up the large majority of all families. According to the 2001 Census 82.8 per cent of all families were couple families. Furthermore, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, excluding children under 15 living with their parent(s), 65 per cent of all Australians live in a couple family compared to 6.1 per cent who live in a lone parent family and 13 per cent who live on their own (ABS 2003a).

How many couples have children?

Naturally not all couple families contain children. As the previous chapter has shown many couples are in a pre-child phase and many are in their post-child phase. Nevertheless, in 2001, 57 per cent of all couple families contained children (dependent and non dependent1). Thirty nine per cent of couple families included children aged under 15; 14 per cent included dependent students aged 15-24 and 16 per cent included non dependent children2.

Of all families that contain children under the age of 15, 78.6 per cent are couple families. The remaining 21.4 per cent of families with a child younger than 15 were lone parent families (ABS 2002c).

Similar figures can be seen when looking at children rather than families. Most children under the age of 15 (81 per cent) live in a couple family while 19 per cent live in a lone parent family (ABS 2003a).

Three types of couples with children

Couple families with children can be divided into three types – intact, blended and step. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 1998a) defines these types of couple families as:

- **Intact family**: A couple family containing at least one child who is the natural, adopted or foster child of both members of the couple, and no child who is the step child of either member of the couple. Intact families were only identified if they contained at least one child aged 0-17 years.

- **Blended family**: A couple family containing two or more children, of whom at least one is the natural child of both members of the couple, and at least one is the step child of either member of the couple. Blended families were only identified if they contained at least one step child aged 0-17 years.

- **Step family**: A couple family containing one or more children, at least one of whom is the step child of either member of the couple and none of whom is the natural or foster child of both members of the couple. Step families were only identified if they contained at least one step child aged 0-17 years.

The 2001 HILDA survey shows that of all couple families with children under the age of 18:

- 90.1 per cent were intact families.
- 4.4 per cent were blended families.
- 5.5 per cent were step families (p. 60).
The same survey also shows that of all families (including lone parent families) with children under the age of 18, 80.5 per cent were intact couple families. Brandon (2004) estimates from HILDA that 73.6 per cent of children under the age of 18 live with their two biological parents.

**Do younger children mainly live in couple families?**

While children are more likely to live in a couple family when they are young the differences in living arrangements are not large. Table 3.1 indicates that 85 per cent of pre-school aged children live in a couple family. This figure declines to 78 per cent for those aged 13-14. Conversely, the proportion of children living in a lone parent family increases as they grow older (Table 3.1).

While the proportion of children living in couple families is relatively stable across age groups, the nature of the couple family changes. Approximately 92 per cent of children are born into an intact couple family. However, as children grow older and parents separate and repartner more of the older children in couple families will be in step or blended families. The latest figures available from the HILDA survey indicate that of children who are born into an intact family, 73 per cent are still in that intact family by the time they reach 18 years of age (de Vaus and Gray, 2003a).

**Are couples with children becoming less common?**

While couple families remain the dominant context in which children grow up, couple families with dependent children nevertheless represent a declining proportion of family types in Australia. Since 1976 the following main changes in couple families are evident (Table 3.2):

- The proportion of couple only families has increased from 28 per cent of all families in 1976 to 36 per cent in 2001 – a 29 per cent increase.
- Couple families with dependent children (including dependent students aged 15-24) have declined from 48.4 per cent of all families in 1976 to 38.6 per cent in 2001 – a 20 per cent decline.
- Couple families with non dependent children only, have declined from 11 per cent of all families to 8.4 per cent of all families – a decline of 24 per cent.

**Which couples have children?**

Couples with children differ from other families in a number of ways. While other chapters describe the characteristics of other families, this section outlines some key features of couples with children.

**Are both (any) parents employed?**

Relative to some other types of families, couples with dependent children have high employment levels. In 2002, the Australian Bureau of Statistics Labour Force Survey indicates that, of couple households with dependent children:

- 57 per cent had both parents employed.
- 22 per cent had both parents employed full time.
- 36 per cent included only one parent employed.
- 7 per cent had neither parent employed.

Of dependent children:

- 7.3 per cent (332,371) lived in a couple family with no employed parent.
- 45.3 per cent (1,990,731) lived in a couple family in which both parents were employed.
- 27.8 per cent (1,222,114) lived in a couple family with only one employed parent (ABS 2003a).

The percentage of couple families with dependent children in which neither parent was employed is...
fairly consistent across all age groups of children, ranging between 9 and 11 per cent. Despite the stability of this figure this does not mean that the same children persistently have neither parent working. Many families will fluctuate from being couple families in which neither partner is employed, to single worker and dual worker families.

As children grow older the chance of both parents working increases (Figure 3.1). While just over a third (35 per cent) of couple families in which the youngest child was less than one year old were dual worker couples this figure increases to almost half (47 per cent) where the youngest child is one or two years old. By the time the youngest child is at primary school (aged 5 to 12 years old) almost two thirds (65 per cent) of couples are dual worker couples. Among those couples whose youngest child is a teenager almost 70 per cent are dual worker couples. These patterns clearly reflect the return of mothers to the workforce as children grow older. Many of these mothers who return to the workforce work part time (p. 301-03).

Table 3.3 shows the part time work pattern of couple mothers with dependent children when their male partner works full time. There is a strong pattern whereby couple mothers with young children either do not have paid work at all or work part time. As the youngest child grows older, couple mothers, whose husband works full time, increase their hours of work (35 or more hours per week).

When the youngest child is aged under two years, 56 per cent of these mothers are not in the workforce at all. Those that are in the workforce are predominantly part time with only 10.2 per cent working full time.

Mothers increase their level of paid work once their youngest child is aged three. The percentage not in paid work drops from 56 per cent to 38.5 per cent and the percentage in full time work increases from 10.2 per cent to 17.2 per cent. Once the youngest child reaches primary school age, the level and hours of paid work increases again. However, the increase in paid work once the youngest starts primary school is not as sharp as it is when the child is three and four years old. Once the youngest child reaches secondary school age the rate of full time work among these couple mothers increases sharply from 21.2 per cent to 32 per cent.

Table 3.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of youngest child</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>1–14</th>
<th>15–29</th>
<th>30–34</th>
<th>35+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–2</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–4</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–11</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–14</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent student 15–24</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All mothers with dependent children</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Family Survey 1997, (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1998a). Note: the category ‘None’ includes people who were temporarily on leave for the whole week (e.g. recreation leave). The other hours are affected by work absences for other reasons (e.g. sick leave).

Figure 3.1

Parental employment in couples with dependent children by age of child, 2001

Source: 2001 Census 1per cent sample file (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001c). Note: the 2001 census provides higher estimates of the percentage of couple families in which neither parent was employed than does the 2002 Labour Force Survey. Most of this difference is likely to be due to the different methodologies employed in the two data collections.
However, even when the youngest dependent child is aged 15-24 only about a third of couple mothers with full time working partners are in full time paid work. There are a variety of reasons for this. These include ongoing domestic responsibilities that make it difficult for both husband and wife to work full time and some loss of competitiveness of these mothers in the workplace.

It might be anticipated that couple mothers with a partner working full time would have less need to work full time than couple mothers whose partner does not have full time work. Accordingly, we might expect that couple mothers with full time working partners would be less involved in the workforce than those whose partners do not have full time work.

However the opposite pattern occurs. Couple mothers with a full time working partner were considerably more likely to work full time than those whose partner did not work full time (Figure 3.2). Of all couple mothers with dependent children, 20.9 per cent of those with fully employed partners themselves worked full time. In contrast, only 7.6 per cent of women with partners who were not working full time, were working full time themselves.

Where the youngest child has commenced secondary school (aged 12-14), 32 per cent of couple mothers whose partner has full time work, were themselves working full time. In sharp contrast, only 9.1 per cent of those couple mothers whose partner was not working full time, worked full time themselves.

This same general pattern repeats regardless of the age of the youngest dependent child.

The same general pattern is evident when looking at couple mothers of dependent children who have no paid work (Figure 3.3). Consistently, those mothers whose partner does not work full time are the most likely to have no paid work. Overall, of all couple mothers with dependent children, 60.4 per cent of those whose partner does not have full time work, also have no paid work. This is a substantially higher rate of no paid work than the 38.7 per cent level among those mothers whose partner works full time.

Overall, there is evidence of polarisation in workforce participation among families consisting of couples with dependent children. In those families where the father works full time the mother is much more likely to work full time and to return to full time work as the children grow up than are mothers whose partner does not have full time work. Equally, couple mothers whose partner does not have full time work are quite likely to have no paid work – far more so than couple mothers whose partners work full time.

Among the likely factors contributing to some couples being work rich and others being work poor, are:

- **Assortative mating** – The principle of which is the notion that “like attracts like”. This is the process by which people with similar work skills and employment prospects tend to partner. Highly employable men tend to partner with employable women. Similarly, men with poor employment prospects tend to partner with women who also have poorer work skills and employment prospects.

- **Loss of welfare benefits** may discourage partners working if the other partner is receiving welfare benefits since working could affect payment eligibility.

- **Some men may continue to object to their wife earning more income than they do.** Despite difficult family finances, these objections
could dissuade some mothers from seeking employment.

• Some men and women may be sharing the care of their children and consequently both work part time.

**Are couples with children usually married?**

As well as distinguishing between couple families that are intact, step or blended, each of these types of couple families can be further distinguished in terms of whether or not the parents are married or cohabiting. While the vast majority of couples with children aged 17 or younger live in a registered marriage this differs sharply between intact, step and blended families. In 2001, while 92 per cent of intact families consisted of a registered married couple, less than half (47 per cent) of couples in step families and 62 per cent of couples in blended families were married—the rest were cohabiting (Figure 3.4).

Couples with younger children were less likely to be married than those with older children. Figure 3.5 shows that among couples where the youngest child was aged two or younger, just 83.4 per cent were married. The percentage progressively increases so that of couples whose youngest child was a dependent student, 97 per cent were married. The increasing rate of marriage as the age of the youngest child increases is likely to be due to a number of factors including the increasing acceptance of having children without being married. However, the lower marriage level among parents with young children will probably not continue as these children grow older. Many of these cohabiting parents will marry. When asked about the likelihood of marrying their partner, 64 per cent of those with 0 to 2 year-olds said that it was likely or very likely that they would marry. Around 40 per cent of cohabiting men and women with a child aged 3-11 expected that they would marry.
If these cohabiting couples with young children (0-2, 3-4 and 5-11) who expect to marry do marry their partner, then their level of marriage will increase to 94 per cent – very similar to those with older children. It appears that rather than rejecting marriage young couples with children still anticipate marrying. It is more a rearrangement of the order in which these couples are going through the traditional stages of family formation.

**How old are parents and children in couple families?**

Of couple families that include dependent children, 42 per cent contain a youngest child who is a pre-schooler (aged 0-4). Thirty per cent of couple families with dependants have a child aged 0-2 years (Figure 3.6).

Most couple parents with dependent children were clustered in the age range spanning 25-54 years (Figure 3.7). Relatively few couples aged 15-24 had dependent children. Of partnered people aged 15-24, just over a quarter (27 per cent) of women and 30 per cent of men had a child. The bulk of young partnered people were child free at that stage of their life (see Chapter 2).

Similarly, very few partnered adults aged 55 or over still have a child under the age of 15 or a dependent student still living with them. Just 4 per cent of women in this age group still had a dependent child/student living at home while 12 per cent of men in this age group were in this situation. The greater number of older men with dependent children/students still at home reflects the older age of men relative to their partners and may reflect the influence of men repartnering and starting a second family.

In contrast to those at the “extremes” most couples (84 per cent) in the 35-44 year old age band have dependent children/students living with them. In this regard partnered men and women in this age group were fairly homogenous – nearly all had responsibilities for children in their home.

Partnered men and women aged 25-34 were also fairly likely to have dependent children in the home – two thirds of these women had dependent children and 59 per cent of partnered men in this age band had dependent children living with them.

**What is the financial position of couples with children?**

Although poverty can be measured in a wide variety of ways, one approach is to define poverty in terms of income relative to a specified income level. The specific income level at which a person or family is defined as poor is adjusted for family size and composition (half average income). By applying this definition to the 1999 ABS Survey of Income and Housing Costs they have estimated that:

- Over half a million children (535,000) living in couple families live in poverty.
- 13 per cent of all children living in couple families live in poverty.
- Couples with children represent 40 per cent of all households living in poverty in 1999 (Harding and Szukalska 2000a).

Table 3.4 shows the per cent of couples with children who live in poverty.

This table indicates that in 1999, 11.6 per cent of all couples with children were living in poverty. The chance of living in poverty increases sharply as the couple has more children. Of couples with three or more children, 17.4 per cent lived in poverty.

**Table 3.4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family type of person</th>
<th>1982 %</th>
<th>1999 %</th>
<th>Difference %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couples with 0 children</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 child</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>-2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 children</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more children</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>-3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All couples with children</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All children</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>-3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All adults</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Australians</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

poverty in 1999 compared to only 10 per cent of couples with two children.

Between 1982-1999, there was a reduction of 2.6 per cent of couples with children living in poverty. The reduction was especially marked among couples with three or more children where there was a 3.9 per cent decline. Over the same period, the relative position of couples without any children in the household deteriorated in that there was a 2.1 per cent increase in poverty among this family type. At least part of the apparent increase in poverty among couple only families is likely to be due to compositional changes whereby the type of couple only family in 1999 was different from that in 1982 (for example, more elderly couple only families).

Has the relative position of children improved over this period? There is some evidence to suggest that it has. Between 1982-1999, the percentage of Australians living in poverty declined by 1.3 per cent. The relative position of children in particular improved with a decline of 3.6 per cent living in poverty. The relative position of couples with children improved at a faster rate than for Australians in general. Among couples with children the percentage of families living in poverty declined by 2.6 per cent compared with just 1.6 per cent for Australians overall.

How much financial support does government provide?

An important way in which governments support families is by redistributing income and benefits so that families’ earnings are supplemented by government support. These transfers are particularly important in families where no parent is employed.

### Table 3.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number employed in household</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Two+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of youngest child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>$49</td>
<td>$23</td>
<td>$830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>$328</td>
<td>$371</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>$377</td>
<td>$394</td>
<td>$930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$99</td>
<td>$972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>$2</td>
<td>$1</td>
<td>$211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>$2</td>
<td>$1</td>
<td>$285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposable income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>$376</td>
<td>$394</td>
<td>$719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$99</td>
<td>$763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>$360</td>
<td>$406</td>
<td>$230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>$230</td>
<td>$230</td>
<td>$354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct taxes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>$68</td>
<td>$62</td>
<td>$90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>$62</td>
<td>$62</td>
<td>$89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>$668</td>
<td>$738</td>
<td>$859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>$738</td>
<td>$859</td>
<td>$1,028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>$588</td>
<td>$777</td>
<td>$330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>$777</td>
<td>$330</td>
<td>$453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total taxes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>$69</td>
<td>$63</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>$63</td>
<td>$63</td>
<td>$297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net benefits of couples with dependent children</td>
<td>$619</td>
<td>$715</td>
<td>$30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Since these figures were collected before the introduction of the GST they do not reflect the taxation changes resulting from this tax reform. The non inclusion of GST can be particularly important given that families with children will have higher consumption costs than those without children.
Table 3.5 provides figures from the 1998-99 household expenditure survey which shows how much couples with children received from government.

Overall couple families with dependent children received about $21 per week more in direct and indirect government benefits than they paid in direct and indirect taxes (Table 3.5). However, the balance between benefits and taxes differed widely among different types of couple families with dependent children.

In 1998-99 couple families with dependent children but no income earners received substantial net benefits from government. While these couple families without income earners received between $328-$371 per week in cash benefits they also received indirect benefits averaging between $360-$406. When direct and indirect benefits are combined, couples with children but no income earner received between $688-$777 per week. After paying an average of $63-$69 in taxes per week these couple families received the equivalent of $619-$715 per week on average in government support.

In contrast, couple families with dependent children and two income earners are net contributors rather than net beneficiaries. For example, in 1998-99 the two income couple family with a child aged under five years, paid on average, $428 per week in taxes and received $371 per week in direct and indirect government benefits. Taken overall, these dual worker couple families with young children contributed $138 per week in taxes more than they received in direct or indirect benefits.

Couple families with dependent children and one income earner were modest beneficiaries of government benefits. Those whose youngest child was under five received $30 per week more in benefits than they paid in taxes while those whose youngest child was aged over five were $156 per week better off as a result of government income/benefit transfers.

Not surprisingly, the level of government support for couples with dependent children increased the more dependent children there were in the household (Table 3.6). The higher net benefit directed to larger couple families is due to three main factors:

- Larger families have a lower income partly due to lower workforce participation of mothers. This lower workforce participation reduces their taxable income and makes them more eligible for government benefits.
- Family payments are directly affected by the number of children in a family.
- Larger families attract far more indirect government benefits in the form of subsidised health and education costs.

**Endnotes**

1 Dependent children includes all children under the age of 15 and full time students aged 15-24. The designation of dependent for students aged 15-24 does not necessarily mean that the child is economically dependent on the parents. Nor does the designation of non dependent necessarily mean that the parents are not providing substantial economic support for the child aged 15-24 who is not a full time student.

2 These percentages should not be added together to see how many families contain children since some families contain all three categories of children.

3 The effect of the number of children on poverty will depend on the particular equivalence scale used. For further details of the equivalence scale used in the analysis reported here see Harding and Szukalska (2000b).

4 When examining changes in poverty using a relative measure of poverty such as that employed here, care must be taken not to draw any conclusions about changes in the absolute living standards of families. Since poverty is defined relative to the average family income, a family may remain poor in a relative sense despite improvements in their absolute standard of living. Equally, changes in the relative poverty of one group can be due to compositional changes in the other groups against which income is effectively compared.

5 Indirect benefits include non cash benefits and services provided by the government to households for education, health, housing, social security and welfare. The cost of administering the provision of direct benefits is included (ABS 2001b).
Although couples with children represent a minority of families, the overwhelming majority of children are reared in couple families.

Of couple families with dependent children 90 per cent are intact, 5.5 per cent are step families and 4.4 per cent are blended families.

Couple families with dependent children are a declining proportion of all families. In 1976, 48.4 per cent of families were couples with dependent children but by 2001 this figure had declined to 39.5 per cent – a 20 per cent decline.

In 7 per cent of couple families with dependent children, neither parent is employed. These families received between $619-$715 per week in direct and indirect government benefits.

In 57 per cent of couples with dependent children, both parents were employed (22 per cent full time). These families made a net contribution to government finances of between $57 and $138 per week.

In 36 per cent of couple families with dependent children, there was just one income earner. On average, these families received between $30 to $136 dollars per week in direct and indirect benefits from government.

In couple families with children, when the male partner is not employed, the female partner also tends not to be employed. Conversely, when the male is employed, the female also tends to be employed.

Most couples with dependent children are married but this is much less true of step and blended families.

Of young cohabiting couples with children many expect to marry.

In terms of income there was a reduction in poverty of 2.6 per cent of couples with children between 1982-99.

Couples with larger families experience more income poverty than other couples. They also receive more government benefits but these do not prevent these larger couple families from being in a relatively poor financial position.
Lone parent families
4 Lone parent families

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Lone parent families have become an increasingly common family form in recent decades both in Australia and overseas. In 2001, 19 per cent of all children under the age of 15 were living in a lone parent family. The growth of lone parent families has been the subject of considerable comment and government policy focus. Concerns have been expressed in terms of the implications of the rise of lone parent families for the future of the traditional two parent families, and for the wellbeing of children and for lone parents themselves. Lone parenting can also have considerable financial implications for the lone parents and children who are more often financially stressed than children growing up in couple families. Supporting lone parents also has significant financial implications for government, and policy initiatives have been directed to containing and sharing these obligations.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information regarding the number of lone parent families and children living in lone parent families. It will then outline some of the characteristics of lone parent households before exploring the implications of lone parenting for employment of parents and the consequent financial implications for the families themselves and governments who provide support for them.

How common are lone parent families?
Many figures are quoted about the number of lone parent families in Australia. This can be confusing because in their own way, each estimate may be true. It is important to understand what the percentages are based on. The figures differ depending on whether the percentage is based on children in lone parent families, on whether only dependent children are considered, on whether the percentages are percentages of families or of households or of families with dependent children. Figures also differ depending on whether the focus is on the percentage of children in lone parent families at a particular point in time or the percentage that ever spend some time in a lone parent family. The statistics below provide different estimates of the incidence of lone parent families for different statistical contexts.

How many families are lone parent families?
At the time of the 2001 Census lone parent families with dependent children made up:

- 10.7 per cent of all families.
- 21.8 per cent of families with dependent children (including dependent students).

Lone parent families are not just those with dependent children. A sizeable proportion consists of older people and adult children. In the 2001 Census, 8.7 per cent of lone parents were aged 65 or older. In 2001, 25 per cent of lone parent families consisted only of non dependent children aged 25 or older. When lone parent families, including those exclusively with older, non dependent children are considered, lone parent families in 2001 made up:

- 15.5 per cent of all families.
- 24.7 per cent of all families which included a parent and a child (including adult children).

How many households are lone parent households?
According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, while all lone parent families made up 15.5 per cent of families, they made up 10.7 per cent of all households. Lone parent families with dependent children constituted 7.6 per cent of all households (ABS 2000a).

How many children ever live in a lone parent family?
Most statistics, such as those described above, are based on the percentage of families that are lone parent families at a specific point of time (for example, Census night). However, because children rarely live in a lone parent family for their whole childhood, these figures can underestimate the percentage of children who ever live in a lone parent family for some of their childhood.

Recent research using the 2001 HILDA survey helps establish how many children spent at least some of their childhood in a lone parent family (de Vaus and Gray 2003). Table 4.1 shows the cumulative percentage of children who ever lived in a lone mother family by the age of 5, 12 and 18 years. This table shows that:

- Of children born between 1976-83, 26.8 per cent had spent at least one period of time in a lone mother family by the time they reached 18 years of age. 1
- Of children born between 1984-89, 21.3 per cent had ever lived in a lone mother family by the age of 12.
- Of children born between 1990-95, 15.5 per cent had ever lived in a lone mother family for at least some time by the age of 5.

The large majority of children do not spend any time in a lone parent family and even those that do so, most only spend part of their childhood in a
lone parent family. One way of representing the incidence of children living in lone parent families is to estimate the total amount of childhood that a cohort of children lives in lone parent households. Based on the 2001 HILDA survey:

- Of all 18 year old children born between 1976-83, 9.7 per cent of the total lived years of this pool of children, was spent in a lone mother family.
- Of all 12 year old children born between 1984-89, 10.4 per cent of the total lived years of this pool of children, was spent living in a lone mother family.
- Of all five year olds born between 1990-95, 10.7 per cent of the total lived years of this pool of children, was spent living in a lone mother family (de Vaus and Gray 2003).

**Are lone parent families becoming more common?**

Since at least the late 1960s there has been a steady increase in the percentage of lone parent families with a dependent child. In 1969, 7.1 per cent of families with dependent children were lone parent families – mainly headed by a mother. By 2003, this figure reached 22.3 per cent (Figure 4.1).

Lone parent families have also increased as a percentage of all families. In 1976, 6.5 per cent of all families were lone parent families with dependent children. This increased to 8.6 per cent in 1981 and fluctuated throughout the 1980s so that by 1991, 8.8 per cent of all families were lone parent families with dependent children. However, the 1990s saw a steady increase in the proportion of families that were lone parents with dependent children. In 1996, the percentage increased to 9.9 and again to 10.7 per cent by 2001.

The increase in lone parent families is due to two broad sets of factors which can be summarised as inflow and outflow factors (Kilmartin 1997).

Inflow factors are factors that increase the number of lone parent families that are formed. Lone parent families have been increasing at more than twice the rate that divorce has been increasing so the increase is not simply due to the divorce rate. The increased rate of cohabiting relationships and their breakdown (which is higher than that of married couples) is partly responsible for the increase in lone parent families. The increased “inflow” into lone parent families is also partly due to those women who have a child as a single parent outside of any relationship (p. 135).

Outflow factors are those that result in the transformation of a lone parent family to some other sort of household. There are two main types of outflow factors – lone parents repartnering to form a couple family, and children leaving a lone parent family so that it becomes a lone person household (or some other type of household). If outflow forces decline, then the proportion of lone parent families will increase. The declining rate of repartnering after divorce (p. 177) will therefore be contributing to the growth in lone parent families. Similarly, children appear to be delaying leaving home (p.146) and this will also contribute to the growth in lone parent families.

**Who are the lone parents?**

**Have lone parents been married previously?**

Lone parents are not just those with young children. A significant group of lone parents are older people, often widowed, who have an adult child...
living with them (p. 42)\(^2\). These living arrangements may arise when an adult child continues to live with a parent throughout life, or may result from a child moving back after a relationship breakdown or to care for a widowed parent in later life. It is therefore useful to distinguish between younger and older lone parents. Table 4.2 divides lone parents into those aged under 55 and those aged 55 and over. Most (85 per cent) of those under 55 have dependent children and most (88 per cent) lone parents over 55 have non dependent children only.

Lone parents arrive at lone parenting with one of three main marital backgrounds. Of the younger lone mothers (aged under 55), 30 per cent have never been married; almost two thirds have been married; and a small proportion (about 6 per cent) have become lone parents due to the death of the other parent.

Of lone mothers that have never been married, most were cohabiting with a partner at the time of the child’s birth. Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare perinatal database indicate that just 11.4 per cent of births in 2000 were to lone mothers (AIHW 2003a). Analysis of the most recent HILDA data suggests a figure of 8.1 per cent of births were cohabiting when the child was born but the relationship will have subsequently broken down. Two thirds of lone mothers aged 55 and over were widows. Of older lone fathers, 47 per cent were widowers. Just a third of older lone mothers were divorced or separated (half the level of younger lone mothers).

Since 1981, there has been a substantial growth in the proportion of lone parents who have never married. This has grown from 12.6 per cent of lone parents in 1981 to 30.5 per cent in 2001. The percentage of lone parent families arising out of marriage breakdown has declined gradually since 1981. However, there has been a decline in the creation of lone parent households through widowhood – from 11.1 per cent in 1981 to just 6.1 per cent in 2001 (Table 4.3).

In addition to the increasing percentage of never married adults heading lone parent families, it is lone parent families with young children in which the parent is most likely to have never married (Table 4.4). For example, in lone parent families where the youngest child is aged 0-2, 60.2 per cent of parents have never been married. Where the youngest child is aged 3-4 years, 44.5 per cent of lone parents have never been married. In contrast, only 7.8 per cent of those lone parents where the youngest dependent child is aged 13-24 have never been married. Many of these lone parents will have been cohabiting when the child was born but the relationship will have subsequently broken down.

The higher rate of “never married” lone parents among lone parents with the youngest children is likely to be due to two factors:

- It reflects the increase in never married individuals becoming lone parents.
- The tendency for many people who are lone parents of a young child to go on to either marry or form a couple relationship. These parents do not show up in the “never married, lone parent” statistics – they either marry or cease to be a lone parent.

### Are lone parents mainly young parents?

Lone parenting is most common among parents aged between 35–54 where over 10 per cent of all women in this age range head a lone parent...
family. Substantial proportions of women in other age groups also head a lone parent family (Table 4.5).

Focusing just on lone parents reveals a similar picture. Both lone mothers and lone fathers with dependent children are predominantly aged in their thirties and forties. Of lone mothers with dependent children, almost 70 per cent are aged between 30-49. Figure 4.2 also shows that lone fathers tend to be older than lone mothers.

The older age profile of lone fathers reflects two patterns. The first is that men, on average, partner with younger women (p. 170). The second factor is that following separation and divorce, older children are more likely than younger children to live with their father. This means that some older fathers who had been living on their own will become lone fathers by virtue of their teenage children moving to live with them.

In addition to being younger than lone fathers, lone mothers are also younger than couple mothers. Table 4.6 shows that lone mothers are more likely than couple mothers to be aged 15-24. Of lone mothers, 8 per cent are in this age group compared with just 3 per cent of couple mothers. Conversely, 46 per cent of couple mothers with dependent children are aged 35-44 compared with 41 per cent of lone mothers.

**Do lone mothers mainly have young children?**

As indicated earlier, the age profile of mother headed and father headed lone parent families is quite different. Overall, children are younger in mother headed than father headed lone parent families (Table 4.7). When fathers head a lone parent family, the children are more likely to be dependent teenagers or young adults.

- In about two thirds (68.2 per cent) of mother headed lone parent families the youngest child was aged under ten years. This compares with just 50.7 per cent of father headed lone parent families with such young children.
- In a quarter (24 per cent) of mother headed families, the youngest child is a pre-schooler compared with just 7 per cent of father headed families.
- In 33 per cent of father headed lone parent families with a dependent child, the youngest dependent child is aged 15-24 compared with just 19 per cent of mother headed lone parent families.

**Table 4.4** Marital status of lone parents by age of youngest dependent child, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of youngest child</th>
<th>0-2</th>
<th>3-4</th>
<th>5-9</th>
<th>10-14</th>
<th>15-24</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated/divorced</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N: 877 607 1462 590 928 4464


**Table 4.5** Percentage of each age group who head a lone parent family, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>15–24</th>
<th>25–34</th>
<th>35–44</th>
<th>45–54</th>
<th>55–64</th>
<th>65–74</th>
<th>75+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lone fathers</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone mothers</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Figure 4.2** Age profile of lone mothers and fathers with dependent children, 2001

Source: 2001 Census, special data cube.
Are many “ethnic families” lone parent families?

Lone mothers with dependent children are relatively common among mothers born in Australia, New Zealand, Continental Europe (except Italy), and the United Kingdom. New Zealand born mothers have the highest rate of lone parenting with over one in four being a lone mother, followed by German born mothers. Australian born women have the third highest rate of lone parenting followed by Greek and UK born mothers of dependent children (Figure 4.3).

Lone mothering is least common among mothers from Southern and Central Asia, Italy, parts of South East Asia and North Africa and the Middle East.

How common is lone parenting in Indigenous families?

Lone parent families are far more common among Indigenous Australian families than among non Indigenous families (Table 4.8). Of all Indigenous families with children under the age of 18, 36.8 per cent were lone parent families in 1996 compared with 19.5 per cent among non Indigenous families.

The circumstances in which lone parent Indigenous families live is also quite different to that in which non Indigenous lone parents live. Of Indigenous lone parents, 22.3 per cent live in multifamily households and a further 15 per cent live in households with other relatives. In contrast, only 8.2 per cent of non Indigenous lone parent families are part of multifamily households with only a further 6.7 per cent living with other relatives (Table 4.8).

This picture is similar to that identified by Daly and Smith from the 1996 Census. They have also noted that Indigenous female lone parents are younger than their non Indigenous counterparts and that Indigenous lone parents typically have more children than non Indigenous lone parents (Daly and Smith 1999).

Are lone parents mainly city families?

Rural families are often thought of as being more “traditional” than those in urban areas. Table 4.9 lends some support to this notion in that the
Lone parent families are less likely than couple parents to be employed. While 60.5 per cent of couple mothers with dependent children had paid work in June 2002 only 47.9 per cent of lone mothers had paid work. Among fathers, 87.7 of couple fathers had paid work compared with 67.6 per cent of lone fathers (ABS 2002e).

There are a number of possible reasons for the lower employment rates of lone parents – especially of lone mothers. One explanation is that because lone mothers have to shoulder a greater share of child rearing responsibilities than couple mothers, it is much more difficult for them to combine work with these responsibilities – especially when children are young.

A second explanation focuses on the disincentive effects of the income support system. This argument is based on the “welfare trap” created by the interaction of taxation and social security systems which results in loss of benefits when in paid work, and high Effective Marginal Tax Rates (Barrett, 1999). The influence of disincentive effects is partly reflected in the larger proportion of lone mothers in paid work when the age of their youngest child no longer qualifies them for pension payments (that is, when the youngest child turns 16) (Figure 4.4).

A third explanation could lie in real differences in the socio-demographic characteristics of lone mothers and couple mothers, marking them as somehow distinct social groups. Of particular importance could be a “human capital” gap in terms of educational or vocational qualifications and skills (see Gray, Qu, de Vaus and Millward 2002). This means that lone mothers may have fewer qualifications, less work experience and

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**Table 4.8** Lone parent families by Indigenous status, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>Non Indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent families with children &lt;18 as percentage of all families</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent families with children &lt;18 as percentage of all households</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent families with children &lt;18 living in a multi family household</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


---

**Table 4.9** Lone parent families by rural – urban location, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population size of locality</th>
<th>% 100,000+</th>
<th>% 50,000-99,999</th>
<th>% 10,000-49,999</th>
<th>% 1,000-9,999</th>
<th>% Less than 1,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent families with dependent children as percentage of all families</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent families with dependent children as percentage of families with dependent children</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All lone parent families (incl non dependent children) as a percentage of all families (lone and couple)</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


---
The similarities in levels of full time employment of lone and couple mothers are nowhere near as substantial as employment levels overall (Figure 4.5). Among those with pre-schoolers, the full time employment gap between lone and couple mothers is only 5.5 per cent (compared with a 20 per cent gap for any employment, Figure 4.4). While the full time employment gap widens a little when children are at primary school, it narrows again to just 5 per cent when children are aged 10-15. Once children are aged 15-24, the full time employment gap of lone and couple mothers reverses with lone mothers having a higher rate of full time employment than couple mothers (46.2 per cent compared with 40.5 per cent).

Lone fathers with dependent children have higher employment rates than lone mothers. This may be partly because children in lone father households are older, on average, than in lone mother households. However, the employment gap between lone mothers and lone fathers is greatest when they have a pre-schooler (55.7 per cent of lone fathers of pre-schoolers are employed full time compared with 30 per cent of lone mothers). Furthermore, the full time employment rate of lone fathers is higher than lone mothers regardless of the age of the youngest child.

Are lone mothers employed more now than in the past?

Since the early 1980s there have been substantial changes in the labour force participation of lone mothers. Not only has the overall level of employment of lone mothers increased, the mix of full time and part time employment has changed sharply. Figure 4.6 depicts both the changing rates of employment and the changing mix of full time and part time work for the period 1983-2002. These changes have been described and explored fully in Gray, Qu, Renda and de Vaus (2003).

The most substantial change that occurred over this period was the rise in part time employment among lone mothers. Part time employment rose from 11.8 per cent in 1983 to 26.8 per cent in 2002. Full time employment fluctuated somewhat. After increasing from 20.3 to 28.7 per cent between 1983-1988, it declined again to 21.0 per cent in 2002. These changing rates of part time and full time employment among lone mothers meant that by 1998, more lone mothers were employed part time than full time.

There are a number of reasons for the increased part time employment among lone mothers. A critical factor is the change in the labour market which has meant that much of the job growth has been in part time work. Part time employment rates also grew for couple mothers between 1983-2002 (Figure 4.7). However, the employment patterns of
lone mothers changed in different ways to couple mothers. Figure 4.7 shows the change in employment of couple mothers between 1983-2002. The part-time employment growth is very similar to that of lone mothers. However, unlike lone mothers, full-time employment also grew over this period.

It is not entirely clear why the employment patterns of lone mothers have changed in different ways to that of couple mothers. While the growth in part-time employment no doubt reflects the growth in part-time work in the labour market, this does not explain why full-time employment grew for couple mothers but not lone mothers. It is likely that changes in the income support system contributed to the relative attractiveness of full-time and part-time work for lone mothers (see Harding and Szukalska 2000a) but these changes were insufficient to account for the patterns described here (see Gray et al 2003).

Changes in the employment of lone and couple mothers differ depending on the age of the mother’s youngest child. The rate of increase in employment is greatest for those whose youngest dependent child is aged 15-24 (Figure 4.8). For these lone mothers, the participation rate has increased from 50.8 per cent in 1985 to 80 per cent in 2003. This increase has occurred in two stages. Between 1985 and 1989 there was a sharp increase in participation rates from 50.8 per cent to 71.2 per cent. Participation rates were then stable until 1997 when they increased again to 80 per cent by 2003.

Among parents whose youngest child was aged 0-4, there has been a modest increase from 28.3 per cent participation in 1985 to 37.3 per cent in 2003. Most of this increase occurred in the late 1980s after which the labour force participation of lone mothers with pre-schoolers has been relatively stable (Figure 4.8).

Lone mothers whose youngest child is aged between 5-9 have shown a steady increase in labour force participation. In 1985, the rate was 40.8 per cent and this increased sharply to 54.5 by 1989. By 2003 this rate had increased to 64.4 per cent.

**Figure 4.6** Employment rates, lone mothers, 1983-2002

**Figure 4.7** Employment rates, couple mothers, 1983-2002
Are lone mothers less educated than couple mothers?

Taken overall, lone mothers are less educated than couple mothers. For example, three quarters (74.6 per cent) of lone mothers had no post-school qualifications compared with around two thirds (65.6 per cent) of couple mothers. Couple mothers were also more likely than lone mothers to have a university degree (14.8 per cent compared with 9.1 per cent (Table 4.10).

However, the educational profiles of lone mothers is very different depending on the age of their youngest child. Among lone mothers, those with older children were more likely than those with young children to be well qualified. While only 6 per cent of lone mothers with a pre-schooler had a degree, this percentage is higher among those whose youngest child was older. Thus by the time the youngest child was aged 15 or older, lone mothers were just as likely to have a degree as were couple mothers. Similarly, while 76.4 per cent of lone mothers with a pre-schooler have no post-school qualifications, this percentage steadily declined so that by the time their youngest child was 18 or older only 51.2 per cent have no qualifications – less than for couple mothers.

The higher educational level of lone mothers with older children compared to those with younger children may partly reflect an increase in educational qualifications among lone mothers as their children grow older, but it is more likely to be due to differences in the points at which different women enter into and exit from lone motherhood. That is, women with lower education may become lone mothers at earlier stages of their family life course and then partner again before their children grow up. Women with higher qualifications may become lone mothers at a later age when their children are older or may be less likely to repartner once they become lone mothers (see Birell and Rapson, 1998).

Are well educated lone mothers employed?

It was noted earlier that lone mothers, on average, have lower education than couple mothers – especially among those with younger children. It is also widely known that education makes people more employable. Table 4.11 shows the link between education level and employment for both lone and couple mothers. The first “total” row indicates the percentage of couple mothers employed according to their qualifications. The second “total” row provides the same figures for lone mothers. For both lone and couple mothers, the higher their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.10</th>
<th>Age of youngest child and post-school qualification, 2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of youngest child</td>
<td>0-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Couple mothers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree or higher</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No qualification</td>
<td>57.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lone mothers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree or higher</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No qualification</td>
<td>76.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

qualifications the higher their rates of employment. For example, among lone mothers, only 39.4 per cent of those without any qualifications were employed. Of those with vocational qualifications, 61.8 per cent were employed while 76.7 per cent of those with a degree were employed.

A comparison of the employment rates of lone mothers with either a postgraduate qualification, or a degree with similarly qualified couple mothers shows relatively similar levels of employment between lone and couple mothers – except when the youngest child is a pre-schooler. Similarly, 63.7 per cent of couple mothers with a degree and a pre-schooler and 62.3 per cent of comparable lone mothers were employed.

However, among those with no qualifications and to a lesser extent among those with vocational qualifications, the employment rates of lone and couple mothers diverge. Lone mothers with lower qualifications have lower rates of employment than couple mothers with similarly low qualifications. For example, 39.2 per cent of couple mothers with a pre-schooler but without post-school qualifications were employed in 2001. This is a considerably higher employment rate than the lone mothers with a pre-schooler but no qualifications, where just 22.9 per cent were employed. Similarly, among couple mothers with a vocational qualification and a primary school aged youngest child, 76.4 per cent were employed. The comparable employment figure for lone mothers was just 64.9 per cent.

The reason that low qualifications seem to affect the employment chances of lone mothers more than couple mothers is unclear. However, it is likely that women with low qualifications have less opportunity to obtain jobs that cover the costs of working (for example, child care) and compensate for the loss of benefits that working might entail.

**How much do lone parent families struggle financially?**

**Does the other parent help financially?**

The introduction of the Child Support Scheme in 1988 was designed to ensure that both parents continued to contribute to the financial support of their children after the relationship breakdown.

Evidence from the 1997 Family Characteristics survey indicates that of lone parent families with dependent children where a natural parent lived elsewhere:

- 44.2 per cent received cash child support from the non resident parent.
- 18 per cent received “in kind” (for example, clothing, help with school fees, health insurance) child support only.
- 37.2 per cent received no child support.

The 2001 wave of the HILDA survey found that lone parents received the following levels of child support from the non resident parent:

- 42.2 per cent received regular financial support.
- 22.3 per cent received other financial support.
- 32.8 per cent received just one form.
- 15.9 per cent received both forms.
- 51.3 per cent received no financial support.

According to the 1997 Family Characteristics Survey, of parents who received cash child support,

### Table 4.11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of youngest child</th>
<th>Post-grad deg/dip %</th>
<th>Degree %</th>
<th>Vocational %</th>
<th>No qualification %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Couple mothers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–4</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–11</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–14</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>62.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–17</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>84.3</td>
<td>67.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–24</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>53.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lone mothers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–4</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–11</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–14</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–17</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–24</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>88.1</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

41 per cent received at least some payments through the Child Support Agency and 54 per cent received all payments directly from the non resident parent (ABS 1998a). Where cash child support payments were made, 45 per cent of these arrangements had been arrived at privately between parents; 43 per cent by the Child Support Agency and only 12 per cent had been determined by the courts (ABS 1998a).

The ABS 1997-98 Income Survey indicates that on average child support contributed 9 per cent of the income to lone mother families in 1997-98 (Harding and Szukalska 2000b). In 1997, lone parent families received between $151-$200 per child per month in child support.

Child support payments have become an increasingly important part of the income of lone mother families (see Harding and Szukalska 2000b). While these payments continue to be a relatively small proportion of the cash income of lone mothers there has, since 1982, been a trebling of the contribution of child support payments as a proportion of income (from 3 per cent to 9 per cent of income). This increase is largely due to the introduction of the Child Support Scheme in 1988-89 (Table 4.12).

The same period has also seen the growth in the importance of government cash transfers to lone mothers from 45 per cent to 50 per cent of their income (Table 4.12). This increase has represented a dollar increase in income from government from the equivalent of $164 per week in 1982 to $230 per week in 1997-98 (in 1997-98 dollars). Over the same period earned income has constituted a declining proportion of the income of lone mother families – declining from 45 per cent to 37 per cent of the weekly income of lone mothers (Table 4.12).

**Are lone parent families financially stressed?**

Since lone parent families with dependent children frequently have no income earner, do not have the benefit of a second income earner, frequently must rely largely on government benefits yet have the normal expenses of a family with dependents, it is of little surprise that lone parent families often struggle financially.

The nature of the financial stress faced by lone parent families is evident from the information collected in the 1998-99 Household Expenditure Survey. Table 4.13 reports some of the subjective and behavioural measures of financial stress while Table 4.14 provides measures of economic well-being in terms of the income, housing and employment characteristics of lone parent mothers and fathers. These tables provide an indication of the day-to-day way in which financial stress can be

**Table 4.12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of income</th>
<th>$ value (1987-8 dollars)</th>
<th>Per cent of income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earned income</td>
<td>$162</td>
<td>$172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt cash transfers</td>
<td>$164</td>
<td>$230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child support</td>
<td>$12</td>
<td>$41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>$22</td>
<td>$17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total weekly income</td>
<td>$361</td>
<td>$460</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Table 4.13**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lone mother</th>
<th>Lone father</th>
<th>Couple with children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spend more than we get each week</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not gone on holiday in last year because can’t afford to</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t have friends over for meal because can’t afford to</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t have a special weekly meal because we can’t afford it</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy second hand clothes because we can’t afford new clothes</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t have leisure or hobbies because we can’t afford it</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times when unable to pay gas/phone/electricity</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have had to pawn things</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have gone without meals because of shortage of money</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought help from community/welfare organisations because of shortage of money</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought help from friends/family because of shortage of money</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had cash flow problems in last year</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not raise $2000 emergency money within a week</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could use own savings as a source of emergency money</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>40.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1751</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

experienced. They show that, compared with couple families with children, lone parent families are more financially stressed on all indicators.

The statistics in Tables 4.13 and 4.14 indicate a further important pattern. Among lone parents, lone mothers are more likely than lone fathers to be financially stressed. On virtually every measure, lone mothers are more financially stressed than lone fathers. Indeed, on quite a few measures, lone fathers have financial stress levels much closer to couples than to lone mothers.

A number of factors contribute to the different levels of financial stress of lone mothers and lone fathers (see Table 4.14):

- Lone fathers are more likely than lone mothers to be employed full time (47.7 per cent compared with 19.8 per cent).
- The average taxable income of lone fathers is considerably higher than lone mothers ($538 compared with $321).
- Far fewer lone fathers than lone mothers are reliant mainly on government benefits (45 per cent compared with 63.5 per cent).
- On average, children in lone mother families are younger than in lone father families. Costs for younger children (including child care) may be greater than for older children.

**Are lone parent families becoming relatively worse or better off financially?**

Lone parents are over represented among poorer groups in society. Figure 4.9 shows the distribution of lone parents across wealth deciles. If lone parents were equally distributed across all wealth groups then 10 per cent of lone parents would fall in each decile. The distribution of lone parent families across wealth deciles indicates the financial position of lone parent families relative to other households.

However, in 1998, lone parents were concentrated in the lower (poorest) wealth deciles and under-represented among the higher (wealthier deciles). For example, 31.9 per cent of all lone parents were among the poorest 20 per cent of society. In contrast, only 7.6 per cent of lone parents are found among the wealthiest 20 per cent.

However, the situation in 1998 represents an improvement in the relative position of lone parents compared to just 10 years earlier when 47.5 per cent of lone parents were in the poorest two wealth deciles. Figure 4.10 illustrates the way in which the relative position of lone parents improved between 1986-98. It shows a sharp decline in the percentage of lone parents among the poorest 20 per cent of society and a 16.8 per cent increase in the proportion in the third lowest income decile.

Essentially, improvements in government income support and the child support payments have enhanced the relative position of a sizeable proportion of lone parents. It should be stressed, however, that improvements in the relative position of lone parents does not necessarily mean that their financial position improved in an absolute sense. In principle at least, the relative position of one group can improve without any improvement in its absolute financial position simply because the position of other groups have deteriorated or the size of another poor group (for example, lone person households) increases at a faster rate than other poor groups.

A similar picture is provided in measures of income poverty between 1982-99. According to the figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Characteristics</th>
<th>Lone Mother</th>
<th>Lone Father</th>
<th>Couple households with children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income (1999)</strong>&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average weekly taxable household income</td>
<td>$321</td>
<td>$538</td>
<td>$1083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average weekly household tax paid</td>
<td>$83</td>
<td>$193</td>
<td>$355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal source of income from pensions/benefits</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing (1999)</strong>&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renting</td>
<td>66.8%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 30% of income spent on housing costs</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average weekly housing costs&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$204</td>
<td>$202</td>
<td>$253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment (June 2000)</strong>&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed full time</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
<td>21.7%(both)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed (full or part time)</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>60.5%(both)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Employed</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>7.5%(both)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> From Australian Bureau of Statistics (1999c) 1999 Household Expenditure Survey
<sup>c</sup> Housing costs include rent, mortgage interest, rates, insurance, repairs and interest on loans for extensions for main dwelling

Note: the taxation figures are pre-GST and do not reflect changes due to the GST
in Table 4.15, between 1982-99 there has been a 15.6 per cent reduction in the percentage of lone parents living in poverty. This improved situation is especially marked for those families with two or more children where there was an estimated 22 per cent reduction in poverty.

It should be noted, however, that the measure of poverty on which the figures in Table 4.15 are based are measures of relative poverty. This means that the reduction in poverty among lone parents may, at least partly, be due simply to the deterioration of the position of other groups or the faster numerical growth of other groups rather than improvement in the absolute living standards of lone parents.

How much do governments support lone parent families?

One of the ways in which lone parents are supported in their parenting role is by direct and indirect benefits from government. In 1999, 71 per cent of all lone parents received lone parent benefits from government. This represents an increase in the rate of lone parents receiving support from the late 1960s when only 35 per cent of lone parents received support. By 1980, the percentage of lone parents in receipt of government payments had increased to 60 per cent. This peaked in 1986 at 78.4 per cent and has since fluctuated around 70 per cent (Whiteford 2000). In 1999, in addition to lone parent support payments, a further 10 per cent of lone parents received higher levels of family assistance to supplement their earnings (Whiteford 2000).

Australia has high lone parent income support coverage rates compared with other comparable nations. This, together with the steadily increasing number of lone parents and lone parent improved benefits, has led to substantial increases in expenditure. This in turn has led to policy initiatives designed to encourage and facilitate workforce participation by lone parents as children grow older.

Table 4.16 indicates the overall extent to which government benefits are directed to lone parents. These figures show that the private weekly income of lone parents declines as their number of children increases ($308 with one child compared with $174 with three or more children). This is hardly surprising as larger numbers of children makes working more difficult and financially less viable. This lack of private income is met by the payment of direct benefits that more or less create income equality between lone parents with one, two or three children.

Indirect benefits (for example, health, education) provide further support for these families so that substantial benefits are directed to lone parent families. Overall, lone parents with one child received net benefits from government worth approximately $255 per week; those with two children received weekly net benefits valued at $446; while those with 3 or more children received $707 worth of government funded benefits.

These levels of government transfers directed at lone parent families contrasts sharply with the value of benefits directed to couple families with children. For example, the net value of government benefits received by a couple family with one pre-schooler was a negative $78 in 1999 and was...
just $3 for those couple families with one child aged over five. For couple families with two or more dependent children the value of government transfers was approximately $250 per week.

The Parenting Payment (Single) is designed to provide income support for lone parents. Early research indicated that lone parents stayed on this payment (or its predecessor) for a limited period and that the average duration of being on the payment was less than three years in total. This finding was taken to mean that lone parents did not become dependent on government income support for an extended period. More recent research which tracks individuals over a five year period has indicated that this is not the case. Tracking lone parents on the Parenting Payment (Single), Gregory and Klug (2002) found that:

- Most Parenting Payment (Single) recipients depended on income support for long periods – on average for 4 out of the 5.5 years of the study.
- The average period of income support dependence for a person who begins to receive a Parenting Payment (Single) is likely to be at least 12 years.
- Within a five year period only around 20 per cent of lone parents left Parenting Payment (Single) and did not return to any form of income support.
- Nearly 25 per cent of lone parents stayed on the payment continuously over the average 5.5 year period.

Endnotes
1 This, of course, does not mean that 26.8 per cent were currently living in a lone mother family at age 18.
2 Some cases in which a lone parent lives with an adult child will be recorded as a lone parent family but more often these cases will be classified in a different way in the Census.
3 In the NATSEM study on which these results are based the poverty line was set at 50 per cent of the family income of the average person in Australia (“half average income”). Family income was adjusted to take into account differing family size and composition (Harding and Szukalska 1999).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highlights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 19 per cent of children under the age of 15 live in a lone parent family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lone parent families with dependent children make up 21.8 per cent of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>families in which there are dependent children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lone parent families with dependent children make up 10.7 per cent of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Almost 27 per cent of children spend some time up to the age of 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>living in a lone parent family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lone parent families with dependent children are becoming more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>common. Since 1965, lone parent families with dependent children have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grown from 6.5 per cent of families with dependent children to 21.8 per</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cent of families with dependent children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lone parent families also include older parents with adult (or non</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dependent) children. About a third of all lone parent families include</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only non dependent children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The main route into lone parenting is via relationship breakdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rather than starting off as lone mother or through widowhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lone mothers are typically younger than lone fathers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lone fathers tend to have older children rather than younger children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>living with them, while lone mothers tend to have younger rather than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>older children living with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lone parenting rates are highest among parents from Anglo backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parenting is uncommon among parents born in Southern Europe, the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East and North Africa, South East Asia and China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lone parenting is considerably more common among Indigenous families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lone Indigenous parents are often part of multi-family households.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Employment levels of lone mothers are lower than couple mothers but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get closer to those of couple mothers once the youngest child turns 16.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The employment of lone mothers has increased considerably over the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>last two decades – especially part time employment. Part time employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lone mothers now outnumber full time employed lone mothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lone mothers with younger children have lower education levels than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>couple mothers but lone mothers with older children have similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education levels to couple mothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poverty is more common among lone mothers but the extent of poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has declined since the mid 1980s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Child support plays a small but important role in income and wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of lone mothers who receive child support payments. However, many lone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mothers receive no child support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Governments provide considerable financial support to lone mothers and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the level of support has increased since early-mid 1980s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lone mother families (but not lone father families) experience high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>levels of financial stress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5

Step families and blended families
5  Step families and blended families

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Marriage and relationship breakdown frequently involve dependent children. In 2001, 53,400 children under the age of 18 experienced the divorce of their parents. An unknown number of other children experienced the separation of their cohabiting parents. In total, almost a million children have a natural parent living elsewhere.

These relationship breakdowns frequently result in the formation of lone parent families (Chapter 4) but for many children a lone parent family may be a relatively short transition stage before parents re-partner. Indeed, studies of relationship histories of some children indicate multiple transitions in and out of lone parent families into one or another type of couple family (Chapter 11).

When a parent with a dependent child partners (or re-partners), a step family or a blended family is formed. Such families can bring a new security and stability to some individuals but can also involve complex and difficult relationships, as individuals and children from different families learn to live together.

**What are blended and step families?**

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, a blended family consists of:

- A couple family containing two or more children.
- At least one child that is the natural child of both members of the couple; and
- At least one child that is the step child of either member of the couple (ABS 1998a).

A step family consists of:

- A couple family containing one or more children.
- At least one child that is the step child of either member of the couple; and
- No child that is the natural or foster child of both members of the couple (ABS 1998a).

Based on estimates from the 2001 HILDA survey, step and blended families account for 8.9 per cent of families with children aged under 18, and 9.9 per cent of all couple families with children under 18. Using HILDA, Brandon (2004) estimates that 5.87 per cent of children under the age of 15 live with a step parent or with their parent and the parent’s de facto spouse. Apart from these estimates we have little national statistical information about blended and step families. Most often, statistical information on couples with children does not distinguish between intact, blended and step families.

**How many step and blended families are there?**

**Blended**

Based on the 2001 HILDA survey, blended families made up 4.0 per cent of all families with children under the age of 18. In the same year blended families made up 4.4 per cent of couple families with children under 18 (Table 5.1).

The proportion of blended couple families has risen gradually since at least 1986. In that year, 2.5 per cent of couple families with dependent children were blended families (ABS 1992). By 1997, 3.9 per cent of couple families with children under 18 (ABS 1998a) were blended families, and by 2001 this figure rose to 4.4 per cent (FaCS, 2002a).

**Step families**

In 2001, 5.5 per cent of all couple families with children under 18 years of age were step families. In the same year, step families made up 4.9 per cent of all families with children under 18 (Table 5.1). This represents a slight decline in the percentage of couple families that are step families.

Overall, the percentage of all families with children under the age of 18 that are either blended or step families is very similar to the percentage of all such families that are lone parent families (10.7 per cent). Not all children living in blended families are step children. Some are the natural child of both parents. In 2001, of children under the age of 18, 5.6 per cent were step children (ABS 2001c).

---

**Table 5.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family type of families containing a child under 18, 2001</th>
<th>All couple families with a child &lt;18</th>
<th>All families with a child &lt;18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All couple families with a child &lt;18</strong></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intact couple family</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>80.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended (step father)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended (step mother)</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended (step mother and step father)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step family (step father)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step family (step mother)</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step family (step mother and step father)</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent family</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>4704</td>
<td>5265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a).
How common is marriage in step/blended families?

Step families and blended families are far more likely than intact families to consist of a cohabiting couple rather than a married couple. In the 2001 HILDA survey more than half of the step family couples (53 per cent) were cohabiting and well over a third (39 per cent) of the blended family couples were cohabiting. These figures stand in sharp contrast to less than 8 per cent of intact families with a child under 18 consisting of a cohabiting couple. Of all couple families with a child under the age of 18, 12.4 per cent were cohabiting rather than married (FaCS, 2002a).

Cohabitation is a common arrangement in step and blended families. Table 5.2 reports these rates from the 2001 HILDA survey – rates that are substantially higher than those recorded in the ABS Family Characteristics survey in 1997 (ABS 1998a).

- In 1997, just 27 per cent of blended family couples were cohabiting (39 per cent in 2001).
- In 1997, 43 per cent of couples in step families were cohabiting compared with 53 per cent in 2001.

Which natural parent do children live with?

Most children who do not live with one of their natural parents, live with their mother. Many such children live with a lone mother rather than in a blended or step family. In 1997, just 22.8 per cent of children with a natural parent living elsewhere lived in a step or blended family. In 2001, 78.6 per cent of step children lived with their natural mother and a step father. In 2001, 4.4 per cent of all children under the age of 18 were the step child of the male parent and 1.2 per cent were the step child of the female parent (ABS 2001c).

When a child lives apart from a natural parent, the chances of living in a step or blended family increase as they get older (Table 5.3). In 1997, most pre-schoolers with a natural parent living elsewhere (92.4 per cent) lived in a lone parent household. However, by the time they reached secondary school age (12-17 years old) only two thirds (67.2 per cent) lived with a lone parent. By their teenage years, over a quarter (27.2 per cent) lived with their mother and step father while 5.6 per cent lived with their father and step mother.

How well off financially are step and blended families?

Overall, little information is available regarding the financial circumstances of step/blended families. Most information does not distinguish between intact couple families with dependent children and step/blended families. However, some information is available that relates to the particular circumstances of step/blended families.

Is child support received?

Since most children in step and blended families will have a natural parent living elsewhere many children in step and blended families are eligible for financial support from this parent. To what extent does this occur? Do children in step and blended families receive child support as frequently as those in lone parent families?

It is clear from Table 5.4 that lone parent families are much more likely to receive financial support from the non resident parent than those families in which the resident parent has repartnered. While 46.9 per cent of lone mothers received regular financial support from the non resident father, just 26.1 per cent and 39.1 per cent of mothers in blended and step families received such support. The disparity between mothers in lone parent families, on the one hand, and mothers in step and blended families on the other, is even greater with regard to other types of financial support (for example, school fees) where very few children living in blended or step families with their mother received this type of support.

Overall, less than half (46.3 per cent) of all lone mother families received no financial support from the non resident parent while about 70 per cent of those in blended and 56 per cent in step families with their mothers received no such financial support.

Resident mothers are much more likely than resident fathers to receive financial support from the...
non resident parent. For example, while 46.9 per cent of lone mothers received regular financial support from their child’s father just 15.6 per cent of lone fathers received regular financial support from the child’s non resident mother. Similarly, while 56.4 per cent of resident mothers in step families received no financial support form the child’s non resident father, 94.1 per cent of resident fathers in step families received no financial support from the child’s non resident mother (Table 5.4).

How common is financial hardship?

Following divorce, families with dependent children frequently face financial hardship. Chapter four has detailed the level of poverty among lone parent families with dependent children. Those who repartner following divorce tend to be financially better off than those who remain as lone parents. The Australian Divorce Transition Project studied a national sample of people after divorce and concluded that “repartnering remains a key way out of financial difficulties for women, and hence for most children whose parents divorce” (Smyth and Weston 2000).

Figure 5.1 below shows the percentage of lone parents and repartnered parents with children who lived below the Henderson poverty line following divorce. This shows that the proportions living below the poverty line are much higher among lone parents – especially women and older lone mothers – than among those who had repartnered. Similarly, far greater proportions of those who had repartnered had a standard of living that was 200 per cent above the poverty line than was the case among lone parents.

While both repartnered mothers and fathers were financially better off than lone mothers and fathers, the difference between repartnered and lone parents was greatest among mothers. For example, 44 per cent of lone mothers were below the poverty line compared to just 15 per cent of repartnered mothers. Similarly, only 8 per cent of lone mothers were 200 per cent above the poverty line compared to about 32 per cent of repartnered mothers. Much smaller differences were evident among repartnered and lone fathers.

How do children manage in step and blended families?

While many blended and step families function well, there is evidence that some children in blended and step families face particular difficulties. This

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.4</th>
<th>Financial support from parent living elsewhere, 2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family type</strong></td>
<td><strong>Blended (n=213)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Receipt of financial support</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mother</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recieves regular financial support</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receives other financial support</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receives just one form</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receives both forms</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receives no financial support</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a). In families with a child under 18 in which a parent lives elsewhere

![Figure 5.1 Poverty in lone parent and step/blended families](source: Australian Divorce Transitions Project (Weston and Smyth 200).)

DIVERSITY AND CHANGE IN AUSTRALIAN FAMILIES
section outlines the link between living in a step/blended family and the incidence of child abuse and mental health disorders. The evidence indicates that child abuse and neglect and child mental health disorders are more common in step and blended families than in intact families.

Care must be taken, however, not to conclude simply that step/blended families cause these particular difficulties. These data do not indicate whether the difficulties associated with certain types of families stem from the type of family structure, from the economic and social environments in which some family types function or from the earlier background of individuals who form blended and step families. It should also be stressed that even in those family types where children are more likely to face particular difficulties, the large majority of children in these families do not encounter these difficulties at all.

Is violence and child abuse more common?

Overseas and Australian evidence indicates that child abuse and neglect are more common in lone parent, step and blended families than in intact families (Tomison 1996). However, this does not necessarily mean that the perpetrator is the lone parent or the step parent. The perpetrator is not necessarily someone who lives with the child.

Evidence provided by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW 2003b) which collates all Australian statistics on child abuse, indicates that child abuse and maltreatment occur in blended and step families more than twice the rate than would be expected.

In 1997, almost 16 per cent of child abuse substantiations related to children in step or blended families. However, only about 8 per cent of children lived in such families. This means that the percentage of substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect in step/blended families was twice as high as would be expected given the percentage of children living in step/blended families.

Over 46 per cent of substantiated abuse occurs in lone parent families while only approximately 18 per cent of children live in lone parent families (Table 5.5). This means that child abuse in lone parent families is about two and a half times higher than would be expected given the number of children living in such families.

Just over a quarter (26.6) of substantiated child abuse happens to children living in intact families – a much lower rate than would be expected given that three quarters of children live in such families.

While substantiated child abuse is twice as high in step and blended families than would be expected, it is important not to simply attribute this to the abusive behaviours of the step parent or cohabiting partner. Of all child abuse, the biological parent is by far the most common perpetrator (63 per cent). Step parents and the parent’s cohabiting partner are believed to be responsible for the child abuse in about 8 per cent of substantiated cases (AIHW 2003b) – a rate that matches the percentage of children in step families. In other words, while step and blended families have higher rates of child abuse than would be expected, step parents do not appear to have higher rates than would be expected given the number of children who live with a step parent.

It should be noted that of all fatal child maltreatment cases in Australia between 1989-92, the stereotypical offender was a young male living in a de facto relationship with the victim’s mother (Strang 1995). This fact, however, should not be generalised to all forms of child maltreatment.

Is mental health of children poorer?

The child and adolescent component of the 1997 Australian National Mental Health Survey found

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family type</th>
<th>% of substantiations</th>
<th>% of children in family type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intact</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step or blended</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent–female</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent–male</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other relatives/kin</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2004a). Does not include NSW. Figures collected from Victoria and Queensland are based on family type at time of investigation. Figures from other states are based on family type when abuse occurred.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Type</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Step/Blended</th>
<th>Lone parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressive Disorder</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct Disorder</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressive Disorder</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct Disorder</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Child and Adolescent Component of the National Survey of Mental Health and Well-being (Sawyer, M. G., F. M. Arney, et al. 2000). Note: These figures are based primarily on responses by parents about symptoms of their children using the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children, Version IV (Shaffer et al., 2000).
that children and adolescents in step and blended families have a higher incidence of a range of common mental health disorders than those in intact families (Table 5.6).

Overall, both male and female children in blended and step families had a rate of the three disorders (depression, conduct disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) that was at least twice as high as that among children and adolescents in intact families. For example:

- 6.6 per cent of boys in step/blended families had a depressive disorder compared to 3.2 per cent of boys in intact families.
- 9.4 per cent of boys in step or blended families had evidence of a conduct disorder compared to 3 per cent of boys in intact families.
- 21.6 per cent of boys from step or blended families were diagnosed as having ADHD compared to 13.2 per cent of those from intact families.
- 5.1 per cent of girls in step or blended families had a depressive disorder compared to 2 per cent of girls in intact families.
- 11.8 per cent of girls in step or blended families were diagnosed with ADHD compared to 5.5 per cent of girls from intact families.

Children in lone parent families generally had disorder rates similar to those in step/blended families.

**Endnote**

1 A step child is a natural or adopted child of only one partner in a marriage or de facto relationship, within the primary family in a household (ABS 2001d).

**Highlights**

- Ten per cent of couple families with children under the age of 18 are step or blended families.
- Almost as many families with a child under 18 are step or blended as are lone parent families with a child under 18 (10.7 per cent).
- 5.6 per cent of children under the age of 18 are step children.
- The couple in a step or blended family frequently cohabits rather than marries.
- Children in step or blended families mainly live with their mother.

- A relatively low percentage of children in step or blended families receive child support (around one in five compared to one in two in lone parent families).
- Financially, step or blended families are better off than lone parent families.
- Rates of substantiated child abuse are higher than expected in step or blended families but there is no evidence that this is due to step parents.
- Detected rates of various mental disorders are at least twice as high among children in step or blended families than in intact families.
Extended families and multifamily households
## Extended families and multifamily households

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6.1 Provide help to relatives living outside household (excluding children aged under 25) 71
While most household families consist of just one family, ties and networks of family members exist beyond the immediate household and remain an important part of the family experience of Australians. The existence of an extended family network beyond the immediate nuclear family and the ability of family members to provide care and support within these extended networks is an important assumption of a great deal of family policy. It is important therefore to have an understanding of these networks.

This chapter describes aspects of multifamily and extended family households and the links between related family members in different households.

Families sharing the same home

What is a multifamily household? A multifamily household contains two or more families. A family, as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, consists of “Two or more persons, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering, and who are usually resident in the same household” (ABS 2001d).

An extended family household consists of one family plus at least one other relative such as a grandparent, aunt, uncle or cousin when these other relatives do not form a separate family unit within the household.

How common are multifamily households?

Multifamily households are unusual in Australia. In 2001:

- Just 1.5 per cent of households were multifamily households.
- 2.5 per cent of families lived in multifamily households.
- 2.2 per cent of the Australian population lived in multifamily households.
- 4.2 per cent of children under the age of 15 who lived with at least one parent lived in an extended family household (that is, a household that included only one family but included relatives other than the child’s immediate family).
- 1.5 per cent of children under the age of 18 who lived in a family lived in a multifamily household (ABS 2001c).
- 10.7 per cent of Indigenous children under 15 lived in a multifamily household and 13.9 per cent lived in a household with a relative beyond their immediate nuclear family (ABS 2001c).
- In 2001, 19.5 per cent of people aged 65 and over who lived in private dwellings lived in a household that contained either one of their children, the family of one of their children, their own parent(s), their grandchildren or other relatives. (ABS 2003e).
- Of people aged 65 and over who lived in private dwellings in 2001, 9.6 per cent lived with relatives but without a partner (ABS 2003e).
- Of children who lived in extended family households, 56 per cent had their grandparents in the household. Of children in multifamily households 71 per cent had their grandparents’ family in the household (ABS 1999d).

Which types of families share the one house?

Most multifamily households consist of related families. In 2001, 93 per cent of multifamily households consisted of related families. Most multifamily households (87.7 per cent) consisted of the families of two adjacent generations – that is, parents and child’s families (ABS 2001c).

Multifamily households are clustered among particular sections of the community and are mainly formed for people at a particular stage of the lifecycle when the standard nuclear, single family household is unable to deal with particular family circumstances (for example, marriage breakdown, elderly and ill older family members). These households are also clustered within particular ethnic groups and among Indigenous Australians where the cultural values, language and economic circumstances promote multifamily household formation.

Lone parent families

Lone parent families are more likely than couple households to live in multifamily households. In 2001, 5.3 per cent of people living in lone parent families with dependent children, lived in a multifamily household compared with just 1.7 per cent of couples with dependent children and 3.2 per cent of couples without children (2001 Census).

The higher rate of lone parent families living as part of multifamily households is likely to be because of the relative poverty in which many lone parent families live (p. 52-4). Sharing households is one way of reducing living expenses. Multifamily households also provide an easier way in which families can share other resources such as child care, skills and company.

Do ethnic and Indigenous families share homes?

Multifamily households are much more common among some groups than others. Indigenous
Australians and Australians born in South East Asia or China are the most likely to live in multifamily households while non Indigenous Australians and those born in the United Kingdom or Western Europe are the least likely to have this living arrangement (Table 6.1).

The pattern whereby people in lone parent families are more likely than those in couple families to live in multifamily households holds for Australian born people (both Indigenous and non Indigenous). For people born in other countries, couples without children were the more likely to live in multifamily households. The reason for the relatively common practice of couples without children living in multifamily households is not entirely clear. It may reflect a pattern where young couples from these ethnic backgrounds live with their parents as they save for a house before they have children or it may reflect older couples living with the families of their adult children.

The lower rate of lone parents living in multifamily households where the reference person was born in Asia, Southern Europe, or the Middle East and North Africa may reflect a cultural disapproval of lone parent families among non Australian born parents. Such disapproval may make co-residence of lone parents too difficult.

Do older people living with grown children?
As people grow older the need to live with their grown children or other relatives can increase due to health reasons – especially if they are living on their own following the death of their partner. However, the bulk of people aged over 65 do not live with their children or other relatives (Table 6.2). In 2001, the majority (80.4 per cent) of people aged over 65 lived with their partner (53.3 per cent) or on their own (27.1 per cent). Just 9 per cent lived with one of their children, grandchildren or other relative; 3.9 per cent lived in some other type of household altogether (including a group household) and 6.7 per cent lived in a non private dwelling (for example, hospital, aged care accommodation, nursing home).

The chances of living with a relative increased as people grew older. Of those aged 65-74, 7.4 per cent lived with one of their children (or their child lived with them) or another relative. However, among those aged 85 or over, almost twice that percentage (13.7 per cent) lived with a child, grandchild or another relative (Table 6.2).

However, from age 65 onwards people are far more likely to live alone than with a child. While 13.7 per cent of those aged 85 or older lived with a child or other relative, 34.7 per cent lived on their own. This should not be interpreted to mean that children are neglecting their responsibilities to older parents. Many older people are able to live independently and prefer to maintain their independence and avoid living with their children. Furthermore, adult children provide a variety of types of care and support to parents even when they do not share the same household.

Do low income families share the one house?
Families with lower incomes are much more likely to live in a multifamily household than those with moderate or higher incomes (Table 6.3). In 2001, of those whose family income was less than $400 per week, 6.2 per cent lived in a multifamily household. This contrasted with just 1.3 per cent of those whose weekly family income was $1500 or higher. This suggests that one way in which families on very low incomes manage is by sharing a household with another family – frequently relatives.

This pattern holds equally for Indigenous and non Indigenous households (Table 6.3). Almost a quarter (22.6 per cent) of Indigenous Australians with a family income below $400 per week lived in multifamily households compared to just 6.5 per cent of Indigenous Australians with a weekly family income in 2001 over $1500.

Families keeping in close contact
Some people use the term “extended family” to refer to family households that consist of family members beyond the members of the immediate nuclear family (for example, grandparents, grandchildren, adult

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of birth (selected countries/regions only)</th>
<th>Couple with children</th>
<th>Couple without children</th>
<th>Lone parent</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian born</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian born, Indigenous</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Asia and China</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Europe</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

siblings, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews). The relative rarity of such families gave rise to the belief that the extended family had largely disappeared and that nuclear families were isolated (Parsons 1943; Lee 1980). However, it quickly became clear that family relationships extended well “beyond the front door” and that family members living in separate households often continued to play a similar role to that played by members of an extended family who lived within the same household. The term “modified extended family” has been coined to refer to these links with family members living outside of the immediate household (Litwak 1960a, 1960b; Sussman 1965).

The operation of modified extended families is apparent in a number of ways including family units living near one another, maintaining contact and helping each other out through various means. How close do family members live to each other?

The Later Life Families Study conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in 1996 asked adults aged between 50 and 70 years of age about the degree of contact they had with their older parents and their adult children. Most people in this age group did not have elderly parents still alive. Of those that did have an elderly parent or parent in law still living, the majority of the parents lived more than 30 minutes travel away from their 50-70 year old child (Table 6.4).

Just over half (54 per cent) of these 50-70 year olds had an adult child living within 30 minutes travel but the rest did not have any adult child living nearby (Table 6.4). In the Australian Living Standards Survey in 1991-92, 56 per cent of families with a child under 18 lived within 30 minutes of at least one parent’s mother and 50 per cent lived within 30 minutes of at least one parent’s father. Furthermore, 64 per cent of families had at least one of the parent’s brothers or sisters living within 30 minutes and 50 per cent had another important relative within the same proximity (Millward, 1996).

How much contact do family members share?

The Later Life Families Study found that adults aged 50-70 had high levels of contact with at least one adult child (Table 6.5). Of these 50-70 year olds, 92 per cent had at least weekly contact with an adult child. Of those with elderly parents still alive, contact with elderly parents was less frequent than with adult children. Sixty five per cent had weekly contact with their elderly mother and 50 per cent had weekly contact with their elderly father.

In the Australian Living Standards Survey, Millward (1996) found that 53 per cent of the families had at least weekly face-to-face contact with at least one parent’s mother and 44 per cent had at least weekly contact with at least one parent’s father. In addition, 69 per cent had at least weekly telephone contact with at least one parent’s mother and 52 per cent with a father. As well as contact with their parents who lived elsewhere, these families maintained high levels of contact with a parent’s siblings.

### Table 6.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living arrangement</th>
<th>65-74 %</th>
<th>75-84 %</th>
<th>85+ %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With partner1</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With child or grandchild or other relative2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone person</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other household</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non private dwelling</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2001 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics customised data cube). Excludes visitors
1 With partner - others may be present
2 No partner present

### Table 6.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Income</th>
<th>$400 - $799</th>
<th>$800 - $1499</th>
<th>$1500 +</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non Indigenous</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 6.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proximity to:</th>
<th>Elderly mother %</th>
<th>Elderly father %</th>
<th>Partner’s parent(s) %</th>
<th>Adult children (living independently) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not alive (or do not have)</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one lives with respondent</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>All live independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one lives within 30 minutes</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They all live further away</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>721</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How much do family members help each other?
The 2002 General Social Survey found that substantial numbers of people provide help to relatives living outside their household. Figure 6.1 shows that a substantial proportion of men and women are providing help to relatives beyond the household. This help peaks among men and women aged between 45 and 65 when approximately a third are providing this type of help. Overall, more than a quarter of adults reported providing help to these extended family members.

According to the General Social Survey, the bulk of support provided is through helping with transport and providing financial assistance.

Most adults (94 per cent) feel that they can obtain support in times of crisis and most of these people (88 per cent) believe that they could rely on family members to help out in a crisis (ABS 2003f).

Older parents continue to provide a great deal of assistance to their grown children in later life. A report to the Economic Planning Advisory Council in 1994 indicated the following levels of support provided by older parents (Table 6.6). Over three quarters of older parents provided child minding and emotional support to their adult children and 61 per cent helped care for members of their adult child’s family in times of illness. Other help was also provided in the form of housing assistance and financial assistance in helping their adult children get established.

The Later Life Families Survey identified high levels of help provided by 50-70 year olds to their adult children (Millward 1998). It found that:

- 91 per cent provided emotional support and help to adult children.
- 72 per cent provided financial assistance to adult children.
- 83 per cent provided other practical help to adult children.

While financial support is one way in which family members help each other out, an important form of inter family support is provided by the unpaid contributions of family members. The financial value of these contributions can be estimated based on the amount of time spent helping family members. The 1997 Time Use Survey allows an estimate to be made of the value of the unpaid work of people to family members living outside of their own household (de Vaas, Gray and Stanton 2003).

On average each woman provided $800 worth of unpaid help per year to family members living...
elsewhere while men provided approximately $484 each per year (Table 6.7). As with financial forms of help (Figure 6.1) the value of the unpaid work to family members beyond the household peaks among women aged 45-64 and men aged 55-74. It is likely that these peaks in unpaid work reflect the periods of life when parents are providing assistance to adult children who have left home and to older parents who may need some support.

Further evidence of the degree to which the families of adults help each other is discussed in sections below.

**Who has the stronger family networks?**

The evidence discussed so far shows that many families have significant ongoing links with their wider families. However, it is also clear that not all people have these extended family ties. This section explores some of the factors associated with the existence of strong extended family ties.

**Does family type affect family networks?**

The family type in which a person lives can have an impact on the availability of extended family networks as can family disruptions such as divorce.

**Does parental divorce disrupt family networks?**

The 1990 Family Formation Study conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies found that compared to parents whose marriage was “intact” (Table 6.8):

- Divorced parents were a little more likely to receive financial help from their adult children.
- Widowed parents were no more likely to receive financial help.
- Widowed mothers (but not fathers) received more emotional help, help around the house and practical help.
- In general widowed fathers received about the same level of help as intact parents except for practical help where they received less help.

As far as parents giving help to adult children was concerned, the study showed that compared to intact parents:

- Divorced parents gave less help with home renovation, child care, help during illness and help with tertiary education.
- Widowed mothers gave about the same level of help as intact parents except for help with home renovations.
- Widowed fathers gave less help during illness and less emotional support to their adult children.

Overall:

- Widowed mothers received more help but did not give more help than intact parents.
- Widowed fathers gave a little less help and received about the same help as intact parents.
- Divorced parents did not receive extra help and gave less help than intact parents.

The 1996 Later Life Families study found that older people who had been divorced or separated had less frequent contact with their adult children. Of divorced and separated older people, 17 per cent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.7</th>
<th>Annual per capita value ($) of unpaid work to family members outside own household by gender and age, Australia 1997 (1997 dollars)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Household work</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 plus</td>
<td>489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child care</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 plus</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adult care</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 plus</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Volunteer work</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 plus</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total unpaid work</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>1,089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>1,820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 plus</td>
<td>739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Household work is defined to include food and drink preparation and clean-up, laundry, ironing and clothes care, other housework, gardening and lawn care, cleaning grounds and pet care, home maintenance, household management and purchasing.
had less than weekly contact with an adult child compared to 10 per cent of widowed older people and 6 per cent of married older people (Millward, 1998a). This same study showed that:

- Parents who had not divorced were twice as likely as those who had divorced to receive emotional support from a grown child.
- Parents who had not divorced were 1.7 times more likely to receive practical help than were other parents (Millward 1997).

The amount of help exchanged between older people and their grown children varied according to whether parents had divorced, and if they had divorced, whether or not they had repartnered. The list below indicates the circumstances in which help was exchanged between older people and their grown children. The list is ordered from circumstances where most help was exchanged through to those where least help was exchanged (Millward 1998):

- Mothers who were widowed and not repartnered.
- Mothers who were still married to the adult child’s father.
- Mothers who were divorced or separated, but not repartnered.
- Fathers who were still married to the adult child’s mother.
- Mothers who had divorced or separated and were repartnered.
- Fathers who were divorced or separated, but not repartnered.
- Fathers who had divorced or separated and were repartnered.

Do lone parent families have close ties with kin?
Due to having only one parent in the home to care for children, lone parents may need to rely on their relatives for assistance more than couple parents. The Australian Living Standards Study found that lone mothers were more likely than couple mothers to live within a 30 minute drive of some extended family members – especially parents and siblings (Table 6.9). Lone mothers also maintained more face-to-face contact with these parents and siblings than did couple mothers.

However, these figures will underestimate the contact that couple mothers have with relatives overall since couple mothers are likely to have contact with their in-laws.

Are extended family networks closer when children are young?
Mothers have more contact with their own parents when their children are young. Contact declines as

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.8</th>
<th>Exchange of help by parental marital status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents intact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help to parents</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Around the house</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During illness</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical help</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help from parents</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any financial</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial help with tertiary education</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renovating</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During illness</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minding children</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1992 Family Formation Study (Rezak 2002).
These percentages are based on Multiple Classification Analysis in which the following variables were controlled: parental age, mother’s education, and offspring’s gender, age, marital status, number of siblings, hours worked, having children, income, whether born in Australia and co-residence with parent. * p<.05; ** p<.01, *** p<.001. These significance levels indicate that the percentage is significantly different from the percentage for parents from an intact marriage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.9</th>
<th>Extended family ties of lone and couple mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Couple mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives within 30 minute drive of</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearest sibling</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees in person at least weekly</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearest sibling</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Living Standards Study (Millward 1996). 
N= Lone mothers=545-561 depending on relative and question 
Couple mothers= between 2573 to 3619 depending on question and relative
children get older. This decline is probably because grandparents play a bigger role in families when their grandchildren are pre-schoolers.

The Australian Living Standards Study also indicates that mothers had most contact with their parents and other nominated extended family members when they had a pre-schooler (Table 6.10). These daughters had the most regular contact with their mothers followed by contact with their father and siblings (child’s aunts or uncles). In general, once the youngest child went to primary school at age five, contact with these relatives declined but remained stable thereafter.

There was very little difference in the level of contact that working and non working mothers maintained with their parents and relatives – even when their children were of similar age. For example, 62 per cent of not employed mothers with a pre-schooler saw their child’s grandmother at least weekly compared to 58 per cent of employed mothers who did so.

### Are family networks closer in rural areas?

It is often thought that family ties in the country are closer than those in the city. However, migration of younger people away from rural areas means that it may be difficult for extended family ties to survive the dislocation of this movement of people with young families. Evidence from the Australian Living Standards Study indicates that rural people are a little less likely to have their parents living nearby and are less likely to see them regularly. Table 6.11 shows that adults in the city live closer to their mother than those who live in the country and that they have more regular contact than do their rural counterparts.

Further evidence from the Australian Living Standards Study indicated that within cities those people living in the outer suburbs lived closest to their parents and relatives and had the most regular contact with them. Adults living in the inner city or middle suburbs resembled the contact patterns of people living in the country. This means that families in the outer or “fringe” suburbs maintained family ties with extended family members more than did those living elsewhere. This pattern casts some doubt on the image of the isolated nuclear family inhabiting the outer suburbs while those in the more densely settled inner areas or in the more traditional rural areas maintain close family ties. One of the reasons for this is the family dislocation often experienced by large numbers of migrants in inner city areas.

### Do older family members receive more help than they give?

The need for and ability to provide help varies over the life course. At some points parents are able to help out their adult children while at other life stages the flow of assistance is reversed. In 1992 the Australian Bureau of Statistics Family Survey focused on the patterns of mutual help among related families. Table 6.12 shows the various ages at which support is given and received between adults and their parents.

The pattern of helping between the generations reported in Table 6.11 has a number of important features.

- The balance of the flow of transfers, favours children rather than older parents: adult children were more likely to have received help from their older parents than to have given them help. For example, in the period covered by the Family Survey (ABS 1998a) the parents of about 20 per cent of adult children (with children aged under 12) were the main providers of informal child care; 11 per cent of parents reported providing income support to children; and 9 per cent of adults received accommodation support from their parents. By comparison, parents received relatively low levels of support from their grown children. Only 8.5 per cent of parents received...
any personal care or home help, and just under 4 per cent received regular transport support.

- Adult children received most support from their parents when they were in their twenties and thirties – the ages at which they were getting educated and established.

- Parental provision of support to their adult children was highest when they (the parents) were in their fifties and sixties, although this support can extend into their early seventies.

- Because they may have several children, parents may be providing support to adult children for an extended period. They were supporting one adult child or another for a more extended period than adult children provide support to their parents. Support for parents was concentrated in the time when they were aged over 75 years (the age after which declines in physical health tend to accelerate).

- There is evidence of a “sandwich generation” dimension to intergenerational support (Brody 1990). Many people in their fifties to seventies are both a parent of an adult child and an adult child of an elderly parent. Between the ages of 50–74, as parents, they were most likely to be helping their adult children, and as adult children they were most likely to be helping their elderly parents.

**Are women the kin-keepers?**

Women are more active than men in maintaining contact with the extended family. For this reason women have often been described as the “kin-keepers”. This tendency is evident in the results from the Australian Living Standards Study shown in Table 6.13.

Three points stand out in Table 6.13:

- Females had a higher rate of face-to-face and telephone contact with extended family members than did males.

- Mothers and daughters had the most frequent contact – 46 per cent saw each other at least weekly and 65 per cent had at least weekly telephone contact.

- Fathers had more contact with their daughters than with their sons.

Despite the greater contact between daughters and their parents, daughters did not live any closer to their parents than did sons. Forty-six per cent of women lived within 30 minutes of their parents compared to 44 per cent of men. However, in country areas men were more likely than women to live near their parents (Millward 1996).

**Older people and gender**

The Australian Institute of Family Studies Later Life Families Survey highlighted the important part played by extended family ties in later life. It identified some of the ways in which these family relationships differed for men and women.

While the majority of both older men and women rated their contact with their family as important, women rated these family ties as more important. Of older women, 84 per cent compared to 64 per cent of men rated these extended family ties as extremely important to them.

Female family members and relatives helped each other quite a lot. In later life, women are more likely than men both to give and receive emotional and practical help with their adult children. Equally, women at this stage of life are more likely than men to be giving support to, and receiving emotional and practical support from, parents in law. Women are also more likely, in later life, to be receiving financial help from their adult children. The only area in which men seemed to be more

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of support</th>
<th>Parents provide support (years)</th>
<th>Children receive support (years)</th>
<th>Children provide support (years)</th>
<th>Parents receive support (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>50–74</td>
<td>20–39</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>50–74</td>
<td>20–39</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>40–59</td>
<td>20–29</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>20–29</td>
<td>40–29</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50–74</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>75+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal care/home help</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** 1992 Survey of Australian Families (de Vaus and Qu 1998).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Has at least weekly face-to-face contact</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearest sibling</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other important relative</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Has at least weekly telephone contact</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearest sibling</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other important relative</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Australian Living Standards Study (Millward 1996).
active than women was in providing financial support to adult children (Table 6.14).

Furthermore, daughters were more likely than sons to be called on to provide help in times of illness or as someone in whom to confide (Table 6.15). For example, 50 per cent of the mothers in the Later Life Survey said they would seek their daughter’s help if ill (compared with 30 per cent who would seek their son’s help) and 35 per cent would choose their daughter to confide in (compared with 18 per cent for sons).

Although fathers were less likely than mothers to seek help from their children if ill or to confide in (they were more likely than women to have a partner) they were still more likely to rely on their daughters than their sons.

Do migrants have stronger extended family ties?

Census data discussed earlier indicated that multi-family and extended family households are more common among families from particular ethnic backgrounds. To what extent does the same pattern apply to the development of the modified extended family?

According to the Australian Living Standards Study, families from a non English-speaking background had less contact with extended family members than those from an English speaking background. Those from a non English speaking background were less likely than others to live near their parents and other relatives and were less likely to speak regularly to their parents on the phone (Millward, 1996). However, non English speaking background adults were about as likely to see their parents as other migrant families (Table 6.16).

This pattern regarding families from non English-speaking backgrounds does not fit with the common conception of tightly knit families from these backgrounds. One reason for this is that migration has disrupted extended family ties in many cases. In many cases, parents and siblings are simply not available for day-to-day contact or to provide any hands-on support. When these other family members had migrated and were thus

---

**Table 6.14** Reciprocity of support between generations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of help</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th></th>
<th>Financial</th>
<th></th>
<th>Practical</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men %</td>
<td>Women %</td>
<td>Men %</td>
<td>Women %</td>
<td>Men %</td>
<td>Women %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support to adult children</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from adult children</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support to parents/in-laws</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from parents/in-laws</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


---

**Table 6.15** Reliance on sons and daughters in later life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If ill</th>
<th>To confide in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


---

**Table 6.16** Links with specified family members among migrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Migrants from</th>
<th>English speaking background</th>
<th>Non English speaking background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Live within 30 minute drive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearest sibling</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other important relative</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See in person at least weekly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearest sibling</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other important relative</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak on telephone at least weekly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearest sibling</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other important relative</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Living Standards Study (Millward 1996).

---

**Table 6.17** Links with parents among migrants whose parents have also migrated to Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Migrants from</th>
<th>English speaking background</th>
<th>Non English speaking background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>See in person at least weekly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak on telephone at least weekly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Living Standards Study (Millward 1996).
potentially available for this type of interaction, families from non English-speaking backgrounds showed a much higher rate of contact with parents – especially face-to-face contact (Table 6.17). Of these families where parents had also migrated to Australia, 72 per cent had at least weekly contact with their mother. This is much higher than the rate of contact among those from English-speaking countries (56 per cent) and those who were born in Australia where less than 50 per cent had weekly contact with their mother.

The Australian Family Survey in 1992 found real differences in the patterns of adults and their parents helping each other depending on their ethnic background. This was especially the case when comparing Australians born in Southern Europe, the Middle East or Asia with other Australians. Compared with other Australians, adults from these regions were:

- Less likely to provide personal care/home help to their parents;
- Less likely to get child care help from their parents;
- More likely to be giving their parents financial support – possibly sending money back home to help their parents in their old age.

These differences probably reflect the fact that many adults from these regions have disrupted family ties where parents are simply not available to help in these ways. (de Vaus and Qu 1998).

### Endnotes

1 Household might also contain the older person’s partner.
2 Some of those who lived with a partner will also have had a child, grandchild or other relative in the household. The classification of children or other relative includes only those people who lived with these relatives without their partner.
3 Support includes giving money for rent and/or other housing costs, for bills or to meet debts, providing or paying for food and clothing, assistance with transport, helping with education expenses, providing regular income and purchasing big cost items such as a car or computer.

### Highlights

- Nationally, just 1.8 per cent of households contain two or more families.
- Lone parent families are much more likely than couple families to live in a multifamily household. In 2001, 5.3 per cent of people living in a lone parent family lived in a multifamily household compared with just 1.7 per cent of those from couple families with dependent children. Indigenous Australians live in multifamily households at a much higher rate than the Australian population overall. Of Indigenous Australians 12.6 per cent were living in a multifamily household at the time of the 2001 census. This compares to 2.1 per cent of all Australian born people.
- Australians born in Asia, Southern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa all had higher rates of multifamily household living than did non Indigenous Australian born people.
- Relatively few older people live with their adult children. The highest rate of living with adult children was among those aged 85 or older where 12 per cent of those in this age group lived with an adult child or grandchild.
- Multifamily household living is considerably more common among low income families.
- Even though it is relatively unusual for adults and their older parents to live together there is strong evidence of active links being maintained between family units. These links help maintain a “modified extended family”.

- Most older people maintain regular contact with at least some adult children, provide support to these adult children and receive some support from them.
- Parental divorce appears to weaken the linkages between adults and their parents.
- Lone mothers appear to have more involvement with their own parents, particularly their mother, than do couple parents.
- Adults living in rural areas seem to have more limited contact with their parents and adult children than those living in urban areas.
- As far as transfers between adults and older parents are concerned, the evidence points to parents providing considerable help and support to their adult children. The balance of transfers between adult children and their older parents favours the adult children.
- Female family members are the most active in maintaining links between members of the extended family. Mother-daughter ties appear to be more active than those between mothers and sons or between fathers and their sons and daughters.
- Those people who were born overseas, overall, have less active links with older parents than those born in Australia. This is mainly because migration has disrupted these family ties. However, adult migrants from a non English speaking background who have parents living in Australia maintain active ties with these older parents.
7
Same-sex couples
7 Same-sex couples

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In recent times there has been increasing discussion of same-sex couples and the place of same-sex marriage. Some fostering agencies are now actively recruiting same-sex couples as carers and developments in reproductive technology have opened up new options for a woman in a lesbian relationship to have children.

What does the law say?

Australia, like most other countries, does not recognise same-sex marriages. The Marriage Act of 1961 specifies that marriage is a union between a man and a woman. Only the Netherlands currently recognises marriages of same-sex couples although a number of other countries such as Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the state of Vermont in the United States and some Canadian provinces allow for registration of same-sex partnerships as a form of legal recognition (Caruana 2002). However the situation in many of these, and other countries, is in the process of change.

Except as far as children are concerned, the Family Law Act does not apply to de facto relationships, regardless of whether they are heterosexual or homosexual relationships. Throughout Australia, de facto relationships are governed by state based, rather than Commonwealth law. These state based laws can govern matters such as property adjustments following relationship breakdown, the enforcement of cohabitation agreements and spousal maintenance.

Since financial adjustments in de facto relationships are governed by state based laws, the treatment of same-sex relationships differs between states. In Western Australia, recent reforms to the Family Court Act mean that as far as their children, property, maintenance and financial agreements are concerned, de facto couples, including same-sex couples, are treated in the same way as married couples.

The Tasmanian Government Relationships (Consequential amendments) Bill has recently allowed for the registration of same-sex relationships as from January 2004. This Bill extends a range of benefits to same-sex partners including the right to adopt their partner’s children, have access to their superannuation, provide authority for medical treatment and inherit.

In other states different provisions apply. The laws relating to financial matters after separation in the Northern Territory and South Australia that apply to heterosexual de facto couples do not apply to same-sex couples. The ACT, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia and New South Wales treat same-sex couples in the same way as other de facto relationships. These states do not confer on de facto couples the same rights as Commonwealth law applies to married couples.

In all states except Western Australia and Tasmania, state laws do not allow for the adoption of children by same-sex couples. All other matters relating to disputes about children after separation are governed by the Commonwealth Family Law Act regardless of the marital status or sexual orientation of parents. Nevertheless, children of same-sex couples are treated in different ways to opposite-sex couples under some circumstances. Specifically, in cases of donor insemination the consenting male partner of a woman who undergoes an artificial conception procedure is regarded as the parent of the child. This same presumption does not apply to the lesbian partner of a woman who conceives in the same way (Caruana 2002). The main exception to this rule is in Western Australia where the new definition of “de facto” contained in the Acts Amendment (Lesbian and Gay Law Reform) Act 2002 (WA) accords lesbian parents who conceive by way of donor insemination and assisted reproductive technologies, the same legal status as heterosexual couples.

How common are same-sex couples?

There is a lack of representative information regarding same-sex couples and households. One source is the 2001 Census. The census form provided same-sex couples with the opportunity to identify as being in a same-sex relationship with someone in the same household. Using 2001 Census figures, only a very small proportion of household based couples declared themselves as a same-sex couple. Of all couples, just under half of 1 per cent were same-sex couples – 0.26 per cent were gay couples and 0.21 per cent were lesbian couples (Table 7.1). Except for those in their early twenties, same-sex couples appeared a little more common among men than among women. These Australian figures are similar to those obtained in the most recent Canadian Census which estimated a prevalence of 0.5 per cent of same sex couples (Ambert 2003). The 2000 US Census estimated that one 1 per cent of all couples sharing a household (married + cohabiting) were same-sex couples (Ambert 2003).

For a variety of reasons, including the way in which same-sex couples are identified in the Census, the census figures are likely to underestimate, to an unknown extent, the number of such couples (ABS 2003g). Using a different methodology, estimates
of same sex-couples can be made from the Australian Study of Health and Relationships – a national probability sample of 19,000 cases from Australian population age 16-59. These estimates are derived from questions about whether the survey respondent had a regular sexual partner with whom they lived.

After weighting the sample data to reflect the population aged 16-59 years as enumerated by the 2001 Census it has been estimated that there are 28,144 female same-sex couples and 41,535 male same-sex couples (Smith 2003). These estimates compare with 9,840 male same-sex couples and 8,312 female same-sex couples identified in the 2001 census. Based on the Australian Study of Health and Relationships, estimates of all couples living in the same household and aged 16-59, 2.2 per cent are same-sex couples, 1.3 per cent are male same-sex couples and 0.9 per cent are female same-sex couples (Smith 2003).

The figures reported below are based on figures from the 2001 Census. In interpreting these, the likely underestimates must be taken into consideration. The figures, however, provide a sense of the relationship between acknowledging living in a same-sex relationship and a range of characteristics. There is no particular reason to expect that the underestimates provided by the Census will distort the patterns evident in the tables that follow.

Same-sex relationships were considerably more common among younger people, with the highest percentage occurring among couples in the 20-24 year old age group where 1.1 per cent identified as same-sex. Of couples in their late twenties and their thirties around 0.9 per cent were same-sex.

The older a person was the less likely they were to be in a household based same-sex relationship. The extent to which this pattern reflects a growing number of same-sex relationships among younger people or a greater reluctance of older same-sex couples to self declare is impossible to say.

A different way of looking at the link between age group and the type of relationship in which people live is to examine the percentage of a particular couple type that are in specific age groups.

Figure 7.1 highlights the pattern for same-sex couples to be much more likely than opposite-sex couples to be younger. Around 20 per cent of gay and lesbian couples were in their twenties compared to just 11 per cent of heterosexual couples. A similar pattern is evident for those in their thirties – about 37 per cent of gay and lesbian couples are in their thirties compared to 23 per cent of heterosexual couples. The opposite pattern held among older people. Of gay and lesbian couples just 13 per cent were in their fifties compared to 20 per cent of heterosexual couples.

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<tr>
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<tr>
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Do many same-sex couples have children? 
Same-sex couples may have children living with them. To date most of these children have been born into a previous heterosexual relationship (McNair et al. 2002) but increasingly there is the possibility of using new reproductive technologies to conceive a child outside of a heterosexual relationship.

It is hardly surprising that heterosexual couples are more likely than homosexual couples to have children living with them. Table 7.2, however, indicates that close to one in five lesbian couples has a child living with them. A much smaller proportion of gay couples – less than 5 per cent – has a child living with them. McNair et al. (2002) have explored the circumstances and aspirations of lesbian couples with children in much more detail.

These figures can be compared to those in North America. The 1990 US Census estimated that 22 per cent of lesbian headed households and 6 per cent of gay headed households had a child under 18 (Black et al., 2000). The 2001 Canadian Census produced a figure of 15 per cent of lesbian couple households and 3 per cent of gay couple households with children. These figures, like the Australian figures, do not include lesbian or gay individuals with children living with them (Ambert 2003.)

Who are the same-sex couples?

Are same-sex couples more highly educated than opposite-sex couples?

Gay and lesbian couples tend to be much more highly educated than heterosexual couples (Figure 7.2). Of self-reported homosexual couples in the 2001 Census, gay men living as a couple were twice as likely as men in heterosexual couples to have a degree or higher qualification (33.2 per cent compared with 16.6). Women in lesbian couple relationships were even more highly educated with 41.2 per cent having a degree or higher qualification compared with 17 per cent for heterosexual couple women.

What are the professions of same-sex couples?

The occupational profile of those living in a gay or lesbian relationship is different from those in heterosexual relationships in some notable respects (Table 7.3). Those in gay or lesbian couples are much more likely than heterosexual couples to work in professional occupations. For example, almost 38 per cent of those living in a lesbian relationship and 31 per cent of those in a gay relationship had a professional occupation. This compares with just under 20 per cent of those in a heterosexual relationship who worked in a professional job.

In contrast, a relatively small percentage of those in gay or lesbian relationships worked in blue collar jobs (10.5 per cent of lesbians and 12.5 per cent of gays) compared to those in a heterosexual relationship where 28.4 per cent worked in blue collar jobs.

Do same-sex couples earn higher incomes than opposite-sex couples?

Consistent with their higher educational and occupational profiles, those living in gay and lesbian relationships tend to have much higher income levels than the typical person in a heterosexual relationship (Table 7.4).

Men living in gay relationships are more likely than those in heterosexual couples to be in the highest income bracket.
income group (30 per cent compared with 23 per cent). Conversely, relative to men in heterosexual relationships, gay men are unlikely to be in the lowest income groups. Women in lesbian relationships are much more likely than women in heterosexual relationships to have high incomes. Of women in a lesbian relationship, 23 per cent were in the highest income group compared to just 7 per cent of women in heterosexual relationships. Part of the reason for this discrepancy is that a greater proportion of women in heterosexual relationships have younger children and work part time.

**Are same-sex couples mainly from Anglo backgrounds?**

The country in which people are born bears some relationship to whether or not they live in a homosexual or heterosexual relationship – no doubt partly a reflection of the acceptability of gay and lesbian relationships within different cultural groups. The clearest differences are:

- Women in lesbian relationships are more likely to be Australian born than are either men in gay relationships or men and women in heterosexual relationships (Table 7.5).
- Men and women in gay or lesbian relationships were more likely than those in heterosexual relationships to have been born in New Zealand and North America (Table 7.5).
- Relative to those in heterosexual relationships, those in gay or lesbian relationships were very unlikely to have been born in Southern Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, developing South East Asian countries, China and Southern Asia (Table 7.5).

**Do same-sex couples have religious affiliations?**

Men and women living in a gay or lesbian relationship are much less likely than those in heterosexual relationships to acknowledge a religious affiliation. For example, 17 per cent of those in a lesbian relationship said they were Anglicans compared to 25 per cent of those in a heterosexual relationship. Similarly, 20 per cent of those in a lesbian couple said they were Catholics compared to 29 per cent of those in heterosexual relationships (Table 7.6).

The difference between those in homosexual and heterosexual relationships was more marked for the smaller religious groups. Eight per cent of those...
living in a heterosexual relationship said they belonged to the Uniting Church compared to just 4 per cent and 4.7 per cent of those in gay or lesbian relationships respectively. A similar pattern occurs for virtually all religions except for Jewish where the proportion of homosexuals who were Jewish was slightly higher than among heterosexuals.

The converse of this pattern is that those living in homosexual relationships were much more likely than those in heterosexual relationships to acknowledge no religious affiliation. Of gay men and lesbian women 40 per cent said they had no religious affiliation – over two and a half times higher than those living in a heterosexual relationship (14.8 per cent) (Table 7.6).

What do Australians think of same-sex couples?

Our knowledge of attitudes regarding same-sex relationships is patchy but the general picture is that the typical Australian is strongly opposed to homosexuality. Nevertheless, opinions are strongly polarised and the available evidence suggests that this opposition is declining (Kelley 2001).

The limited available survey evidence is of a generally negative view towards homosexuality and to gay and lesbian couples having the same legal status as married couples or being able to adopt children. Depending on the particular question asked, between 60 and 70 per cent of Australian adults are opposed to homosexuality – or at least were opposed when the surveys were conducted at various points in the 1990s (Table 7.7).³

The recent 2003 Australian Social Attitudes Survey indicated that 43 per cent of adults regard a same-sex couple with children as a family (compared with 98.8 per cent in relation to unmarried heterosexual couples with children). Just 19.5 per cent regarded a same-sex couple without children as a family compared with 32.5 per cent who regard a unmarried heterosexual couple without children as a family.

Table 7.7 shows an interesting gender difference in relation to attitudes towards male and female homosexuality. Men, but not women, distinguish between male and female homosexuality. Men condemned male homosexuality more than women did but men and women were indistinguishable in their attitudes to female homosexuality, with 66 per cent of both men and women condemning female homosexuality. Men condemned male homosexuality more than they condemned female homosexuality while women condemned male and female homosexuality to the same extent (Table 7.7).

The greater opposition to homosexuality among men than women was not even across all age groups. It was greatest among younger people where men were considerably more opposed to homosexuality than were young women. This gender gap tapered off so that among those over 50, men and women were virtually indistinguishable in their attitudes to homosexuality.

The older people were, the more likely they were to oppose homosexuality, the legal recognition of homosexual relationships, homosexual adoption or regarding a same-sex couple with children as a family. About 90 per cent of those aged 60 or over,
compared with 60 per cent of those under 40, believed that male homosexuality is always wrong. Almost 90 per cent of those aged 60 or over compared with only 55 per cent of those in their twenties, opposed homosexuals being able to adopt children.

While there is a generally negative attitude towards homosexuality in Australia, the population is quite polarised in its views. In his analysis of changing attitudes Kelley (2001) points out that:

“Australians are either unambiguously tolerant or unambiguously censorious, with very few holding ambivalent or nuanced views in the middle” (p. 15).

Despite the generally negative attitudes, there is some evidence that Australians are becoming more tolerant of homosexuality. Although the figures reported in Table 7.8 are not just about homosexual couples or views about same-sex families, it is likely that attitudes about homosexuality in general can be extended to homosexual families.

Surveys conducted at different times can give some idea of changes in attitudes to homosexuality. However, care must be taken in comparing different surveys at different times as differences in question wording and sampling can be responsible for some of the apparent differences. Nevertheless, considerable change in attitudes appears to have taken place. In 1989-90 the National Social Science Survey found that 72 per cent of adults thought that sex between two men was always wrong and 66 per cent thought that sex between two women was always wrong. Similar questions in the 2001 Australian Study of Health and Relationships indicated disapproval levels of 32 per cent and 23 per cent respectively (Table 7.7). In 2003, 47 per cent disagreed with the law recognising same-sex relationships while in 1995, 63 per cent were opposed to treating a same-sex couple the same as a married couple. Certainly, the much more accepting attitudes of younger people suggests that, over time, there will be much greater acceptance of same-sex relationships.

Table 7.8 shows responses to the same question on two surveys conducted about 15 years apart. Attitudes have become less opposed to homosexuality. That sex between two women was always wrong. Similar questions in the 2001 Australian Study of Health and Relationships indicated disapproval levels of 32 per cent and 23 per cent respectively (Table 7.7). In 2003, 47 per cent disagreed with the law recognising same-sex relationships while in 1995, 63 per cent were opposed to treating a same-sex couple the same as a married couple. Certainly, the much more accepting attitudes of younger people suggests that, over time, there will be much greater acceptance of same-sex relationships.

Endnotes
1 24,939 identified as lesbian and 3,205 as bisexual.
2 29,796 identified as gay and 11,730 as bisexual.
3 The discussion relating to the some of figures in Table 7.7 is drawn from de Vaus (1997a).
• Declared same-sex couples in the 2001 census represent a very small proportion of all couples – just under 0.5 per cent of all household couples.

• Estimates of same-sex couples from the Australian Study of Health and Relationships are that 2.2 per cent of household based couples are same-sex couples.

• Children are present in approximately one in five households of lesbian couples but in less than 5 per cent of those of gay couples.

• Compared to heterosexual couples, same-sex couples are much more likely to:
  - be younger;
  - be employed in professional occupations;
  - have a degree or higher educational qualification;
  - have a relatively high income;
  - be born in Australia (lesbian couples only), New Zealand or North America;
  - have no religious affiliation.

• Although homosexuality continues to be opposed by significant sections of society there appears to be far more acceptance of homosexuality in 2001 than just ten or 15 years earlier.

• There appears to be growing support for the legal recognition of same-sex relationships. However, there is a polarisation of views with very few people holding a position between strong approval and strong condemnation.
Adoption and adoptive families
8  Adoption and adoptive families

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For a variety of reasons some birth parents do not raise their children. These reasons include parental death, incapacity, insufficient resources and forced removal of children. The care of these children has been managed in a variety of ways over the years. Although institutional care was once a common solution, contemporary approaches emphasise either supporting the birth parents to care for their children or arranging for foster care or adoption. Guardianship and permanent protective care orders are other means by which the care of children is managed.

It is difficult to obtain reliable or complete statistics regarding the number of children being cared for by people other than their birth parents. Adoption was once a common means of caring for children but precise statistics regarding levels of adoption in the past are difficult to obtain. In addition to formal adoption there was undoubtedly some level of informal, unrecorded adoption. Most children who were available for adoption had been relinquished by their birth parents. Some children were removed from their parents based on beliefs and assessments that the children were at risk. While some such children were subsequently placed for adoption many were placed in state care or placed in foster care arrangements.

Traditionally adoption has been a means of dealing with two problems. On the one hand adoption provided a means of caring for children when birth parents could not provide it due to death, incapacity or the judgement by others that parents could not provide adequate care. On the other hand, adoption provided an option for adults who, for one reason or another were unable or unwilling, to bring up their own children.

**Is adoption disappearing?**

Historically adoption has been an important means of family formation and for caring for children where their parents were not in a position to provide care. Adoption requires two conditions to be satisfied: (1) children must be available for adoption (2) suitable people must want to adopt the available children.

Since 1970 adoption has become increasingly rare. In 1971-72, 9,798 children were adopted. Since then the number of children adopted each year has dropped steadily to just 561 in 2001-02 (Figure 8.1 AIHW 2002a).

The frequency of adoption has declined since 1970 for a variety of reasons. The single most important reason is that fewer children are available for adoption because of changed attitudes to single parenthood. Where it was once unacceptable for a young, unmarried woman to keep her child it is now much more acceptable to have children without being married (p. 202). In addition, birth control and the availability of abortion both mean that the frequency of unwanted pregnancies has declined since the early 1960s (p. 194).

Fewer children are now available for adoption, also because it is now financially more feasible for a young, unmarried woman to keep her child. Welfare support provides a means to assist with the care of young children without the need to relinquish a child.

Another reason why fewer children are available for adoption is because of changed arrangements for protective care of at risk children. Where at risk children were once made available for adoption, in
some jurisdictions (for example, Victoria) these children are now more likely to be managed under Permanent Protection Orders. Furthermore, in some Australian states step parents are encouraged to use arrangements other than adoption (Bentley and Broadbent 1997). This in turn reduced the level of “known person” adoptions (see below).

**How do Australian adoption trends compare internationally?**

Australian trends have closely mirrored British trends. In 1967, in England and Wales almost 25,000 children were adopted. By 1987 this had dropped to 7,500 and to about 4,500 by 1997. In the United States it is very difficult to obtain reliable up-to-date figures since there has been no compulsory national collection of data since 1992 (Stolley, 1993). The indications however, are that there has been a decline in adoptions but nothing like as sharp as in Australia and the UK. In 1970, 170,000 children were adopted in the US (Maza 1994). By 1992, the last year in which full national data were collected, this had declined to 127,000 (Flango, 1995). The best evidence is that this figure has remained stable throughout the 1990s (National Adoption Clearinghouse).

**Types of adoption**

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare compiles the Australian adoption statistics. It classifies adoptions into two broad types: (1) Placement adoptions (2) Known child adoptions.

**Placement adoptions** are those where a child is made available for adoption and agencies then place that child with an appropriate family. The adoptive family normally has had no prior contact with the adopted child. Placement adoptions are sub-classified as (1) Local placements where the child comes from within Australia (2) Inter-country placements where the child comes from a country other than Australia (Figure 8.2).

**Known child adoptions** are those in which the adopting parent has had prior contact with the child and knows the child. Normally the child is not available for adoption by other people. Typically these adoptions are adoptions by the child’s relatives or step parent.

Placement adoptions represent the majority of adoptions. In 2001-02, 71 per cent (401) of adoptions were placement adoptions and 29 per cent (160) were known child adoptions. Of the placements, 27 per cent (107) were local placements and 73 per cent were (294) were inter-country adoptions.

Known child adoptions now represent just a small proportion of all adoptions. In 2001-02 only 29 per cent (160) of adoptions were known child adoptions and most of these were adoptions by a step parent (64 per cent) (AIHW 2002a).

**Inter-country adoptions**

The decline in adoptions would have been sharper than it has been, had it not been for a rise in inter-country adoptions after 1970. Inter-country adoptions grew in the early 1970s due to the availability of children to adopt following the wars and disruptions in South East Asia at the time and due to the decline in local children being placed for adoption (Figure 8.3). By 2001-02 inter-country placement adoptions were the single most common type of adoption arrangement.

The main countries from which inter-country adoptees came in 2001-02 were:

- South Korea 32 per cent.
- Ethiopia 12 per cent.
- India 14 per cent.
- China 13 per cent.
- Thailand 10 per cent.
- Philippines 4 per cent.

![Figure 8.2 Types of adoption in Australia, 2001-02](image-url)
Birth mothers, adopting families and adoptees

Who are the relinquishing birth mothers?

Of the local birth mothers who placed their child for adoption in 2001-02 (AIHW 2002a):

- 17 per cent were teenagers.
- 34 per cent were in their early twenties and 20 per cent were in their late twenties.
- 22 per cent were in their thirties.
- 93 per cent were not married.

Who adopts children?

Most adoptive parents in local and international adoptions (94 per cent) in 2001-02 were married couples. Just 3 per cent were de facto couples and 4 per cent were single.

Adoptive parents are, on average older than parents who bear their own children which suggests that in many cases adoption is the solution after unsuccessful attempts to have their own biological children.

- Most adoptive mothers (81 per cent) were aged 35 and over, and over half (52 per cent) were aged over 40 years.
- Over half the adoptive fathers (54 per cent) were over 40 years old and 25 per cent were 45 years or older.
- Most children were adopted to families either that had no other children (64 per cent) or had only other adoptive children (16 per cent) while 19 per cent had their own biological children (Figure 8.4).

Placement adoptions are more likely to be by families from more financially advantaged backgrounds.

What types of children are available for adoption?

- 83 per cent of placement adoptions (local and inter-country) were aged under one year of age.
- 73 per cent of known child adoptions were aged between 5 and 14 years.
- Equal proportions of male and female children were adopted.
- Almost no Indigenous children were adopted. In 2001-02, only six Indigenous children were adopted.
Do adopted children have much contact with their birth mother?

Early adoption legislation in Australia was based on the clean and complete break philosophy that there should be no contact between the relinquishing parents and the relinquished child. The legislative provisions ensured that neither the parent nor the child would have any knowledge of each other. However, since the 1980s the assumption that secrecy and non contact was desirable has been challenged and provisions have been enacted to allow for information to be shared about the birth parents and the relinquished child. It is now possible for the two parties to establish contact with each other (Boss 1995).

However, the provisions also allow the birth parent or adopted child to “veto” any information sharing or contact. That is, birth parents can indicate to agencies that should the child seek information or contact that no information or contact details be provided. Adopted children and other relevant people (for example, adoptive parents) can also veto information sharing or contact (although provisions vary somewhat by particular state jurisdictions). Vetos were most likely to be applied by adoptive children. About 54 per cent of all vetos were applied by adoptive children. Birth mothers were the next most common source of vetos (36 per cent). Adoptive parents rarely requested vetos (Figure 8.5).

Endnotes
2 For a summary of information regarding adoption in the United States see http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/FactOverview.html
3 http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/

Highlights
• Adoption levels have declined sharply since the early 1970s so that by 2001-02 just 561 children were adopted in Australia.
• Most of the decline in adoption in Australia is due to fewer Australian born children becoming available for adoption. Since the early 1970s there has been a modest increase in inter-country adoption.
• Most adoptive parents (94 per cent) are married and most adoptive mothers (81 per cent) are aged 35 or older.
• Most placement adoptions are of children aged under one year of age, with equal number of male and female babies being adopted.
• The majority of vetos to contact between adopted children and their birth parents are requested by adopted children.
9

Living alone
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### Living alone

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Although people living alone do not constitute a family as defined by statistical collections, most people who live alone are part of wider families that extend beyond a single household. In 2001 almost a quarter (24.6 per cent) of all households contained just one person. Over 9 per cent (9.4 per cent, 1,616,213) of all Australians lived alone. Of Australians over the age of 15, 13 per cent lived alone in 2001.

As well as accounting for a large number of households and individuals, living alone is an increasingly common living arrangement in Australia (Figure 9.1) and this trend is likely to continue. Some of the growth is due to changing demographics including population ageing, changing values, changing patterns of partnering and shifting policies in areas such as aged care which encourage more elderly people to live independently in their own homes.

People who live alone are a diverse group. They include younger people in their early adulthood, other younger and middle aged and older adults who have lived alone for most of their adult life, others who live alone for a period after a relationship breakdown while for others living alone is the result of the death of a husband or wife. Sometimes living alone is confined to a period early on in the adult life course, while for others it is the period that occurs towards the end of life. For some people, living alone will be a preferred arrangement while for others it is an unwelcome situation that has occurred due to a lack of alternatives. Lone living may reflect social isolation or it may reflect welcome independence and autonomy. This chapter describes some of the characteristics of people who live alone.

**Is living alone a growing trend?**

In 2001 24.6 per cent of all households were lone person households. This level of lone living was an increase from 21.1 per cent of lone person households in 1991, 14.1 per cent in 1971 and 10.2 per cent in 1961. Furthermore, in 2001 9.4 per cent (1,616,213) of all Australians were living alone, which is an increase from 8.3 per cent in 1996 and 5.5 per cent (665,938 people) in 1971.

There has been a steady increase in the percentage of lone person households and the number of people living on their own. Figure 9.1 shows the steady increase in lone person households from 21.1 per cent in 1991 to a quarter of all households in 2001. This increase is likely to continue and has been projected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to reach 30.2 per cent of all households by 2026 (ABS 2004b). The percentage of people aged 15 or over living alone has increased from 7.6 per cent in 1983 to 13 per cent in 2001 (Figure 9.1) and is projected to reach 15.4 per cent by 2026 (ABS 2004b).

Lone living is increasing and will continue to increase because of three main demographic trends:

- More people aged 25-55 will live alone. This is due to fewer people marrying or having a partner and a declining proportion who repartner after divorce (p. 178).
- An increase in childlessness which means that a proportion of those whose relationship ends will be lone persons rather than lone parents.
- The ageing of the population which means that a larger proportion of households will contain a
lone (widowed) older person. This will be most evident among people aged 75 and over.

Who lives alone?
Are those on their own mainly older women?
The likelihood of living alone increases sharply as people grow older – especially from about age 65 onwards. The percentage of each age group that lives alone rises most sharply from age 65 onwards, especially for women. The 2001 Census found that among those aged 55-64, about 16.4 per cent of women and 13 per cent of men lived alone. For those aged 75 or over 50 per cent of women and about 23 per cent of men lived alone (see Figure 9.3). The main reason for the predominance of women over men in later life is the greater longevity of women and the age difference between husbands and wives. Almost two thirds of the lone women aged 75 and over were widows.

While women outnumber men among older people who live alone the opposite is true among younger people living on their own. Among younger people on their own, men outnumber women. Indeed, this holds for all age groups younger than 55 years of age (Figure 9.3).

One of the reasons for this male predominance among the younger group who live alone, is that following divorce many men live on their own. Since children mainly live with their mother following relationship breakdown, many separating women become lone parents while many separating men form lone person households.

Among which age groups is living alone increasing most?
Living alone has increased across all age groups between 1971-2001. In virtually all age groups the percentage who were living alone has increased each decade. Viewed across the age groups the greatest growth in the percentage of age groups living alone occurred in the 1970s and during the 1990s (Figure 9.4).

The only age group in which there has been a decline in the percentage living alone from 1981-2001 is the 65-74 year age group where there has been a marginal decline – probably due to increased longevity of husbands and wives.

Figures 9.3 and 9.4 show that the proportion of an age group that lives alone increases as age increases. It is not surprising that the proportion of people

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**Figure 9.2**
Projected per cent living alone by age group, 2001 and 2021

**Figure 9.3**
Per cent living alone by gender and age group, 2001
aged 75 and over who live alone is greater than in younger age groups. However, this unsurprising tendency of older people being much more likely than younger people to live alone must not obscure the fact that numerically those who live alone are far more likely to be relatively young (Figure 9.5).

A key point evident in Figure 9.5 is that living alone is not simply an old person’s phenomenon. There are many people across all age groups that live alone. While the number in the 15-44 age group is especially high because this age group spans a 30 year age range it is nevertheless worth noting that over half a million (538,000) people in this age group live alone. Numerically, the proportion of those aged 85 or older who live alone is quite small (86,000 in 2001). In 2001 the age groups, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74 and 75-84 each included around a quarter of a million people who lived alone.

Furthermore, the numerical growth in living alone has been most evident among the relatively younger age groups. The growth in the number of people aged 15-44 who live alone has been steady and substantial between 1971-2001. In all age groups (except 65-74) the growth in the number of people living alone was especially sharp in the 1990s.

While older age groups have a larger proportion of people living alone than do younger age groups, the rate of growth in living alone has been more marked among younger age groups than among the elderly. Figure 9.6 shows that between 1971-2001 the proportion of those aged 15-44 who lived alone increased by 224 per cent for men and 264 per cent for women (from 106,000 to 538,000 men and women). Among those aged 54-54 the proportion living alone increased by 136 per cent among men and 96 per cent among women (from 62,300 to 241,800 men and women). These rates of increase dwarf those between the ages of 55-84 and are higher than among those aged 85 and over.

While the popular perception may be that the increase in living alone is a function of population ageing, the evidence in Figures 9.5 and 9.6 indicates otherwise. While the older age groups have the highest proportion who live alone, the numerical growth in people living alone and the rate of growth in living alone is occurring much earlier in the life course.

Figure 9.4
Per cent living alone by age group, Australia, 1971-2001

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003e) using Census collections in respective years.

Figure 9.5
Number living alone by age group, Australia, 1971-2001 ('000s)

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003e) using Census collections in respective years.
Are people living on their own divorced, widowed or never married?

Examining the marital status of people who live alone suggests three groupings of people who live alone (Figure 9.7).

The first grouping consists of those aged between 15 and 34. In this age group 88.6 per cent have never been married. These people probably represent those who live on their own before family formation or following a cohabiting relationship.

The second grouping consists of those aged 35 to 59 where half have been divorced or separated. Within this age group of lone people 40.8 per cent of those aged 35-49, were divorced or separated and 60.5 per cent of those aged 50-59 were divorced or separated.

The third grouping consists of those aged 60 and over – where the considerable majority (62.7 per cent) lived alone following widowhood. More detailed information from the Census shows that in 2001, 53.6 per cent of those aged 65-74 who lived alone were widowed; 77.7 per cent of those aged 75-84 and living alone were widowed; and 86 per cent of those aged 85 or over and living alone were widowed.

In 2001, relatively few of the older group (the over 60s) who lived alone were divorced or separated (23.3 per cent). Concern has been expressed in some quarters (for example, Millward 1997) that divorce leads to the disruption of family ties – especially among men, and that this will have important consequences for care in later life, if family ties are broken as previous research suggests, (Millward 1997; Rezac 2002).

On the other hand, older women are much more likely to live alone because of the death of their husband. For example, of women aged in their sixties, 51.3 per cent of those who live alone are widows compared to just 16.7 per cent of similarly aged men. Of lone women aged in their seventies, 77.2 per cent were widows compared to just 42.9 per cent of men.

Any such trend is most likely to lead to an increase in the percentage of older men who live alone due to divorce or separation. Table 9.1 demonstrates that lone living among older men is more likely to be associated with divorce and separation than it is for women. For example, 58.9 per cent of men in their sixties who live alone are divorced or separated while only 40.2 per cent of comparable women are divorced or separated. The same type of gap persists among those in their seventies and older. These older men are likely to encounter some difficulties with care in later life, if family ties are broken as previous research suggests, (Millward 1997; Rezac 2002).

Figure 9.6 Percentage change of people living alone by age group, Australia, 1971-2001

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003a) using Census collections in respective years.
Percentage change = ((% in 2001-% in 1971)/% in 1971)*100

Figure 9.7 Marital status of people living alone by age group, 2001

In each age group, men who live alone are much more likely than lone women to be those who never married. For example, of lone men in their sixties almost a quarter had never married compared to just 8.5 per cent of women. Of lone men in their seventies, 20.2 per cent had never married compared to 6.5 per cent of comparable women. These differences between men and women highlight how the experience of later life is very different for men and women. Being alone due to widowhood will be a quite different experience from being alone because of never marrying or because of divorce.

What type of housing is used by people living on their own?

The housing needs of people living on their own are quite different to those with a household family. In 2001:

- 26.2 per cent of people who lived on their own lived in a flat, unit or apartment (compared with 17.7 per cent of all people).
- Apartment, flat and unit living was particularly common among younger people living on their own with 40 per cent of lone 20-29 year olds living in this style of housing.

- While 55 per cent of lone people lived in a separate house this type of accommodation was most common among older people aged 75 or over where 73 per cent of those living alone lived in a separate house.
- A substantial proportion of older people who lived alone owned their home outright. (73 per cent of those aged over 65). Most of the remainder were renting.

In all age groups, those who were living alone were much more likely than those living with other people to be renting (Figure 9.8a). For example, among those aged 45-54, 41.5 per cent of lone persons were renting compared to just 15.9 per cent of those living with someone else.

The level of renting varies greatly between younger and older lone people. In 2001, lone younger people had very high levels of renting. Of those aged 15-24, more than 70 per cent of lone people were renting and over half of those aged 25-44 were renting. However, among older lone people just 25 per cent were renting (Figure 9.8).

How common is living alone in ethnic communities?

Cultural norms vary in terms of the acceptability of either young or older people living alone. Cultural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>60-69 Male %</th>
<th>60-69 Female %</th>
<th>70-79 Male %</th>
<th>70-79 Female %</th>
<th>80+ Male %</th>
<th>80+ Female %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated or Divorced</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>1422</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>2146</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>1593</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

groups also differ in the extent to which they are likely to live in multiple family households (p.68-69). Similarly, cultural norms vary in terms of the acceptability (and prevalence) of divorce and childlessness (p. 216-17). These cultural differences are likely to be reflected in the proportion of people from various cultural groups who live alone.

Table 9.2 reports the percentage of people in various age groups who lived alone in 2001 according to their country of birth. This table indicates a number of patterns.

Disregarding age group:

- The highest rates of lone living were among those born in Western Europe, Eastern Europe and the United Kingdom.
- The percentage of Australian born people who lived alone falls about midway between the most prone and least prone groups.
- The lowest rates of living alone were found among those born in South East Asia and China.
- The rates of living alone among those from Southern Europe (Greece, Italy and other Southern European countries) were reasonably close to that of Australian born people ranging from 8.1 per cent (Greece) to 12.6 per cent (Italy).

However, the patterns of living alone are somewhat different when considering just older people born in different countries (Table 9.2). Among older people (65 and over), those born in Australia had the highest rates of lone living (32.8 per cent) – rates that were close to those born in New Zealand and the UK. The low rates of lone living persist among older people born in South East Asia and China.

Older people born in Southern Europe, especially Greece and Italy also had relatively low rates of lone living – certainly much lower than among the older Australian born population. For example, in 2001 while 32.8 per cent of Australian born people aged 65 or over lived on their own just 19.9 per cent of Italian born older Australians and 11.1 per cent of Greek born older Australians lived on their own.

Of course living on one’s own can reflect things other than cultural differences. It may also reflect group differences in the resources that enable people to live on their own. Australian born people may enjoy better health, have culturally appropriate community support and the financial resources.

Table 9.2 Per cent living alone by country of birth by age, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>15-44</th>
<th>45-64</th>
<th>65+</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West Europe</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other United Kingdom and Ireland</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern and Eastern Europe (excluding Greece and Italy)</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Australia</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>12.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>32.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>9.4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Africa and the Middle East</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other North East Asia</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other South East Asia</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China (excluding Taiwan)</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern and Central Asia</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 9.3 Per cent living alone within older age groups by selected country of birth and English proficiency, (ages 65 and over) 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of birth</th>
<th>English proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern and Eastern Europe (excluding Greece and Italy)</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Africa and the Middle East</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other North East Asia</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other South East Asia</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China (excluding Taiwan)</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

that enable lone living rather than having to share a household with other people. One factor that can affect an older person’s ability to live alone will be their English speaking proficiency. Those older people with good English language skills are more likely to be able to manage on their own. This factor was particularly relevant for older people from Asian countries as illustrated in Table 9.3. This pattern is especially evident among older people who were born in Vietnam. Of those with good English skills, 27 per cent lived on their own compared to just 5.1 per cent of those with limited English skills.

How much time is actually spent alone?
Living alone normally means that a person will spend more of their time on their own. However, the amount of time that a person spends on their own will differ according to their circumstances and age.

Table 9.4 shows the expected pattern whereby people living on their own spent a great deal more time alone than those living with others. However, not all people who lived alone spent the same amount of time alone.

- Younger people living alone spent less time alone than do older people. Those aged between 15-24 spent about seven hours a day on their own compared to between 12 and 13 hours alone among older people.
- Regardless of age, men who lived alone spent about an extra hour a day alone compared to women who lived on their own.

Are people on their own employed?
The patterns of employment of lone men differ from those of lone women in a number of respects (Figure 9.9). First, among younger lone people (aged 20-44), lone women have employment rates about 5 per cent higher than similarly aged lone men. Among older lone people of workforce age (45-64) lone males have employment rates about 5 per cent higher than similarly aged lone women.

Second, employment rates of lone men differ from other men. Men aged 20-34 have very similar employment rates regardless of whether they were living alone or not. However, among men aged between 35-64, lone men have employment rates at least 10 per cent lower than other men. Among women the opposite pattern occurs. Employment rates are between 10 to 20 per cent higher among younger lone women (aged 20-44) than among other women in these age groups. However, among women aged between 45 –64, the employment rates of lone women are relatively similar (approximately 4 per cent lower) to that of other women.

The employment pattern of lone women relative to other women is largely explicable in terms of the effect of children on younger women. Women living alone will not need to adjust their employment to child care needs. Similarly, the absence of employment differences among younger men reflects that pattern whereby younger fathers rarely withdraw from the workforce because of child care responsibilities.

The reasons for the lower employment levels of lone men relative to other men aged 35-64 is less
obvious and requires further investigation. It may be related to less need to work since they may not have a family to support; it may be affected by the consequences of relationship breakdown; and there may be selective factors which mean that the factors that are responsible for them living alone may also contribute to lower employability or desire to be employed.

How well off financially are those living on their own?

While people who live alone will have lower household incomes than partnered people, they will also have some lower costs. However, some costs are relatively fixed and this may mean that people living on their own are relatively poorly off financially. Furthermore, because of the age and employment profiles of people living alone, lone person households may rely disproportionately on government benefits for their income.

Are people living alone poorer?

People who live alone, are less wealthy overall than those who live in family households. Table 9.5 indicates a clustering of lone persons among the lower income deciles. For example, in 1998, 18.2 per cent of lone persons were in the least wealthy 10 per cent of the population, and 25.3 per cent of lone persons were among the poorest 20 per cent of the population. At the other end of the wealth spectrum only 4 per cent of lone persons were among the wealthiest 10 per cent of the population, and only 8.3 per cent of lone persons were among the wealthiest 20 per cent of the population.

Do lone people feel financially stressed?

A comparison of the measures of financial stress in Table 9.6 with those of lone parents and couple parents (p. 52) shows that lone persons, in general, display similar levels of financial stress to parents with dependent children. Lone people show much lower levels of financial stress than do lone parents.

On most of the measures of financial stress in Table 9.6, older people living alone (65+) showed far fewer signs of financial stress than younger people living on their own. Compared with those under 30, the older people living alone were less likely to report going without for example, clothes, meals, and holidays. Older people were also much less

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9.5</th>
<th>Wealth distribution of lone persons by decile, 1986-98</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decile</td>
<td>Poorest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Costs using figures calculated by Kelly (2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicator of financial stress</td>
<td>&lt; 30 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=182)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend more than get each week</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not gone on holiday in last year because can’t afford to</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t have friends over for meal because can’t afford to</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t have a special weekly meal because can’t afford it</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy second hand clothes because can’t afford new clothes</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t have leisure or hobbies because can’t afford it</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times when unable to pay gas/phone/electricity</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have had to pawn things</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have gone without meals because of shortage of money</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought help from community/welfare organisations because of shortage of money</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

likely to report not being able to pay essential bills and were less likely to indicate that they spent more money than they had. On the other hand, younger people living alone were much more likely than older people to report pawning things, spending more than they earned, not being able to buy new clothes, having cash flow problems, obtaining help from welfare organisations and family and friends. Younger people were also much less likely to be able to draw on their own savings in the event of an emergency.

The greater level of financial stress among younger people who lived alone may be due to a number of factors which cannot be determined from the available data. These possibilities include:

- Different expenditure needs of young compared with older people.
- Different expectations about what is necessary.
- Different levels of home ownership.
- Attitudes about paying regular bills.
- Preparedness to ask others for help.

- Availability of networks from which to seek help.
- Accumulation of assets on which to draw in times of financial difficulty.
- The adequacy of aged pension benefits compared to benefits available to younger people.
- Expenses due to child support payments after family breakdown.

What is the main source of income?

Of all people living on their own, 42.1 per cent relied on government benefits for their main source of income. This is a higher percentage than applies to couple families (17.4 per cent) but lower than for lone parent families where 48.7 per cent relied on government benefits for their main source of income (Table 9.7).

The main reason why a relatively high proportion of lone people rely on government for their main source of income is the age profile of people who live alone. The relatively large number of people living alone who were aged 65 or over, means that they no longer earn a salary and are reliant on the aged pension. Government benefits are the main source of income for 70.6 per cent of those aged 65 or over. Among the younger cohorts of lone people, the reliance on government benefits is much lower. For example, 20 per cent of those under 25, and 28.1 per cent of those aged 25-64 relied mainly on government benefits (ABS 1999c).

Among lone people of working age and especially those aged 25-64, lone people had a three times greater reliance on government benefits than couples (28.1 per cent compared with 9.6 per cent). However, lone people in this age bracket were considerably less reliant on government benefits than were lone parents (28.1 per cent compared with 46.9 per cent).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of household head</th>
<th>15-24</th>
<th>25-64</th>
<th>65+</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lone person</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


| Table 9.8 Weekly income, taxes and government benefits for people living alone, 1999 |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Age group                | <25 $           | 25-34 $         | 35-44 $         | 45-54 $         | 55-64 $         | 65+ $           |
| Private income           | 420.31          | 584.22          | 693.04          | 539.69          | 287.33          | 115.99          |
| Direct benefits          | 34.61           | 30.52           | 29.84           | 54.38           | 101.04          | 143.57          |
| Indirect benefits        | 87.25           | 47.6            | 43.03           | 50.01           | 77.68           | 129.27          |
| Value of income + benefits| 542.17          | 662.34          | 765.91          | 644.08          | 466.03          | 388.83          |
| Direct tax               | 92.44           | 145.73          | 188.08          | 150.24          | 66.96           | 19.93           |
| Indirect taxes           | 39.21           | 51.77           | 56.77           | 49.11           | 39.89           | 26.32           |
| Total taxes              | 131.65          | 197.51          | 244.86          | 199.35          | 106.84          | 46.25           |
| Final income (income + benefits)-taxes| 410.59 | 464.89 | 521.07 | 444.68 | 359.18 | 342.59 |
| Total benefits (direct + indirect) | 121.85 | 78.12 | 72.88 | 104.49 | 178.71 | 272.84 |
| Net benefits (total benefits - total taxes) | –9.79 | –119.39 | –171.98 | –94.95 | 71.86 | 226.59 |

How much support do governments provide people on their own?

Government support for people who live alone is concentrated among older people. Table 9.8 indicates that for those aged 55 and over there is a net benefit directed to these lone individuals. For those aged 65 and over the weekly value of benefits is $226 greater than the tax they pay.

In contrast, the younger groups of people living on their own made substantial net contributions to government (and thus help fund the income support for other family types and older lone people). For example, those aged between 25-34 made a net weekly contribution to the public purse valued at $119; those aged 35-44 contributed a net of $172 while those aged 45-54 contributed $95 per week.

The effect of taxation and benefits on lone persons has a substantial redistributive effect on this population of households. The private income of these households indicates substantial income disparities between the age groups ranging from a weekly average income of $693 for those aged 35-44 to just $116 for those aged over 65. The effect of direct and indirect benefits combined with taxation resulted in much greater equity and resulted in a final income of these two age groups of $521 and $343 respectively.

Highlights

- One in four households consists of a person living on their own and almost one in every ten people live on their own.
- The levels of living alone in Australia are increasing.
- Three types of people who live alone can be distinguished: younger people who have not yet partnered or had children; middle aged people who have divorced or separated and older people who are widowed.
- While a greater proportion of people in older age groups than younger age groups live alone, younger people who live alone are numerically a much larger group than older people living alone.
- The rate of growth in living alone is much more marked among younger than older age groups.
- Men outnumber women among the two younger groups of people who live alone while women easily outnumber men among older people who live alone.
- Rates of living alone are much lower among cultural groups such as Asians and those from Southern Europe. Living alone is more common among those from western backgrounds.
- Rates of employment among lone men aged 35-64 are lower than other men of a similar age.
- As a group, people who live alone have higher levels of poverty and lower levels of wealth than the average household.
- Older people on their own had high levels of home ownership while younger people living alone had low levels of home ownership.
- Older people living alone have relatively high levels of reliance on government benefits for income support and receive considerable net transfers from government.
- Younger and middle aged people living on their own have relatively low levels of reliance on government for income support and are net contributors to the public purse.
- Older people living on their own display lower levels of financial stress than do younger people living on their own.
## 10 Cohabitation

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### What do people think about marriage and cohabitation?

### Highlights

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One of the marked changes in family formation over the last quarter century has been the growth of cohabitation as a socially acceptable form of couple relationship. While Chapter 13 details some of the changes in marriage patterns this chapter focuses on the growth of cohabitating relationships in Australia. The purpose of the chapter is to map the extent of the change and to consider whether couples who are married and those who cohabit are different in demographic terms and whether marriages and cohabitations are different in other ways.

In this chapter cohabitation refers to heterosexual couples who live together in an intimate relationship without being married. These relationships are frequently referred to as “de facto” relationships or de facto marriages. When considering the statistics in this chapter it is important to recognise that cohabiters are not a uniform group. Although it was not possible to apply the following distinctions to the analysis in this chapter it is worth keeping in mind the five types of cohabitation patterns identified in the Andrews Report (Australian Parliament 1998, p. 76).

1. Cohabitating relationships that are temporary, casual and convenient. These relationships may be motivated more by economic and protective than romantic, emotional or physical factors. They involve little commitment to an ongoing relationship.

2. Cohabitating relationships that are an extension of an affectionate, steady relationship, involves sexual intimacy and which will continue as long as the couple enjoy being together.

3. Trial marriages. In these relationships cohabitation is part of courtship which may or may not lead to marriage.

4. Relationships that are a temporary alternative to marriage for people who intend to marry. Living together is a short term arrangement until marriage is economically, legally or professionally feasible.

5. A permanent or semi-permanent alternative to marriage. This may be motivated by economic factors or by negative views about formal marriage or because one person is already married.

Care is required when interpreting the statistics in this chapter. The statistics show considerable differences between couples in registered marriages and those who are cohabiting. For example, the levels of partner violence and mental health disorders are higher among cohabiting than married couples.

At this point of the research, however, we do not always know the extent to which these and other differences between cohabiting and married couples reflect the effects of being married or cohabiting and the extent to which the differences are due to selective factors – different types of people cohabit and marry. The truth probably is that the differences are due to a combination of causal and selective factors but in many cases we do not know the relative importance of these two factors.

How common is cohabitation?

Levels of cohabitation can be explored in three main ways. One index of the popularity of cohabitation is to see how many people cohabit before they marry. Another index is to see how many people are cohabiting at any particular point of time (for example, at the Census). A third way of assessing the popularity of cohabiting is to see how many people have ever lived in a cohabiting relationship.

Is it now normal to live together before marrying?

Of people marrying now, the majority live together before they marry. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, of those people who married in 2001, 72 per cent had lived together with their marriage partner before they married (ABS 2002d). This represents a sharp increase from 16 per cent who lived together before they married in 1975. Each year has shown a steady increase in the rate of premarital cohabitation to the extent that since the early 1990s the majority of people who married lived with their partner beforehand. Figure 10.1 shows the rise in premarital cohabitation rates for first marriages from before the 1960s until 2001 as estimated from the HILDA survey. It shows the beginning of an increase in the 1960s which then accelerated in the early 1970s and has climbed steadily since then, showing no sign of levelling off.

The statistics in Figure 10.1 apply to first marriages. Evidence from the same study indicates that the rates of premarital cohabitation following the ending of a first marriage are even higher and have been higher for some time with little increase since the 1970s. Of people marrying for the second time:

- 70.6 lived together in the 1970s before remarrying.
- 77.7 per cent lived together in the 1980s before remarrying.
- 72.3 per cent lived together in the 1990s before remarrying.

The increase in rates of premarital cohabitation observed in first marriages in the late 1990s, are
now just reaching the levels of cohabitation for remarriages reached in the 1970s.

**Trends in cohabitation**

At the same time as rates of premarital cohabitation have increased there has been a related increase in the percentage of cohabiting relationships at any given point of time. Since 1986, the percentage of couples that were cohabiting has increased by approximately two percentage points every five years.

- In 1986, 5.7 per cent of couples were in cohabiting relationships.
- In 1991, 8.2 per cent of couples were in cohabiting relationships.
- In 1996, 10.1 per cent of couples were in cohabiting relationships.
- In 2001, 12.4 per cent of couples were in cohabiting relationships.

This means that in the course of 15 years the percentage of cohabiting couples has more than doubled.

**How many people have ever cohabited?**

Analysis based on the 2001 HILDA survey shows that, of people aged 15 or over who had ever been partnered, 20 per cent have, at some point, cohabited for at least three months (Table 10.1). While rates of ever cohabiting are low among those aged 55 or over (less than 10 per cent), rates are much higher among younger people. Of those in their early twenties who have ever been partnered, two thirds have cohabited at least once. Of those aged 25-34 almost 40 per cent have cohabited at least once (Dempsey and de Vaus, in 2004).

If rates of ever cohabiting are calculated as a percentage of the whole age group rather than as a percentage only of those who have ever been partnered, different rates emerge but a similar pattern of change across the age groups is evident. This further analysis shows the percentage of each age group who have cohabited at least once. It shows that:

- 18 per cent of all 20-24 year olds have ever cohabited (mean = 1.4 cohabiting relationships for each person who has cohabited).
- 29 per cent of all 25-34 year olds have ever cohabited (mean = 1.7 cohabiting relationships).
- 24 per cent of 35-44 year olds have ever cohabited (mean = 1.8 cohabiting relationships).
- 15 per cent of 45-54 year olds have ever cohabited (mean = 2.0).
- 8 per cent of 55-64 year olds have ever cohabited (mean = 1.6).

**Are people delaying partnering?**

As the proportion of marriages preceded by cohabitation has risen, the period of living together before marriage has also increased steadily. The first (2001) wave of the HILDA Survey suggests that, of couples who lived together before marrying, the proportions who married within six months of moving in together fell from 40 per cent in the 1960s and 1970s to 12 per cent by the late 1990s.

### Table 10.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>15-19</th>
<th>20-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55-64</th>
<th>65-74</th>
<th>75+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>90.3</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>98.5</td>
<td>79.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>2767</td>
<td>2315</td>
<td>1634</td>
<td>1179</td>
<td>805</td>
<td>10924</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conversely, the proportions who lived together for at least three years before marrying increased from about 5 per cent in the 1960s and 1970s to more than 30 per cent by the late 1990s.

Given that men and women are living together for longer periods before they marry their partner, the growth of cohabitation is also linked with the increasing age at which men and women are marrying. But has there been any change in the age at which people first partner? Figure 10.2 shows that young people nowadays begin their first partnership – involving cohabitation or marriage – at ages similar to those born in the early part of the 20th century. For example, of men born in the early 1970s, half formed their first relationship by age 24 compared with age 25 for those born before 1932. However, those who were born right after World War II entered their first relationship at an earlier age – half of the men had partnered by the age of 23 years. A similar pattern applies to women, although the differences over time are smaller for women than for men. These changes relating to age of entry into first partnerships are considerably smaller than those relating to age of entry into first marriage.

Is the rise in cohabitation making up for delays in marriage?
In Chapter 13 it is shown that, since the early 1970s, there has been a steady decline in marriage and remarriage rates and that consequently the proportion of the population that is married has declined. To what extent has the reduction in formal marriage been compensated for by an increase in informal marriage – that is, cohabitation?

Figure 10.3 shows that between 1981 and 2001 the proportion of those aged 15 or over that were married fell by eight percentage points (from 60 per cent to 52 per cent), while the proportion cohabiting increased by about 4 percentage points (from 3 per cent to 7 per cent). Thus, although the married population has fallen by 8 per cent, half of this fall has been made up for, in one sense, by an increase of 4 per cent in the proportion who are living together but not formally married.

Who cohabits and who marries?
Is cohabitation mainly a young person’s thing?
Cohabitation is far more common among younger than older age groups (Figure 10.4). While the majority (63 per cent) of live-in relationships of those aged 15-24 are cohabiting relationships this pattern quickly reverses among older age groups. Of partnered people aged 25-34 just a quarter are cohabiting. Of partnered men and women aged 35-44 just over 10 per cent cohabit and fewer than 10 per cent in older age groups cohabit.

How many cohabiters have never been married?
The marital history of people who remarry or cohabit can play a role in the way the new relationship works. Commitments to children from a previous marriage and the experience of ending a marriage can all play a role in the way in which new relationships are built. According to the 2001 Census (ABS 2003g), of people who were cohabiting:
• Two thirds (67.6 per cent) had never been married.
• 28.8 per cent were divorced (23.6 per cent) or separated (5.2 per cent).
• 1.9 per cent were widowed.

Table 10.2 provides details of adults who were cohabiting at the time of the 2001 Census. Not surprisingly, it shows that the marital background of those who cohabit is quite different in different age groups. While most of those who cohabit up to the age of 34 have never been married previously, the experience of the older age groups is somewhat different. Of those aged 35-44, just over half have not been married previously while 42 per cent have had a previous marriage. Of those aged 45 or over who cohabit, 70 per cent have been previously married.

Do many people with children cohabit?

While marriage was once a prerequisite for having children this is no longer the case. Approximately 16 per cent of children are born to cohabiting couples (p. 202) and a relatively high proportion of couples in step and blended families are cohabiting rather than married (p. 61). In 2001, 5.8 per cent of children under the age of 15 were living with their two biological parents who were living together but were not married (Brandon 2004). However, since many cohabiting parents that have children together either marry or break up, the rate of births to cohabiting couples does not indicate how many cohabiting couples have children living with them.

Table 10.3 shows the proportion of people who are cohabiting who have children living with them. The first point to observe in Table 10.3 is that, of cohabiting adults aged between 35-44, the majority had dependent children living with them. A third of cohabiting adults in their late twenties and well over a third (40 per cent) of those aged 45-49 had dependent children living with them.

A second point emerges when the patterns for those who cohabit are compared to those who are married (Table 10.3). Although many cohabiting adults have dependent children living with them, they are considerably less likely to have children than are married couples. For example:

• 56 per cent of married adults aged 25-29 had dependent children compared to 33.5 per cent of cohabiting adults of the same age.
• 77.4 per cent of married people aged 30-34 compared to 49.3 per cent of cohabiting adults had dependent children.
• 88.3 per cent of married adults aged 35-39 had dependent children compared 61.7 per cent of cohabiting adults.
• 65 per cent of 45-49 year old married adults compared to 40 per cent of cohabiting adults had dependent children.
broken up by the time they reach the 30-34 years of age.

**In which age groups is cohabiting most common?**

Very few individuals aged 15-24 are cohabiting at any given point of time. In 2001, 7 per cent of these young people aged 15-24 were cohabiting and 84 per cent were unpartnered. In 2001, 14.5 per cent of 25-34 year olds were cohabiting; 8.4 per cent of 35-44 year olds were cohabiting; 5.7 per cent of 45-54 year olds were cohabiting and just 1.9 per cent of those aged 55 or over were cohabiting.

**How popular is cohabitation after divorce?**

Of divorced or separated people, 18 per cent were cohabiting in 2001. One in five separated or divorced adults aged between 25-54 were cohabiting in 2001 and about one in ten separated and divorced younger people (15-24) and older people (55 and older) were cohabiting. These cohabiting levels are well above the overall cohabiting level of 7.1 per cent of all people aged 15 or over (Table 10.5). Nevertheless, these figures mean that the vast majority of separated or divorced adults are not cohabiting. Overall, separated and divorced adults are far more likely to either live on their own (46 per cent) or as a lone parent (40 per cent) than to cohabit.

In each age group, separated and divorced adults are more likely than widowed adults to cohabit. Taken overall just 2.3 per cent of widowed men and women were cohabiting in 2001. Cohabiting is much higher than this figure among younger widows and widowers where between 10 to 13 per cent were cohabiting (Table 10.5).

While most separated and divorced adults do not cohabit, they are, nevertheless more likely to be cohabiting than those who have never married – 18 per cent of separated and divorced were cohabiting compared to 14.7 per cent of those who had never married (Table 10.5).

**Is cohabitation mainly an "Anglo" thing?**

Living together without being formally married is accepted more widely in some cultural groups than in others (Table 10.6). This is clearly evident in the levels of cohabiting relationships among those adults born in different countries. New Zealanders living in Australia had the highest rate of cohabitation among couples (22.8 per cent of males) followed by Australian born people (13.9 per cent of males) and then by those born in the United Kingdom or Ireland (10.2 per cent of males). Cohabiting relationships were quite unusual among those born in Southern Europe, the Middle East or North Africa – especially among women. Just 1.6 per cent of partnered women born in the Middle East or North Africa were cohabiting compared with 2.7 per cent of men. Similarly, very small proportions of partnered men (2.8 per cent) or women (2.2 per cent) born in Southern Europe cohabit – most marry. Men and women from various parts of Asia – especially Southern Asia and China had low rates of cohabitation (less than 4 per cent). Men and women born in South East Asia and developed Asian nations (for example, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan) had somewhat higher cohabitation levels than other Asian nations but were still well below the Australian norm.

**Is it just the irreligious who cohabit?**

Rates of cohabitation also vary depending on a person’s religious affiliation. This will be due to both religious prescriptions regarding cohabitation but will also reflect the cultural and ethnic influences associated with different religious affiliations.
Of people in cohabiting relationships in 2001 those who reported no religious affiliation were most likely to cohabit (Table 10.7). A quarter of partnered women and 21 per cent of partnered men who claimed no religious affiliation cohabited. This compares with cohabitation rates of between 2 per cent to just under 12 per cent among those who nominated a religious affiliation in the 2001 Census. The lowest rates of cohabitation were among Pentecostals, fundamentalist and sectarian groups (for example, Jehovah’s Witness), Orthodox groups and Muslims. The mainstream religious groupings such as Anglican and Catholic had the highest rates of cohabitation of those who reported a religious affiliation. Between 10 to 12 per cent of partnered Catholics and Anglicans were cohabiting in 2001.

**How many Indigenous Australians cohabit?**

Rates of cohabitation are much higher among Indigenous than non Indigenous Australians. This, no doubt, partly reflects different cultural traditions about the relevance of registered marriage. Table 10.8 indicates that, overall, over a third (35.8 per cent) of partnered Indigenous Australians cohabit compared to 11.7 per cent of their non Indigenous counterparts.

While the different rates of cohabitation among Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians will be affected by different cultural traditions there is, nevertheless, the same age-related decline in cohabitation found among Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians (Table 10.5). Partnered Indigenous adults aged 20-24 have high rates of cohabitation (66 per cent compared with 60 per cent for non Indigenous). These rates decline steadily so that among Indigenous Australians aged 50-54 just 18 per cent were cohabiting (compared with 6 per cent of non Indigenous partnered adults of the same age). These age-related differences in cohabitation among Indigenous adults indicate that the overall higher rates of cohabitation among Indigenous Australians are not simply due to Indigenous cultural values and customs. Age factors clearly play a role in determining Indigenous rates of cohabitation.

**Is cohabitation a white collar or a blue collar arrangement?**

While rates of cohabitation differ somewhat according to a person’s occupation there is no simple association between cohabitation rates and occupational status. Table 10.9 outlines the differences in cohabitation according to occupation and gender. It shows that:

- Among partnered men, those from manual occupations and lower level clerical and sales jobs have higher rates of cohabitation – especially compared to those in the higher level white collar jobs.
- Men in management, administrative, professional and the higher level clerical, service and sales jobs have relatively low rates of cohabitation.
- Among partnered women there is a less clear cut pattern. There does not appear to be a coherent pattern regarding cohabitation and occupation among women.
Who cohabits most – workers or the unemployed?

In 2001 the employment status of partnered men and women was linked to whether or not they cohabited. Table 10.10 shows a pattern whereby:

- Partnered men and women who were unemployed had the highest rates of cohabitation. This pattern held across the different age groups.
- Partnered women who worked part time or who were not in the labour force had the lowest rates of cohabitation. Both the low rate of cohabitation and workforce participation level of these women is most likely linked to these women caring for children or the result of child care responsibilities in the past.

The relatively high rates of cohabitation among women employed full time is somewhat anomalous. These women who work full time have very similar rates of cohabitation to unemployed women and considerably higher than those who work part time or who are out of the labour force. This relatively higher level of cohabitation among full time employed women applies across all the age groups in Table 10.10. The reason for the higher rate of cohabitation among full time employed women is not clear but may reflect the choices of women who are relatively financially independent or the greater difficulty these women may have in finding a partner to marry (p. 174-7).

What happens to cohabiting relationships?

As indicated earlier, people cohabit for a variety of reasons. Some cohabit as an alternative to marriage and some cohabit as a prelude to marriage.

Of all people cohabiting at the time of the 2001 HILDA survey:

- A little more than half thought they were likely or very likely to marry their partner (57 per cent men and 52 per cent women).
- Close to a quarter thought it was unlikely or very unlikely that they would marry their current partner (21 per cent men and 27 per cent women).
- A fifth were unsure about whether the relationship would end in marriage or not (Qu, 2003).

Expectations of marrying one’s current partner depended somewhat on whether the person had been married previously. Cohabiting people who had never been married had higher expectations that marriage would follow than those who were cohabiting following a previous marriage. Of the never married people:

Table 10.8: Union type by Indigenous status, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non Indigenous</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 10.9: Per cent of partnered men and women who cohabit by occupation, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Managers &amp; Admin</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Assoc Professional</th>
<th>Trades &amp; Related</th>
<th>Intermediate Clerical &amp; Service</th>
<th>Intermediate Sales &amp; Service</th>
<th>Intermediate Production &amp; Transport</th>
<th>Elementary Clerical &amp; Service</th>
<th>Elementary Sales &amp; Service</th>
<th>Labourers &amp; Related Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 10.5: Cohabitation rates of partnered Indigenous and non Indigenous adults by age, 2001

married cohabiters, 60 per cent thought it likely or very likely that they would marry their partner while only 18 per cent thought it unlikely. In contrast, only 40 per cent of the previously married cohabiters expected to marry their current partner and 38 per cent thought that marriage was unlikely (Qu, 2003).

Younger people who were cohabiting had higher expectations of marriage than older cohabiters. Of never married cohabiting men and women, 70 per cent of those aged under 25 and 75 per cent of those aged 25-29 expected to marry their partner. This compares to just 24 per cent of cohabiting men and women aged over 40 who expected to marry their partner (Qu, 2003).

How long do cohabiting relationships last?
Cohabitation is frequently regarded as a relatively unstable relationship. Cohabitation can have one of three main outcomes. A cohabiting relationship can be ongoing, it can end in marriage or it can break up. However, little is actually known about how long cohabiting relationships last and how common each of these three outcomes are.

The average duration of cohabiting relationships that end in either marriage or break up are shown in Table 10.11. These figures relate to the first cohabitation of people but exclude first cohabitations following a marriage.

Table 10.11 shows that the duration of cohabitation differs depending on whether it ends in marriage or whether it breaks up. It also shows that the duration of first cohabiting relationships has changed over thirty years. Men and women now live together longer before they marry than they did in the 1970s. In the early 1970s the mean duration of cohabiting before marriage was 2.3 years but this had increased by almost half a year to 2.6 years by the early 1990s. The duration of cohabiting relationships that break up has changed in the opposite direction. In the early 1970s cohabiting relationships that broke up typically lasted 3.8 years. By the early 1990s they were breaking up more than a year sooner.

How often do cohabiting relationships break up?
While the duration of cohabitations that end in either marriage or break up can be calculated, these figures provide no sense of how common it is for first cohabitations to end in marriage, break up or to continue. Figure 10.6 shows what had happened to first cohabiting relationships within five years of the relationship commencing.

The figures reveal a number of important patterns. The first is that the conversion rate of cohabiting relationships into marriage has declined over the years. Among men and women who began to cohabit in the early 1990s closer to 40 per cent (45 per cent of men and 41 per cent of women) had married. This decline in the conversion of cohabiting relationships to marriage is probably due to three factors – people are now living together longer before marrying, more relationships are breaking up and some are continuing to live together without marrying at all.

Second, the risk of cohabiting relationships breaking up within five years appears to have grown. In the early 1970s, 22 per cent of cohabiting relationships, as reported by women, had ended in a break up within five years. By the early 1990s this risk had almost doubled to 40 per cent. The reports of men suggest that the break up rate was lower for first cohabitations that began in the early 1970s than those that began more recently. Since the late 1970s, the break up rates have remained fairly stable across each cohort.

Third, according to the reports of men, the likelihood of a cohabiting relationship continuing beyond five years has increased in recent times. For example, of men who cohabited for the first time in the 1970s the relationship of about 10 per cent of men reported that the relationship had ended within five years. By the early 1990s this break up rate had increased to 19 per cent.

Finally, in all cohorts the first cohabitation was more likely to result in marriage than it was to continue.
break up. However, the chances of breaking up or marrying are converging. In the early 1970s, 61 per cent of cohabiting men reported having married within five years while 28 per cent said they had broken up. However, of men who began cohabiting in the early 1990s just 45 per cent had gone on to marry within five years while 36 per cent had broken up (Figure 10.6). According to women’s reports, the rates of break up and marriage were virtually identical for those whose relationship began in the early 1990s.

**Are marriages more likely to break up than cohabiting relationships?**

Cohabiting relationships are more likely than marriages to break up. For example, Figure 10.6 shows that in the early 1990s, 40 per cent of cohabiting relationships of women had ended within five years of commencing the relationship. Over the same period just 12 per cent of marriages ended within five years of marriage.

In the early 1970s, fewer cohabiting relationships than marriages broke up within 5 years than in later periods. In 1970-74, 28 per cent of cohabiting relationships of men and 22 per cent of those of women had ended within five years. By comparison, just 10 per cent of marriages of women and 9 per cent of marriages of men had broken up within five years.

The much lower break up rate of marriages compared to cohabitations within five years has persisted through to those beginning relationships in the early 1990s. Of those beginning their cohabiting relationships between 1990 and 1994, 36 per cent of men and 40 per cent of women reported that the relationship had broken up within five years. However, only 13 per cent of men and 12 per cent of women reported the marriage as breaking up within the same period (Figure 10.7).

**How many long term cohabiting relationships are there?**

Relatively few cohabiting relationships endure as cohabiting relationships in the long term – most end in break up or in marriage.

Of those who began first cohabiting in the 1970s less than 1 per cent were still cohabiting in the same relationship in 2001 (Table 10.12).

Of those men who first began cohabiting in the early 1990s, 8.6 per cent were still cohabiting with the same partner by 2001. While this percentage is higher than in the 1970s this will partly reflect the fact that cohabiting couples formed in the early 1990s will have had less time to either break up or marry by 2001 than those who began cohabiting in the 1970s.

Regardless of when people began cohabiting, the majority of the relationships converted to marriage (except for women in the early 1990s). However, the proportion that are converting to marriage is steadily declining. Before 1970 and into the early 1970s about two thirds of men and three quarters of women who cohabited reported that they went on to marry their partner. By the 1980s and thereafter only about half the men and over 60 per cent of women reported having married their partner. Compared to cohabiting relationships in the 1970s more recent cohabitations are ending in break ups. Among women who first began cohabiting in the early 1970s, 72 per cent reported having married their partner by 2001 and only 25 per cent reported having broken up. In contrast, of those who began cohabiting in the early 1990s 46 per cent had married and 46 per cent had broken up by 2001.

It is not certain why this is so. Changes in the social and economic setting over this period are likely to...
have contributed to the changing meaning of cohabitation and the pressures to convert a cohabiting relationship into marriage. It is possible that as cohabitation has become more widespread, more people are entering such relationships with the intention of it only being short term. In addition, as more people cohabit, the move into cohabitation may be more casual and attracting people into relationships which, when cohabitation was less common, would not have even been considered. Finally, since couples now cohabit for a longer period before marriage they have more chance of breaking up. When cohabiting relationships quickly converted to marriage (as they tended to do in the early 1970), there was less chance for them to break up.

Is marriage just a piece of paper or are there differences?

It is not uncommon to hear the statement that marriage is just a piece of paper – that there is really no difference between formally marrying and cohabiting. The evidence reviewed so far shows that cohabiting people have a different profile to those in registered marriages. To what extent is there evidence that those who cohabit experience the relationship differently from those in registered marriages? This section reviews differences between registered marriages and cohabiting relationships in terms of domestic violence, mental health, division of domestic labour, whether or not they have children, financial management, geographical mobility and housing tenure.

Are cohabiting relationships less or more violent?

While violence occurs among both cohabiting and married couples there is clear evidence that domestic violence is more probable among cohabiting couples. The 1997 ABS Women’s Safety Survey showed that women in cohabiting relationships were considerably more likely than married women to report a wide range of forms of domestic violence (Table 10.13). The evidence in Table 10.13 indicates that on many measures cohabiting women were about twice as likely as married women to report being the victim of violence from their current partner. For example:
• Emotional abuse was reported at almost twice the rate in cohabiting relationships than in married relationships. (7.9 per cent by cohabiting partner compared with 4.1 per cent by married partner).

• Pushing, grabbing and shoving had occurred in 9.7 per cent of the cohabiting relationships compared to 5.2 per cent of the married relationships.

• Threats or attempted hitting had occurred in 6.2 per cent of the cohabiting relationships compared 3.9 per cent of the marriages.

One important factor that is linked to the higher rate of domestic violence in cohabiting than married relationships is the lower rate of employment of male partners in cohabiting relationships. Table 10.14 indicates that, where cohabiting partners were employed, the rates of domestic violence in those relationships were comparable to those among married couples in which the male was employed. For each of the forms of violence in Table 10.14 there were no statistically significant differences in the rates of violence by the current male partner in cohabiting and married relationships.

However, among relationships where the male partner was not employed, the rates of violence in cohabiting relationships were much higher than in marriages where the male partner was not employed. For example, in marriages where the male partner was not employed, 6.2 per cent of women reported having been physically assaulted by their husband. Of cohabiting relationships where the male partner was not employed, 24.5 per cent of women reported having being physically assaulted by that partner at some point.

In contrast, marriages in which the male partner was not employed had very similar rates of violence to marriages or cohabiting relationships in which the male partner was employed. For example, 6.2 per cent of married women with husbands who were not employed reported that their partner had assaulted them at some point compared with 8.2 per cent of married women whose husband was employed (Table 10.14).

### Table 10.13
Violence from current male partner by marital status (cohabiting and married), women only, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of violence (directed to female partner)</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Cohabiting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional abuse in last 12 months</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>7.9***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any physical violence from partner</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>11.4**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatened or attempted to hit with a fist or anything else</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>6.2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushed, grabbed or shoved</td>
<td>5.2*</td>
<td>9.7***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kicked, bit or punched</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.7*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choked</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>3.2***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical assault by current partner</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>10.9**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 1996 Women’s Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996b).*

* Difference between married and cohabiting is statistically significant: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

### Table 10.14
Violence from current male partner by marital and partner’s employment status, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of violence</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Cohabiting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional abuse in previous 12 months</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>7.9***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner employed</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>6.2**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner not employed</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>20.9**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical assault</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>11.4*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner employed</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>9.6*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner not employed</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>24.5**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatened or attempted physical assault</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner employed</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner not employed</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>10.2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushed, grabbed or shoved</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>9.7**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner employed</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>7.9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner not employed</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>22.4**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 1996 Women’s Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996b).*

* Difference between married and cohabiting not statistically significant; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

1 Base n on which % are based
It seems, therefore, that any link between cohabitation and violence in relationships is not simple. There is certainly no general link. It appears that there may be an interaction between relationship type and employment that makes violence more likely. When a male partner is cohabiting and not employed, he is more likely to be violent. However, employed men who are cohabiting display no greater propensity to violence towards their partner than do married men.

Do cohabiting people have better or worse mental health?

It has been argued that marriage is a protective factor against mental disorders and the evidence supports the view that married people have better mental health than never married and divorced people (de Vaus 2002). It has also been argued (Brown 2000) that marriage will lead to better mental health than cohabitation. Essentially the argument is that marriage provides more of the benefits of a secure, intimate and enduring relationship than does cohabitation.

The evidence from the 1996 National Survey of Mental Health and Well Being indicates that cohabiting men and women have higher rates of mental disorders than do married people.

Table 10.15 shows these differences in the first two rows. This table shows that:

- Cohabiting women are considerably more likely than married women to suffer from an anxiety or an affective disorder (19.6 per cent compared with 12.4 per cent).
- Men and women in cohabiting relationships were much more likely than married people to suffer from alcohol and drug disorders. Of cohabiting men it is estimated that 12.8 suffered from an alcohol or drug disorder in the previous 12 months compared to just 5.3 per cent of married men. Among women the comparable probabilities were 7 per cent (cohabiting women) and 1.8 per cent (married women).

The critical question, however, is whether the higher rate of disorders among cohabiting men and women is somehow due to the different experiences associated with cohabitation and marriage or whether the characteristics of people who cohabit also predispose the same people to higher rates of mental disorders. Certainly, those who cohabit are different in many respects from those who are married and many of these characteristics are known to be linked to the chances of suffering from a mental disorder. For example, cohabiting people are, on average younger, less educated, have had more previous relationships and come from different ethnic backgrounds to those who are married.

The final row in Table 10.15 reports the results of logistic regression analysis which estimates what the rates of mental health disorders of cohabiting men and women would be if they had the same characteristics as married men and women. These results suggest that if cohabiting men and women were of a similar age, education, ethnic background, and had a similar number of previous relationships to married men and women, then they would have rates of mental disorders very similar to those of married men and women (compare probabilities in bottom row with those in first row).

How do cohabiting couples manage their finances?

Although two thirds of both married and cohabiting couples report sharing financial decision making, cohabiting relationships generally indicate less financial dependence between partners and greater individual than joint management of finances. The 1996 Australian Institute of Family Studies Life Course Study found that:

- 54 per cent of cohabiting couples reported having joint bank accounts compared to 90 per cent of married couples.
- 37 per cent of cohabiting couples compared to 67 per cent of married couples reported that the male was the main economic provider.

Do cohabiting couples have a more equal domestic division of labour?

The way in which couples share the daily tasks of living together is frequently used as a measure of the gender equality in these relationships. It has been widely observed that partnered women spend far more time than partnered men on domestic work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 10.15</th>
<th>Estimated rates of mental disorders in previous 12 months, 1996</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disorder type</td>
<td>Affective or anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probability of disorder</td>
<td>Male %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probability of cohabiting people having a disorder if they had the same characteristics as married people</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and in child care while men typically spend more time in paid work. Because cohabiting relationships are less institutionalised and sometimes entered into as an alternative to the structures and inequalities that some people associate with traditional marriage, it is often stated that these relationships exhibit greater gender equality than marriages (South and Spitze 1994; Bianchi et al. 2000; Baxter 2001). To what extent does the gendered division of labour in cohabiting relationships indicate greater gender equality than in marriages?

One way of examining equality in relationships is to see how couples divide up their time and share domestic, employment, child care and leisure activities. Table 10.16 reports differences in the time that men and women spend on various types of activities according to whether they were married or cohabiting. Since married and cohabiting couples differ in many ways as the data in this chapter have demonstrated, it is important to ensure that like is compared with like. The results in Table 10.16 take into account differences between married and cohabiting couples in terms of age, whether or not they have children, their ethnicity, education, income and workforce participation. These results report the differences between men and women after the influence of all these other differences are removed.

The table reports the difference (in minutes per day) that men and women spend on various activities. Positive numbers indicate that women spend this much more time per day than men on the relevant activity. Negative figures indicate that women spend this much time less than men on the relevant activity.

The first thing that is evident in Table 10.16 is that gender differences in time use exist among both those who are married and those who cohabit. The pattern of differences is the same among those who are married and those who cohabit. Women do more inside domestic work and child care than men while men do a little more outside domestic work than women. Regardless of whether they are married or are cohabiting men spend much more time than women in paid employment and spend more time than women in recreational activities. These differences are independent of whether or not people have young children, their age and other characteristics controlled in Table 10.16.

However, there were a number of important differences between the cohabiting and married couples. These include:

- The gender difference in domestic work between cohabiting men and women (86 minutes per day) was less than between married men and women (118 minutes per day). This applies (but less so) to the sub categories of domestic work except home maintenance where the gender gap was slightly greater among cohabiters.

- The gender gap in overall child care was substantially less among cohabiting than among married men and women. Married women did about 139 minutes more child care per day on child care than did married men. However, cohabiting women spent only about 67 minutes a day more on overall child care than did cohabiting men.

- The gender gap in paid employment was much less among cohabiting men and women (100 minutes a day) than among married men and women (170 minutes per day).

These patterns suggest that there is greater gender equity in the time spent on domestic work among cohabiting couples than among married couples. Among married men the less time they spent on domestic work was partly compensated for by the greater time they spent in paid work and their greater relative involvement in child care activities. However, the picture is more complex than this.

The reason why the gender differences are less among cohabiting couples is not because these men did more around the house than married men but because women in cohabiting relationships did less than married women (Table 10.17).

Rather than being more “enlightened” than their married counterparts, men in cohabiting relationships did no more domestic work than their married counterparts, they had more leisure, and did less child care and less paid work. The most important differences between cohabiting and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 10.16 Time use differences between men and women in married and cohabiting couples, 1997</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Married</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Difference</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(minutes per day)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic work (overall)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other housework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children (overall)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Time Use Survey, 1997 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997e). Positive values = women do more per day than men. Negative values = women do fewer minutes per day than men. These results are based on regression analysis and have controlled for age of individuals, whether they have children, whether children are dependent, country of birth, main language spoken, highest qualifications, income and employment status (FT, PT, Unemployed or not in labour force), day and season. Time use includes both primary and secondary activities. Estimates are based on separate regression models for men and women. Significance tests for gender were based on a combined model.

*** Difference between men and women is significant at the 0.001 level.
married couples is found among women – not the men. Women in cohabiting relationships did less domestic work than comparable married women (27 minutes a day less), spent less time on children (96 minutes a day less than married women), had more leisure (46 minutes a day) and had more paid employment (19 minutes a day). That is, women in cohabiting relationships spent less time on their home and children compared to married women and more time on leisure and paid work.

In general, equivalent married and cohabiting men spent the same amount per day on the activities listed in Table 10.17. On most activities the time use of cohabiting men did not differ significantly from that of married men. The only exceptions were recreation and employment where cohabiting men spent more time than married men on recreational activities and less time on paid employment.

Do cohabiting individuals move more often?

Individuals in cohabiting relationships were more geographically mobile than married couples (Figure 10.8). This is true among both men and women and holds for virtually all age groups. Taken overall, the 2001 Census shows that 40 per cent of married men and women moved residence in the previous 5 years compared to 78 per cent of men and women in cohabiting relationships – double the rate of mobility.

While cohabiting and married couples experienced relatively similar rates of geographical mobility in their twenties, they increasingly begin to differ in their rates of geographical mobility from about the age of 30 onwards.

It is unclear why people in cohabiting relationships are more mobile than married people. However, contributing factors are likely to include:

Relationship changes. Overall, cohabiting relationships have lower rates of survival than do marriages and the higher break up rates and conversions to marriage would produce higher rates of mobility following relationship changes.

Children. Those in cohabiting relationships are less likely to have children and thus do not have the mobility constraints that tend to accompany children.

Housing tenure. Those in cohabiting relationships are more likely than married couples to live in rental housing (Table 10.18). Rental housing is less likely to be secure in the long term thus leading to higher rates of mobility among tenants. Furthermore, some tenants become home purchasers which leads to a move into the home they purchase.

Age. Cohabiting couples are younger than married couples and younger couples are more likely to be mobile as they are in rental housing and may need to move for employment-related reasons (Figure 10.8).

Are cohabiters also renters?

Partnered adults in cohabiting relationships are more likely than those who are married to live in rental housing. While 45 per cent of all cohabiting couples aged 15-64 rent, just 16 per cent of married couples are renters. This partly reflects the older age profile of married people (and thus their greater likelihood of owning a home) but these differences persist within each age group (Table 10.18).

In most age groups cohabiters were at least twice as likely to rent than those who were married. For example, among those aged 35-44, 16.6 per cent of those who were married rented compared to 34.2 per cent of those who were cohabiting.

### Table 10.17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Difference (men)</th>
<th>Difference (women)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic work (overall)</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>27***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other household</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home maintenance</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children (overall)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>96***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>-47**</td>
<td>-46**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>51***</td>
<td>-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Positive values = Married did more minutes per day than cohabiting
Negative values = Married did fewer minutes per day than cohabiting

Three results are based on regression analysis and have controlled for age of individuals, whether they have children, whether children are dependent, country of birth, main language spoken, highest qualifications, income and employment status (FT, PT, Unemployed or not in labour force), day and season

Estimates are derived from separate regression models for men and women

* differences between married and cohabiting significant at 0.05 level
** differences between married and cohabiting significant at 0.01 level
*** differences between married and cohabiting significant at 0.001 level
The reasons for the greater rate of renting among cohabiters in each age group is not certain but a number of factors are likely to contribute:

- Since cohabiting relationships are less stable than married relationships, renting may reflect the accrued economic consequences of relationship changes.
- A greater proportion of cohabiting couples than married couples have no income earner thus making home ownership less likely.
- Because cohabiting relationships, as a whole, are subject to more change, renting fits best with the lower stability in these relationships.

**What do people think about marriage and cohabitation?**

Where marriage was once viewed as an exclusive, lifelong, heterosexual relationship formalised by a religious ceremony and necessary for both bearing and rearing children, the pathway to marriage is becoming increasingly diverse.

According to the National Social Science Survey in 1998, more than half of the adult Australian population favoured young people living together before marriage. Similarly, de Vaus’ analysis of the 1995 Australian Family Values Survey indicated widespread acceptance of cohabitation (de Vaus, 1997a).

**How much approval is there for cohabitation?**

It is clear from the behaviour reported in this chapter that cohabitation has become widely accepted in Australian society. But how wide is this acceptance and under what conditions do Australians still disapprove of cohabitation?

Attitudinal surveys conducted in 1995 and 1998 indicate that that about a quarter of adults disapprove of cohabitation regardless of whether the couple intends to marry or not (Table 10.19). These people simply see cohabitation as an undesirable behaviour. Men and women share similar views. However, disapproval of cohabitation is far more common among older people. Men and women aged 20-49 shared very similar views about cohabitation with only about 15 per cent disapproving. However, compared with those under 50 years old, disapproval of cohabitation is more common for those in their fifties and markedly more common for those in their sixties and seventies. Whether these age-related differences reflect increasing disapproval of cohabitation as people grow older or the influence of the different periods in which the different generations formed their views about marriage and cohabitation is not clear.

While there were only modest levels of rejection of cohabitation, particularly among those younger than 60, there is more ambivalence about treating cohabiting couples the same as married couples in the eyes of the law. There is evidence that although people accept cohabitation, many still distinguish between marriage and cohabitation. While only a quarter reject cohabitation outright, almost 40 per cent reject treating cohabiting relationships in the same way as marriages. This pattern is found among both men and women and among all age groups. In summary, regardless of gender and age group, the general acceptance of cohabitation is not matched by an acceptance that marriage and cohabitation should be treated as the same thing in legislation.

**Table 10.18**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent of partnered adults renting by marital status and age, 2001</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Cohabiting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Table 10.19**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes towards marriage &amp; cohabitation (per cent agree)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapprove of a man and woman living together without planning marriage</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a good idea for a couple who intend to get married to live together first?</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law should not treat cohabiting same as married</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>30-39</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>43***</td>
<td>43***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>30-39</td>
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<td></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54**</td>
<td>54**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1. 1995 Australian Family Values Survey, 1995
2. International Social Science Survey, Australia, 1998
p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

**Endnotes**

1. For the analysis of remarriages the data have been combined with similar data from the 1996 Australian Family Life Course survey and 1997 Negotiating the Life Course to ensure sufficient numbers for reliable analysis.
2. The material in this sub section is taken more or less directly from an article by de Vaus, Qu and Weston (2003).
3. A fourth but less common way in which cohabitation may end is in the death of one partner.
Cohabitation has rapidly become a more common form of partnering with 72 per cent of people now living with their partner before marrying; 12.4 per cent of all partnered people cohabit.

Since the early 1970s, cohabitation has been very common following a marriage. Cohabitation before a first marriage has now reached the same levels as achieved before second marriages in the early 1970s.

Although adults are delaying marriage, they appear to be forming intimate, live-in relationships at about the same age as they were for much of the 20th century.

Between 1982-2001 there has been an 8 per cent decline in the percentage of the population that is married. About half of this decline is compensated for by a 4 per cent increase in cohabitation over the same period.

Most cohabiting couples are aged in their twenties and early thirties. In all age groups except those aged 15-24, married couples easily out-number cohabiting couples.

Of those aged over 45 who cohabit, 70 per cent cohabit following divorce or separation.

Nevertheless, at a given point of time, most separated or divorced men and women do not cohabit – just 18 per cent cohabit while approximately 82 per cent of separated and divorced adults either live alone or are lone parents.

While many cohabiting couples have dependent children in their home (over half of cohabiting adults aged between 30-44), they are considerably less likely than married couples to have dependent children living with them. Conversely, cohabiting couples are much more likely than married couples to have no children with them.

Most children living in couple households live with married parents (or step parents). Less than 10 per cent of couples with dependent children are cohabiting couples.

Cohabiting in Australia mainly occurs among people from an Anglo background. Cohabitation rates are very low among people from Southern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa and Asia.

Cohabitation rates are highest among those with no religious affiliation (over 20 per cent) but are also relatively common among people affiliated with the mainstream religious groups (around 11 per cent among Anglicans and Catholics). Cohabitation rates are lowest among those from fundamentalist and sectarian religious groups as well as among those from an Islamic background.

Indigenous couples have a cohabitation rate about three times higher than the non Indigenous rate.

Cohabitation is less common among professional and higher level white collar men than those in blue collar and lower white collar jobs.

Men who are employed full time have lower cohabitation rates than those who either work part time or not at all. Among women, those who work full time or are unemployed have the highest rates of cohabitation.

In recent years cohabiting relationships last, on average, just over two and a half years before either converting to marriage or breaking up.

The rate at which cohabiting relationships convert to marriage has been declining since the 1970s. This has been mirrored by an increase in the rate at which cohabiting relationships are breaking up.

Very few cohabiting relationships last, as cohabiting relationships, in the long term. After five years the large majority have either ended in marriage or have broken up. Less than 1 per cent of people who cohabited in the 1970s have remained in a cohabiting relationship by 2001.

Cohabiting relationships are much less stable than marriages. Of women marrying in the early 1990s, 12 per cent had separated within five years. Of those who began cohabiting in the early 1990s, 40 per cent had broken up five years later.

Domestic violence is considerably higher in cohabiting relationships but mainly when the male partner is not employed.

Men and women in cohabiting relationships have higher levels of mental disorders compared with married people but these differences are attributable to the characteristics of those who cohabit rather than to cohabitation itself.

Cohabiting couples have a more equal division of labour than do married couples. However, this is due to cohabiting women doing less domestic work than married women rather than to cohabiting men doing more domestic work than their married counterparts.

People who cohabit appear to be less geographically settled than married couples. They are more geographically mobile and are more likely to be renting than purchasing their home.

There is widespread approval and support for cohabitation. However, there was less support for treating marriages and cohabiting relationships in the same way in legislation.
Transitions in childhood
11 Transitions in childhood

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While childhood is a time of considerable developmental change, both at the individual level and in terms of changing relationships with parents and peers, the traditional model of childhood has almost taken for granted a high level of stability in the family living arrangements of children.

However, the diversity of family forms and relationship instability among parents means that we can no longer assume that most children will live out their childhood within the same set of family arrangements. Many children (currently over 50,000 each year) experience a parental divorce and many others experience the separation of cohabiting parents. In addition to parental separations some children will also experience the repartnering of their parent(s). This repartnering means that the child will enter into a new family arrangement (step family or blended family) as well as out of other family arrangements.

Some children will experience multiple transitions between living arrangements during their childhood. A child whose parents separate will experience a transition at this point. For a period the child may live in a lone parent family. If their parent repartners then the child will experience a transition into a new family arrangement. If this relationship breaks down then the child will experience another transition. In addition to transitions in the household in which the child lives they may also experience changing living arrangements of their non resident parent with whom they may have regular contact.

Family diversity and relationship breakdown and family re-formation all mean that children may well be experiencing considerable disruptions during their childhood. Most of the available evidence about the living arrangements of children does not enable us to see how the living arrangements of children change over their childhood. Most existing information simply indicates how many children are living in a particular family type at any given point of time.

While these figures are helpful in identifying the diversity of family types in which children live they provide no sense of how long children live in particular families and how many transitions they experience over the course of their childhood.

Why does it matter how many living arrangements children experience? Pryor and Rogers (2001) have reviewed Australian and international studies that examine the impact of changes in living arrangements on the wellbeing of children. On the basis of their extensive review of the studies, they conclude that:

“Children who have experienced transitions not only show short and medium term distress but are also at risk for long term difficulties over many domains of development and achievement” (p. 222).

The evidence is that children in separated, as opposed to intact families, have:

- Poorer social and emotional behaviour during childhood but that these differences are not large.
- Poorer educational and economic outcomes in adulthood.
- A greater, but not large, probability of engaging in aggressive, antisocial and criminal behaviour.
- A greater chance of substance use in adulthood especially in regard to illicit substances.
- Poorer mental health in adolescence and adulthood although the differences are not large.
- Poorer family and intimate relationships in adolescence and adulthood and a greater chance of divorce.

Overall, the overwhelming evidence is that where family type has an impact, children whose parents separate do less well as a group than those in intact families. Pryor and Rogers (2001) conclude that:

“Children from separated families typically have from one-and-a-half times to double the risk of an adverse outcome compared to children from intact original families” (p. 66).

Why do transitions have an impact on children? While there is no single or simple answer to this question, the quality of parenting and of parent-child relations is a key factor that mediates the impact of other risk factors in a child’s life. Thus, a child may be exposed to many potential risk factors that do not have a negative impact because the quality of parenting is such as to protect the child from these risks. Alternatively, a child may be relatively protected from the main risk factors but, because of poor parenting and poor parent-child relations, may nevertheless be overly affected by these risk factors.

When children experience a change in family arrangements they face a greater exposure to factors that have been identified as affecting child wellbeing. These include decline in family income following parental separation and increased levels of
exposure to family conflict, both before and after separation, which has well known negative implications on child wellbeing (for example, Amato 1993; Cummings and Davies 1994; Amato and Booth 1997; Morrison and Cotro 1999). Furthermore, the quality of parenting is likely to be affected as parents are distressed during and after separation. When parents separate or repartner children may move neighbourhoods and thus experience disruptions to friendships and other relationships beyond the family (Heatherington 1991, 1992). Parents who separate can show high levels of distress and have a higher rate of mental disorders (Marks 1996; Simon 2002; de Vaus 2002). All these factors can combine to make a child more vulnerable to risk factors and affect their short and long term wellbeing.

The available research indicates that children who undergo multiple family transitions appear to be at the most risk of adverse outcomes. Compared to children from intact families and from stable lone parent families, those who experience multiple transitions are the most at risk of poorer educational outcomes, poorer relationships and poorer behaviour (Marks 1996; Simon 2002; de Vaus 2002). All these factors can combine to make a child more vulnerable to risk factors and affect their short and long term wellbeing.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine family change among children. It explores change at two levels. It examines:

- The extent to which children experience change in family living arrangements in the first 15 years of their childhood.
- The extent to which children are increasingly liable to experience changes in their living arrangements in more recent years.

These changes are based on information from the HILDA survey and show changes in the living arrangements of children since the end of World War II until 2000. Details of the data set and the methodology by which the following estimates are based can be found in de Vaus and Gray (2003). Perhaps the most important point to emphasise is that the methodology applied enables us to obtain a much fuller picture of the extent of family transitions than those derived from divorce statistics provides. Divorce statistics only provide a measure of the number of children who face family disruptions and transitions as a result of the breakdown of the relationship of their married parents. However, the increasing number of children born into cohabiting relationships and the fact that a relatively large proportion of step and blended families consist of a cohabiting couple (p. 61) means that the breakdown of these families must be included in any estimate of childhood family transitions.

How different are the family types into which children are now born?

Children can be born to a married couple, a cohabiting couple or to a lone parent. The proportion of children born to married parents has declined in the post-war period – particularly from 1950 onwards (Table 11.1). In 1950, 97 per cent of all children were born to married parents. During the 1960s this figure declined a little to around 95 per cent. By the mid 1970s until the early 1980s around 90 per cent of children were born to married parents. During the 1980s this percentage dropped again to about 85 per cent and in the mid 1990s the percentage dropped again, but even more sharply, so that by 2001 just over 70 per cent of children were born to married parents.

Initially, the decline in the percentage of children born to married parents was attributable to an increase in the percentage of children born to single, unpartnered women. In 1950 only about 2 per cent of children were born into lone parent families. In the 1960s this figure doubled to more than 5 per cent. By the mid 1970s to early 1980s around 7 per cent of children were born into lone parent families. The proportion of children born to single mothers has continued to increase so that by 2001, 11.6 per cent of the children were born to single mothers.

### Table 11.1 Family type into which children were born, 1946-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of birth</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Cohabiting</th>
<th>Lone mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>97.0%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>98.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>94.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>94.6%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>89.7%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>89.3%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>85.6%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>74.6%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of birth</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Cohabiting</th>
<th>Lone mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS, 2002a).
But the increase of births to lone mothers was only part of the story behind the decline of children born to married parents. Until 1970 virtually no children were born to unmarried but cohabiting parents. In the early 1970s the first sign of births to cohabiting parents began to emerge. By 1980 this new trend had become established with 4 per cent of all births being to cohabiting but unmarried couples. This new trend has quickly accelerated so that by 1990, 8.6 per cent of births were to unmarried couples. By 2001 this figure had doubled again to 16.2 per cent. In other words, since emerging in the very early 1970s, the percentage of births to unmarried couples has doubled every ten years since 1970.

How many children remain with both biological parents throughout their childhood?

While there has been a considerable change in the family circumstances into which children are born, this does not say anything about the degree to which children face changes to their family living arrangements during their childhood. In this section we describe the percentage of children who live all of their first 15 years with both their natural parents, regardless of whether the parents were married. Table 11.2 shows the percentage of children born to parents who were living together and whose parents were still living together by the time the child was aged, 5, 10 and 15 years.

The first row of the table shows the percentage of children who were still living with those two parents five years after their birth. It shows the changing percentages for children born in the decades after World War II. Of children born to couple parents between 1946-1955, most (98 per cent) were still with both these birth parents by the age of five. However, of children born between 1963-1975, this percentage had declined to 95.8 per cent. After the introduction of the Family Law Act in 1975 the percentage of children who were born to couple parents and were still living with them five years later declined to 91.3 per cent and has remained at that level since.

These figures indicate high levels of couple stability in the first five years of a child’s life prior to the introduction of the Family Law Act. However, following the introduction of the Act there was a substantial rise in the extent to which children experienced the separation of their two parents within their first five years of life.

Similar changes are evident among children by the time they are ten years old. Of children born to couple parents between 1946-1955, 95.5 per cent were still living with both parents by the age of ten. The same was true of those born between 1956-62. However, of those born into couple families after 1976, this percentage dropped sharply to around 84 per cent. That is, of children born to couple parents after 1976, 84 per cent were still living with both these parents by the age of 10. Since the initial decline in 1976, there is no evidence of any further decline in the percentage of 10 year olds experiencing the separation of their parents.

A similar pattern applies for children by the age of 15. In the two post-war cohorts where children would turn 15 before the introduction of the 1975 Family Law Act, between 90 to 93 per cent of those children born to couple parents remained with both parents for all 15 years. In the post-1976 cohorts, the survival of parental relationships dropped sharply in the immediate post-1976 cohort but appears to have remained stable subsequently. Of children born into couple families since 1976 around 77 per cent were still living in a family with both their parents when they were 15 years old.

In summary, since World War II the percentage of children who experience the separation of their parents has increased. Not surprisingly, the chances of children experiencing their parents’ separation increases as children grow older. But the chances of experiencing parental separation have also increased since the introduction of the 1975 Family Law Act. Prior to the introduction of the Act the percentage of children who experienced a parental separation was

### Table 11.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of child’s birth</th>
<th>All turn 15 by time of 1975 Family Law Act</th>
<th>Turned 15 after introduction of Family Law Act</th>
<th>All born after Family Law Act</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 years old</td>
<td>97.8 %</td>
<td>97.5 %</td>
<td>95.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 years old</td>
<td>95.5 %</td>
<td>95.1 %</td>
<td>87.9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 years old</td>
<td>93.2 %</td>
<td>90.5 %</td>
<td>81.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>1338</td>
<td>3057</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS, 2002a).
quite stable\cite{1}. Among children born after the Act, the chances of experiencing parental separation increased substantially. However, after an initial increase following the Act the percentage of children experiencing parental separation has been remarkably stable. That is, since the initial sharp increase following the Family Law Act, there is no evidence from these figures, that children born into a couple family since then are becoming more likely to experience their parents separation by the time they turn 15.

**What proportion of childhood is spent with both biological parents?**

Another way of thinking about changing patterns of family living arrangements of children is to explore the per cent of time that a whole cohort spends living in a particular family form. If all members of a cohort lived in the same family type throughout their childhood, then the percentage of time spent in the family type would be 100 per cent. If half the members spent all their childhood in the particular family type and the other half spent 50 per cent of their childhood in that same family type then 75 per cent of the time of the cohort would be spent in that family type.

Figure 11.1 reports the percentage of time that each cohort spent living with both their biological parents up to the age of 15. It shows that of those children born in the 1946-55 cohort immediately after World War II, 94 per cent of the total years of that cohort was spent living with both biological parents. The remaining 6 per cent of time consisted of the time children spent in lone parent families or step families.

With each successive cohort the percentage of time children spent living with both biological parents has declined. As a group, the 1966-75 (pre-Family Law Act) birth cohort spent almost 89 per cent of its time living with both biological parents. The remaining 6 per cent of time consisted of the time children spent in lone parent families or step families.

Figure 11.1 reports the percentage of time that each cohort spent living with both their biological parents up to the age of 15. It shows that of those children born in the 1946-55 cohort immediately after World War II, 94 per cent of the total years of that cohort was spent living with both biological parents. The remaining 6 per cent of time consisted of the time children spent in lone parent families or step families.

How many children ever live with a lone parent?

The percentage of children who ever live in a lone parent family is due to two main factors – the percentage of children who are born into a lone parent family and the percentage of children whose parents (or step parents) separate and form a lone parent family. Since 1946, the percentage of children born into a lone parent family has grown as has the percentage lone parent families created by parental separation.

As shown in Table 11.3, between the 1946-55 birth cohort and the 1981-85 birth cohort there has been a trebling of the percentage of children who ever live in a lone parent family. In the 1946-55 birth cohort 8.9 per cent of children spent some time living in a lone parent family in their first 15 years. In the 1981-85 birth cohort 24.9 per cent of children spent some time in a lone parent family. In each cohort, children entered into a lone parent family either at birth or when their parents separated. In each cohort parental separation was by far the most common mode of entry of children in to a lone parent family.

**What proportion of childhood is spent with a lone parent?**

Although a quarter of the children in the 1981-85 birth cohort spent some time living in a lone parent family this does not mean that they live all their first 15 years in such a family. Indeed, over 70 per cent of all such children enter into a lone parent family some time after birth (rather than at birth). Furthermore, most children who are born into a lone parent family do not spend their next 15 years in a lone parent family. Most mothers who have a child as a lone parent subsequently partner.

The increasing role of lone parent families in rearing children can be seen by changes in the total amount of time that each cohort spent in lone parent families (Figure 11.2). Of the 1946-55 birth cohort, 3.6 per cent of the total time of this cohort of children up to age 15 was spent in a lone parent family.

**Table 11.3 Cumulative per cent of children ever in lone mother family by birth cohort**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth cohort</th>
<th>By age 15</th>
<th>At birth</th>
<th>Due to parental separation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946-55</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956-62</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963-75</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-80</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-85</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS, 2002a).

Note: The proportion due to parental separation is the difference between the cumulative per cent of children ever in a lone mother family by age 15 and the per cent in a lone mother family at birth.
family. This increased sharply to 6.3 per cent of time for the 1963-75 birth cohort. The percentage of time spent in a lone parent family has continued to increase so that by the 1981-85 birth cohort 10.7 per cent of all the time of this cohort was lived in a lone parent family.

Figure 11.2 also shows that the bulk of the increased time children spend in lone parent families is due to parental separation rather than being born into a lone parent family.

**How many times do children live with a lone parent?**

Most children who ever live in a lone parent family do so for a single spell. There was little evidence from the HILDA survey of a substantial number of children being part of a family that is rotating between being a lone parent family and a partnered family. In the most recent cohort of fifteen year olds, 87 per cent of children who had ever been in a lone parent family had been in such a family on only one occasion. Thirteen per cent had had two spells in a lone parent family (Table 11.4).

While most children in the most recent cohort had been in a lone parent family only once, the percentage of children experiencing two lone parent spells has nevertheless increased in successive cohorts. In the 1946-55 birth cohort just 2 per cent of children who ever lived in a lone parent family did so twice. This percentage of multiple spells has increased from 2 to 13 per cent between the 1946-55 to 1981-85 cohorts – a 650 per cent increase. It is very rare for a child to experience three lone parent spells in their first 15 years (Table 11.4).

**For how long do children live with a lone parent?**

Very few children spend all their first 15 years living in a lone parent household. Of those that spend any time living in a lone parent family, the average duration of each spell in a lone parent family is between five and six years (Figure 11.3). This duration has been stable across the various birth cohorts since 1946. Children in the 1946-55 cohort who ever lived in a lone parent family did so for an average of 6.3 years on each occasion. In the subsequent three birth cohorts the average duration of each lone parent spell was a little over five years.

**How many children ever live in a step or blended family?**

The rise in lone parent families has been accompanied by a parallel rise in children living in step and blended families.

Overall the proportion of children who ever live in a step family by the age of 15 has increased almost fourfold from 4.5 per cent of the 1946-55 birth cohort to 16.6 per cent of the 1981-85 birth cohort (Table 11.5). Among those who spent some time in a step family the average number of years spent in a step or blended family has remained more or less constant, ranging from 6.6 years for the 1963-75 birth cohort to 6.7 years for the 1981-85 birth cohort. The average number of years spent in a step family for each cohort remained relatively constant, ranging from 6.4 years for the 1946-55 birth cohort to 6.7 years for the 1981-85 birth cohort.

### Table 11.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of lone parent spells</th>
<th>1946-55 %</th>
<th>1956-62 %</th>
<th>1963-75 %</th>
<th>1976-80 %</th>
<th>1981-85 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>98.0</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>92.4</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of children</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS, 2002a).
birth cohort to 8.1 years for the 1946-55 birth cohort. The most recent group of fifteen year olds spent seven years in a step or blended family.

The per cent of time that each cohort of children spent living in a step or blended family has increased in a similar way to that in which living in a lone parent family has increased (Figure 11.4). In the cohort of children immediately following World War II, 2.2 per cent of the time of this cohort (up to the age of 15) was spent living in a step or blended family. This percentage has increased steadily with each successive cohort until the 1976-80 birth cohort after which the proportion of time in step families has remained steady at just over 7 per cent. The levelling off in the time spent in step and blended families since the mid 1970s is most probably due to step families forming later in a child’s life; a smaller proportion of separated parents forming step families; and possibly due to step families surviving for a shorter time than in the past.

How many living arrangements do children experience?

In all birth cohorts, at least three quarters of the children lived in just one family living arrangement for all of their first 15 years of life (Table 11.6). Most of these children spent all these 15 years living with both their biological parents. However, Table 11.6 also shows the decline in the percentage of children living in just one family type throughout their first 15 years. In the 1946-55 birth cohort, almost 92 per cent of all children lived in just one family type throughout these 15 years. By the time the 1981-85 birth cohort reached 15 years of age (that is, by 1996-2000), just 74 per cent had lived in the same family type throughout their childhood.

The percentage of children living in two different family living arrangements has risen since 1946 from 6 per cent to almost 16 per cent in the most recent cohort of 15 year olds.

Relatively few children lived in three or more family living arrangements in their first fifteen years. Of the most recent cohort, just over 10 per cent of children lived in three or more such arrangements. While relatively low, this figure represents a gradual increase and is considerably higher than just after World War II when just 2.4 per cent of the post-war cohort lived in three or more separate arrangements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth cohort</th>
<th>Average duration in step family (Years)</th>
<th>Proportion ever in step family %</th>
<th>Number of observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946-55</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956-62</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963-75</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-80</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-85</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>213</td>
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</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS, 2002a).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth cohort</th>
<th>Per cent of time in step family</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946-55</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956-62</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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<td>1963-75</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-80</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-85</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS, 2002a).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>73.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS, 2002a).

Endnote

1 The percentage in the 1963-75 birth cohort that experienced parental separation is greater than in the two earlier cohorts. However, although all these children were born before the 1975 Family Law Act, many will have experienced parental separation after the Act.
• The proportion of children born to married parents has declined from around 97 per cent in the 1950s, to 90 per cent in the early 1980s and to just over 70 per cent among children born in the mid 1990s.

• The percentage of children born to cohabiting couples has doubled each decade since 1970 to 16 per cent in 2001.

• The percentage of children born to lone mothers has increased from 2 per cent in 1950 to 11.6 per cent in 2001.

• Of children born between 1981-85, 76.6 per cent spent all of their first 15 years of life living with both their biological parents.

• This percentage is a decline from the 93 per cent of the post-war cohort who lived with both biological parents.

• Of the 1981-85 birth cohort, 82 per cent of the life of this cohort up to the age of 15 was spent living with both biological parents.

• The per cent of time living with both biological parents has declined from 94 per cent in the post-war cohort of 15 year olds to 82 per cent of the most recent cohort.

• A quarter of all children now spend some time during their first 15 years of life living in a lone parent family. This represents a substantial increase from approximately 10 per cent of children born between 1946-62 who spent some time living in a lone parent family.

• Parental separation, rather than birth to a lone mother, continues to be by far the most common reason that a child lives in a lone parent family. Approximately 75 per cent of lone parent households with children under 15 are due to parental separation.

• As a birth cohort, children born in 1981-85 spent 10.7 per cent of the first fifteen years living in a lone parent family – a considerable increase from approximately 3.5 per cent of the time of children born between 1946-55.

• Most children who ever live in a lone parent family do so only once in their first 15 years. However, the proportion of those ever living in a lone parent family who do so on two or more occasions has increased from 2 per cent in the post war cohort to 13 per cent in the 1981-85 birth cohort.

• Of children who ever live in a lone parent household the average length of time in the lone parent family is between five to six years – a figure that has remained fairly stable since World War II.

• In the 1981-85 birth cohort, 16.6 per cent had lived in a step or blended family by the age of 15.

• This is an increase from 4.5 per cent of the immediate post-war cohort who lived in a step or blended family.

• Of children who ever live in a step family, the average duration is about seven years.

• Of the 1981-85 birth cohort, 7.2 per cent of the time of this cohort was spent living in a step family by the time they turned 15.

• Most children spend all of their first 15 years in the same family living arrangement and thus experience no transitions in this period.

• However, the percentage living in just one family arrangement up to the age of 15 has declined from 92 per cent in the post-war cohort to 74 per cent in the 1981-85 birth cohort.

• In the most recent birth cohort of 15 year olds almost 16 per cent lived in two family living arrangements (and thus experienced one transition) by the age of 15.

• In the same birth cohort, just over 10 per cent of children experienced two or more transitions in family living arrangements by the age of 15.

• Despite increasing family diversity and more family instability, it remains the case that most children spend most of their early to mid childhood (up to 15 years of age) living with both their natural parents and experiencing no family transitions. Of those that experience any transitions, most experience just one transition.
12

Transition of young people to adulthood
### 12 Transition of young people to adulthood

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<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>150</td>
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<td><strong>Are young people delaying marriage and children?</strong></td>
<td>151</td>
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<td>Have young people stopped having babies?</td>
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<td><strong>Are young people delaying buying homes?</strong></td>
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Legally, a person becomes an adult when they turn 18. An 18 year old can vote, drink alcohol and participate in other adult activities. Culturally, however, the arrival of adulthood is less clear cut. Traditionally, reaching adulthood has been signified by a number of markers including completing education, getting a full time job (especially for males), leaving home, getting married and having children.

However, in contemporary, mainstream Australian society where there is no single, culturally recognised rite of passage, it is unclear which of these markers finally bestows adult status. The reality is that the move into adulthood is not a single event. It is a transition that occurs over time as a person acquires more of the attributes that the culture defines as markers of adulthood.

In contemporary Australia, social and economic changes have meant that this transition to adulthood has undergone important changes in the last quarter of a century. There is evidence that the transition is being both delayed and extended. Furthermore, the sequencing of the stages that was normal in the past has become much more blurred and less prescriptive. While it was once relatively normal to finish education, get a job, leave home, marry and then have children there is now no set order in which these events take place. For many people (p. 201) children come before marriage, leaving home comes before finishing an education, work and education are combined and home purchase may precede marriage. Even the attributes of adulthood may be undergoing change as more people live on their own or do not have children.

This chapter explores some of the statistical data that provide an overview of the ways in which the transition to adulthood is made. It examines education, labour force participation, living arrangements, marital status, fertility and financial circumstances as young people make the transition from being a dependent child to an independent adult. Where information is available it maps changes in the age at which these transitions appear to be taking place.

**When do young people leave home?**

**Who do young people live with?**

The late teens and twenties are a time when many young people are leaving their parents’ home – at least for a time (Table 12.1). More than three quarters (79.2 per cent) of those aged 18-19 live with their parents. This percentage rapidly declines so that 37 per cent of those aged 23-24 and just 18.7 per cent of those in their late twenties live with their parents (Table 12.1).

One of the main reasons for leaving home appears to be to move out either to cohabit or marry. In 2001, of those aged 18-19 just 4.8 per cent were living with a partner. This increased to 16.1 per cent of those aged 20-22 and to 33.1 per cent for those aged 23-24. Of those in their later twenties (25-29) 55.5 per cent were living in their own household with a partner. Apart from living with a partner, the most common arrangement when young people leave home is to live in a group household – a transitional arrangement for most people. Group household living peaks among those aged 20-24 with 17 per cent of young people living in this arrangement.

Moves in and out of the parental home are one of the most common transitions among young people aged 15-29. According to data from the 1999 Australian Housing Survey (ABS 2000b), those aged 20-24 are the most likely group to be moving out of the parental home – for example, in just the previous year, 10.5 per cent moved out.

Although many younger people move out of their parental home this is not a simple, one-way transition of young people to adulthood

### Table 12.1 Living arrangements of young people aged 18-29, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living arrangement</th>
<th>15-17</th>
<th>18-19</th>
<th>20-22</th>
<th>23-24</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With parents</td>
<td>96.9</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>52.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple without children</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple with children</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group household</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone person</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>7067</td>
<td>4260</td>
<td>5951</td>
<td>4104</td>
<td>11359</td>
<td>32741</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2001 Census 1 per cent sample Confidentialised Unit Record File (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001c).
transition. While many young adults are moving out “through the front door” of the parental home up to half are returning “through the back door” (Figure 12.1). For example, while 10.5 per cent of those aged 20-24 left their parent’s home in the previous year, 5.2 per cent of the same age group had returned to their parent’s home in the previous year. It has been estimated that over 40 per cent of young people who leave home, particularly for reasons other than marriage, return to live with their parents at least once due to financial, emotional or accommodation problems (Stone, 1998).

The Australian Institute of Family Studies Young Adults’ Aspirations Survey found high levels of returning home at some point (Kilmartin 2000). Of those in their twenties who had ever left home, 53 per cent had returned at least once. In this survey, while over two thirds of those in their early twenties (20-23) were living at home, less than 40 per cent had never left home (Kilmartin, 2000).

Figure 12.2 which reports figures from the 1998 Young Adults’ Aspirations Survey shows the progressive movement away from home when men and women are in their twenties. As age increases the percentage at home who have never left steadily declines while the percentage who have left home and never returned steadily increases. For example, among females aged 20-23, 40.9 per cent had never left home. This declined to just 13 per cent among females aged 24-26 and again to just 4.9 per cent among those aged 27-29 (Figure 12.2). Conversely, the percentage who had left home and never returned increased steadily with age. For example, of females aged 20-23, just 24.8 per cent had left home and never returned to live. Among the 24-26 year olds this had increased to 43.5 per cent and for those aged 27-29, 57.8 per cent had left home and never returned to live.

Overall, returning home was much more common among those who experienced difficulties after leaving home, that is, difficulties in making the transition to full adult life. When facing these setbacks, returning to live at home was one way of, at least temporarily, responding to these difficulties. Returning home, in this survey, was associated with financial insecurity. Of the financially insecure who had left home, three quarters had returned home. Relationship breakdown and never having had a partner were also linked to young people moving back to live with their parents (Kilmartin, 2000).

**Are young people staying at home longer?**

Over the last 20 years more people in their twenties have continued to live at home. While the increase
in living alone has barely changed among men in their early twenties, those in their late twenties are much more likely to be living with their parents in 2001 than they were in 1981 (Table 12.2). In 1981, 13.1 per cent of men in their late twenties were living at home but by 2001 this had increased to 20 per cent – a 53 per cent increase. The increase in young women staying at home has been even more pronounced. In 1981, 25.6 per cent of women in their early twenties were still living at home. By 2001 this had increased to 34.2 per cent – a 34 per cent increase. Among women in their late twenties the percentage living with their parents doubled from 5.7 per cent in 1981 to 11.7 per cent in 2001. These figures also highlight that the transition out of the parental home comes earlier for women than for men. In 2001, 44.1 per cent of men aged 20-24 and 20 per cent of men aged 25-29 were still living at home compared to 34.2 per cent and 11.5 per cent for women of the same age. The reasons for this difference are related to the younger age at which women typically begin to cohabit or marry. There are a number of reasons for the increasing delays in finally leaving home. One factor is that more young people are staying at school longer and going on to tertiary education (Table 12.3). Other factors include delays in marriage, delays in entering the full time labour force and the associated financial dependence, and the sharp increases in housing costs (p. 275). These factors both reduce the need to leave home and reduce the capacity of many young adults to set up their own households.

### Are young people studying longer?

Increasingly, young people are spending their early adult years obtaining further education after they leave school. This extended period of education can both delay other transitions such as becoming economically independent, leaving home, obtaining full time work, achieving financial independence and finding a partner and having children.

In recent years more young people are staying on at school and then going on to further education. Participation rates in both school and further education have increased sharply since the mid 1980s (Table 12.3).

- Between 1987-2000 the percentage of 15-19 year olds at school has increased by seven percentage points from 45 per cent to 52 per cent.
- Participation in higher education has been even more marked. Among 15-19 year olds, tertiary participation has increased from 19 per cent to 26 per cent. Among 20-24 year olds participation has almost doubled from 18.4 per cent to 35.7 per cent.
- The flip side of these trends is that the percentage of 15-19 year olds who are not involved in education has declined from 36 per cent to 22 per cent and for 20-24 year olds has declined from 82 per cent to 63 per cent.

These changes have taken place over a very short period – just 13 years. It is almost inevitable that...
such sharp changes will have consequences for other aspects of the lives of young people and their capacity to make other transitions that parents and others frequently associate with being a “real adult”.

**How many students combine work and study?**
Consistent with the general blurring of sharp transition points in the move to adulthood is the way in which many young people combine work and education. Many young people are both students and workers.

Of young people who are studying part time the large majority are employed full time (Table 12.4). In 2001, of 15-19 year olds studying part time almost 80 per cent were working full time and three quarters of 20-24 year olds studying part time were working full time.

Of those studying full time, many work part time (Table 12.5). Over half (53 per cent) of all full time students aged 20-24 were working part time (49 per cent) or full time (4 per cent).

The pattern of combining work and study among full time tertiary students shows in bold relief the extent to which these two elements of the transition to adulthood overlap (Table 12.5). In 2003:
- Of full time tertiary students aged 18-21 only a quarter were not also in the labour force.
- Of full time students aged 22-24 only a third were not in the workforce.
- The most common arrangement is for full time students to work part time.
- Of those tertiary students aged 18-24 around 10 per cent were actively looking for work but have not found any.

**Are young people fully employed?**
Between the ages of 15-24 there is a movement of young people into the labour force. This is a movement that takes place gradually over the ten year period rather than at a single, definable point.

In 2002, among the youngest age group (15-17) almost half (45.4 per cent) were not in the labour force – they were mainly still at school. Another substantial group were working part time (35.1 per cent) and the bulk of these would also have been at school. However, the percentage who were not in the labour force at all drops sharply as young people grow older, for example, among 18-19 year olds just 20 per cent were not in the labour force. This drop is largely accounted for by a substantial increase in the full time labour force participation of 18–19 year olds from 8 per cent among 15-17 year olds to 33.7 per cent (Table 12.6).

Full time employment rates increase as young people grow older. By the time they reach 22–24 when many will have finished post secondary education, 60 per cent worked full time.

Part time employment is an important part of the transition of young people into the labour force. About a third of 15-19 year olds work part time. This rate then declines among 20-21 year olds (29 per cent) and 22-24 year olds (17 per cent) as their rate of full time work increases.

**Are young people financially independent?**
An important marker of adulthood is to become less financially dependent on parents and to be

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 12.5</th>
<th>Labour force participation of full time tertiary students, 2002</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed full time</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employed part time</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not in labour force</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Labour force participation of 15-24 year olds, 2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed full time</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed part time</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in labour force</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 12.7</th>
<th>Gross weekly income by age group and gender, 2001</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below $199</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200 - $499</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500 - $699</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$700 - $999</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1000 or more</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below $199</td>
<td>80.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200 - $499</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500 - $699</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$700 - $999</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1000 or more</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
able to manage financially on one's own. This transition to financial independence, however, can take many years.

Are young people mainly low income earners?
It is hardly surprising that younger age groups are disproportionately found among the lower income groups. This is partly because of the level of youth wages and the fact that many young people are either working part time in low paid jobs or have not accumulated sufficient work experience to attract higher salaries. These factors can affect the capacity of younger people to become financially independent adults.

Table 12.7 shows that the higher the age group the lower the percentage that are in the lowest income group. For example, in 2001, three quarters of 15-19 year olds earned below $199 per week compared to around a quarter of those in their early twenties and 14 per cent of those in their late twenties.

The reverse is true among higher income earners. For example, in 2001 just 2.3 per cent of 15-19 year old males had a weekly gross income of between $500-$699. This percentage increased to 22 per cent and 25 per cent of those in their early and late twenties. Although the percentages differ for women, identical patterns prevail.

Where do young people get their money from?
Income and financial support can come from many different sources but for younger people will predominantly come from parents¹, government, and labour market earnings of themselves and/or their partner. During the transition to adulthood young people may obtain income from all four sources at once but the transition will involve decreasing reliance on parents and increasing self reliance. Government benefits can be part of the transition from parental to self support.

How much financial support do parents provide?
Parents support young adults financially in many ways. These include free or subsidised accommodation, purchase of goods and services, and regular gifts and less /or income. It is difficult to obtain information on the extent of the various forms of assistance. However the HILDA survey indicates the percentage of people obtaining regular income from their parents (Table 12.8). Not surprisingly, this shows a steady reduction of dependence on parents as a regular source of income as young people get older. Of those aged over 20, only a relatively small proportion received regular income form their parents. Of those aged 20-21, 19 per cent received such support but by the time they were aged 22-24 just 8 per cent received regular income from parents. The level of income provided by parents was relatively modest. While those aged over 22 who received regular income from parents received an average of over $6000 per year, very few young people in these age groups received any income from their parents.

What government benefits are provided to young people?
Government income support is a much more common source of income for young people than are parents – especially from the age of 18 onwards (Table 12.9). Of those aged 18-21, almost 30 per cent received government income support, while about 20 per cent of those aged 22-29 received government income support. As young people grow older they become less likely to receive government benefits and are more likely to be generating their own income. While young people aged 15-19 receive income support from parents and government, this changes in the early twenties away from

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Table 12.8  Receipt of regular income from parents by age group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>15-17</th>
<th>18-19</th>
<th>20-21</th>
<th>22-24</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-34</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per cent receiving regular income from parents</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean annual income from parents (of those receiving)</td>
<td>$1,030</td>
<td>$2,207</td>
<td>$2,873</td>
<td>$7,652</td>
<td>$6,073</td>
<td>$6,823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean annual income from parents (of age group)</td>
<td>$394</td>
<td>$403</td>
<td>$525</td>
<td>$642</td>
<td>$201</td>
<td>$63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>778</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>1211</td>
<td>1407</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a).

Table 12.9  Receipt of government benefits by age group, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government benefits</th>
<th>16-17</th>
<th>18-19</th>
<th>20-21</th>
<th>22-24</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-34</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receives a government benefit</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Allowance</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austudy</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newstart</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Payment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>1197</td>
<td>1399</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

support by parents to support from government and then to self support. The transition to financial independence involves a handing over of responsibility from parents to government to self.

While government benefits are accessed by over 20 per cent of those in their twenties the nature of the benefit changes as young people move through their twenties in the transition to adulthood (Table 12.9). In the earlier years Youth Allowance is by far the most common form of government support. Austudy is available to only a small proportion of young people and is largely confined to those in their late teens and early twenties. As young people grow older they become eligible for the types of benefits that stem from adult roles and responsibilities – the Parenting Payment (when they have dependent children) and Newstart which is designed for those who are trying to enter the workforce.

Are young people living in poverty?

Since the transition to adulthood can be extended and unpredictable, it can be a time of financial vulnerability for young people. Incomes are typically lower as young people first enter the workforce or have part time and casual work as they continue with their education. Nor, in many cases do young people have a partner who can compensate financially for the financial ups and downs in their own life.

It should come as little surprise therefore, that some younger people live in poverty. The rates of poverty among young people are higher than for other age groups. The income and housing surveys indicate that among single, non dependent young people aged 15-24, over a quarter experience income poverty (less than half the average income) – a rate that is much higher than the 16 per cent of single 25-64 year olds and the 10 per cent of those aged over 65 (Table 12.10).

Are young people financially stressed?

Higher rates of poverty among younger people do not necessarily mean that they experience greater financial stress. Fewer commitments, living with parents, receiving support from parents and greater flexibility may ameliorate some of the stress that would otherwise be associated with low incomes.

The HILDA survey indicates that younger people (15-19) were more likely than those in their later twenties and early thirties to regard themselves as prosperous or very comfortable. Many of these younger people will still be living at home, be financially supported by their parents and have few financial responsibilities (Table 12.11).

Rates of subjective prosperity decline among those in their twenties and again among those in their early thirties. While a quarter of those aged 18-19 describe themselves as prosperous or comfortable this drops to 18 per cent among those aged 20-21, to 15 per cent among the 22-29 year olds and to 12 per cent among those in their early thirties.

While incomes increase as people move through their twenties and into their thirties so do their financial commitments. Housing costs and marriage and children increasingly lead to greater commitments. Thus while many younger people may have low incomes and are poor, fewer responsibilities mean that the financial stress of this is less than it would be if they had these other responsibilities. The decisions that many young people make to delay purchasing a home, getting married and having children are, no doubt, rational responses to limited and uncertain incomes. These things are deferred until education is completed and income is more certain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>15-17</th>
<th>18-19</th>
<th>20-21</th>
<th>22-24</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-34</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prosperous or very comfortable</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonably comfortable</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just getting along</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor or very poor</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total | 711  | 424  | 387  | 523  | 1101  | 1312  |

Source: HILDA 2001 (FaCS 2002a).
One way of assessing financial resources and independence is to ask people if they could raise $2000 quickly. Findings from the HILDA survey show that the capacity of young people to raise $2000 quickly increases steadily as they move into and through their twenties. Table 12.12 shows that a quarter of those aged 18-19 did not think they could raise the money. This percentage declines the older people are so that by their late twenties only 17 per cent felt they could not raise $2000. On the other hand, while 20 per cent of 18-19 year olds thought they could easily raise the money the capacity to raise money easily increased as people grew older so that by their late twenties 32 per cent thought that it would be easy to raise $2000.

In terms of the transition to adulthood the source of any such money is significant. As young people grew older they were less likely to obtain the money from a relative in their household. In part this will be because they were less likely to live with their parents as they grow older. But borrowing from a relative (regardless of whether they are in the same or another household) declines as young people grow older (Table 12.13). For example, 65 per cent of 18-19 year olds would get the money from a relative compared to just 47.2 per cent of 25-29 year olds and just 23.3 per cent of those in their early thirties.

As they grew older young people were much more likely to borrow the money from a financial institution. Just 12.5 per cent of 18-19 year olds anticipated using a financial institution to raise $2000 in an emergency compared to 30 per cent of 25-29 year olds and 36 per cent of those in their early thirties. This trend away from obtaining money from relatives (most probably from parents in many cases) and the increased capacity to obtain loans suggests a growing financial independence that emerges as people move through their twenties and into their early thirties.

Are young people becoming more financially dependent?

Schneider (1999) has examined changes in financial dependency among young people since the early1980s. She defines financial dependency in terms of the percentage of young people living below the poverty line3.

Overall there was a 12 per cent increase in financial dependency between 1982-1996 of men and women aged 15-24 (Table 12.14). This increase in dependency has mainly occurred among young men and women aged 15-20. Among the 15-17 year olds financial dependence has grown so that by 1996 virtually all (96 per cent) of young men and women of this age were financially dependent. In the 18-20 year old age group financial dependence has grown most sharply. Among young men it has grown from 37 per cent in 1982 to 61 per cent in 1996. For young women it has similarly increased from 37 per cent in 1982 to 61 per cent in 1996. For young women it has similarly increased from 40 per cent to 62 per cent.

Those aged 21-24 have shown no increase in financial dependency. Schneider (1999) demonstrates the link between the increase in financial dependence on the one hand and rising rates of educational participation and lower wages for young, full time employed people on the other hand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 12.12</th>
<th>Capacity to raise $2000 quickly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age group</td>
<td>15-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could easily raise the money</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some sacrifices</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have to do something drastic</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t think I could raise the money</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>698</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA 2001 (FaCS 2002a).
Note: respondents could indicate more than one source of $2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 12.13</th>
<th>Source of obtaining $2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age group</td>
<td>15-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use savings</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrow from a relative who lives with you</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrow from a relative who lives elsewhere</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrow from a friend</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrow from a financial institution</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA 2001 (FaCS 2002a).
Are young people delaying marriage and children?

Extended education, delays entering the full time labour force and consequent financial dependence are associated with changing patterns of family formation.

Are young people delaying partnering and marriage?

Recent years have seen an increase in the percentage of young men and women living without a partner. These changes were especially sharp between 1986-1996 but have been more modest since 1996 (Table 12.15). Between 1986-2001, those in their early twenties who were unpartnered increased from 80 to 87 per cent for males and from 61 per cent to 76 per cent for females. Among those in their late twenties the comparable rise in being unpartnered increased from 47 per cent to 59 per cent among males and from 33 per cent to 47 per cent among females.

Do these changes suggest that there is a growing rejection of partnering among younger people?

Evidence from Australian studies suggests not. The young cohort of 18-23 year olds from the Women’s Health Survey indicate that 85.4 per cent of these women aspired to marry and a further 10.6 per cent aspired to a relationship other than marriage. The remainder were unsure of their aspirations in this regard (ABS 1996b).

The Australian Temperament Project also indicates an intention to partner (Smart 2002). This particular long term study has tracked children for 18 years since they were born. At the age of 17 and 18 they were recently asked if they intended to form long term relationships and to marry. Results indicate a high degree of intention to enter into long term relationships and into marriage. Most of the females (84 per cent) hoped to have formed such a relationship within the next five years and a further 10 per cent within six to 10 years. Of the males, 78 per cent hoped to form such a relationship within five years and 12 per cent within six to 10 years. Virtually no-one said that they did not aspire to such a relationship. Similarly, most hoped to marry but at a considerably older age than when they first formed a long term relationship. Only 11 per cent of these 17 and 18 year old women hoped to marry within five years; a further 59 per cent within 6-10 years and a further 17 per cent in 11 or more years. Ten per cent had not thought about whether they hoped to marry but just 4 per cent said they did not want to marry. Similar patterns applied among the young
men, except that they hoped to marry at slightly later age than the young women.

The point that stands out most sharply from these results is that relationships and marriage remain sought after goals for young people.

The age at which young men and women are marrying has been steadily increasing since the mid 1970s. In 1970 the average age at which men first married was 23.3 years. By 2001 this had increased to 29 years. The comparable increase for women is from 21.1 years to 27.1 years (p. 164-66).

The extent of change in the age at which men and women marry can be seen most sharply in changes in the age specific first marriage rates of young people. Age specific first marriage rates indicate the number of people in a particular age group who marry in a given year for every 1000 never married people in that age group.

In 1976, 123 out of every 1000 never married men aged 20-24 married. In 2001, this figure had dropped to just 23.1 per 1000. For those in their late twenties the rate halved from 135 in 1976 to 66.5 in 2001. A similar rate of decline occurred among women (Figure 12.4).

It is unlikely that this change in the age of first marriage is simply a result of extended education and delayed labour force entry. Many other changes have taken place that are associated with the deferral of marriage. These include the increased acceptability of cohabitation, greater acceptance of having children without being married and changing values and priorities.

However, it is important not to overstate the extent of these changes. While the age at which young men and women first marry has increased there has been nowhere as much change in the age at which they first partner. Figure 12.5 reports the trends in the age at which 50 per cent of young people have formed their first live-in relationship. Of those born before 1932, half had formed their first live-in relationship (almost always marriage) by the time they were 24.8 years old (men) or 21.9 years old (women). The age of first partnering then

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**Figure 12.4**

Age-specific first marriage rates (ages 15-29) 1976-2001


**Figure 12.5**

Age by which 50 per cent of birth cohort had formed a live-in relationship

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a).

Note: not all those who had formed a live-in relationship by a particular age will still be in that relationship. These figures do not mean that 50 per cent of people are currently partnered by the ages indicated in the figure.
gradually declined among those born between the depression and the end of World War II and then increased a little among those born after 1950. Of those born in the early 1970s half had partnered by the age of 23.9 years (men) or 21.4 years (women). In other words, although the age of first marriage has changed, the increasing rates of premarital cohabitation has meant that there has been little change in the age at which people first partner.

What has changed is the nature of this first relationship. While we cannot tell from these statistics what these cohabiting relationships mean to those involved, the rise in premarital cohabitation can be interpreted as a change in the way in which young people make the transition to marriage. Cohabitation, especially cohabitation that leads to eventual marriage, can be viewed as part of the broader change in the transition to adulthood in which the transition is extended and blurred.

Figure 12.6 indicates that, in 1996, while 62 per cent of those in their early twenties had never had a live-in relationship this percentage rapidly declines as they move through their twenties. By their late twenties just over a quarter have never had a live-in relationship and by their early thirties this percentage declines further to just 15 per cent.

There can be little doubt that we have witnessed a radical change in the way in which men and women make the transition to marriage. Prior to the 1970s very few couples lived together before marrying. This began to change in the early 1970s when 16 per cent of couples cohabited before they married. This rate has steadily climbed so that by the late 1990s, 66.6 per cent of those marrying had lived with their partner beforehand. (Figure 12.7).

While cohabiting has become the norm, young people are likely to convert their cohabiting relationships into marriages as they grow older (p. 152).

Most teenage couples (83 per cent of teenage men in a couple relationship and 82 per cent of women in a couple relationship) cohabit rather than marry. This remains true, but less so, among couples in their early twenties. Two thirds of partnered males and 57 per cent of partnered females in their early twenties were cohabiting in 2001. However, by the time people reach their late twenties this pattern reverses so that 62 per cent of partnered men and 70 per cent of partnered women were married – only a minority were cohabiting (Table 12.16).

**Have young people stopped having babies?**

As well as delaying marriage men and women are delaying having children.

- In 2000, of all first births, 30.5 per cent were to women aged 15-24 – a decline from 37.3 per cent in 1993 (AIHW 2003a).
• In 1986, two thirds of women aged 20-24 had not had a child: by 1996 this figure had risen to more than three quarters (76 per cent) (ABS 2001a).

• In 1986, 40 per cent of women in their late twenties (25-29) had not had a child: by 1996 this percentage had increased to 53 per cent (ABS 2001a).

The deferral of children is also reflected in changes in age-specific fertility rates. These rates indicate the number of children born for every 1000 women in a specific age group. The decline in fertility has been especially sharp among women in their early twenties. In 1960 there were 220 births for every 1000 women aged 20-24. This has declined steadily over the years so that by 2002 there were just 55.5 births per 1000 women aged 20-24 (Figure 12.8).

Fertility rates have also fallen, but not as dramatically, among women in their late twenties. The fertility rate of these women has halved from 216 per 1000 in 1960 to 104.2 in 2002.

While some of this decline in age-specific fertility reflects an overall drop in fertility it also indicates a delay. Information reported elsewhere (Chapter 14 and de Vaus, 2002) shows that fertility rates have not declined in the same way among those in their thirties (p. 198-99).

Despite the decline in fertility and the delays in having children, young people generally still aspire to parenthood. The cohort of 18-23 year old women from the Women’s Health Study indicated that less than 8 per cent wanted to remain childless – 80 per cent wanted two or more children (Bryson et al. 1999). The Australian Temperament project asked 17 and 18 year old young men and women about their aspirations to have children (Smart, 2002). Overwhelmingly, both young men and young women wanted to have children at some point. Although 12 per cent of these young women said they had not thought about whether or not they wanted children just 5 per cent indicated that they did not want to have children. Among the young men 22 per cent said they had not thought about the issue but just 3 per cent indicated that they did not want to have children. The vast majority of these young women (83 per cent) and men (75 per cent) said they wanted children. Most wanted to wait until their late twenties before they had their first child.

In other words, children were still on the agenda for most young men and women but they wanted to have children at a later age than did the generation before them.

Are young people delaying buying homes?

In a country where 71 per cent of householders own or are purchasing their own home (ABS 2003n), buying a home has traditionally been an important marker of adulthood and remains an aspiration of the vast majority of Australian men and women. For a number of reasons, entry into home ownership has become more difficult (especially on a single income) and is increasingly being delayed. The delays are due to a combination of factors including extended periods of training, delays in obtaining a steady job, deferral of marriage, competing priorities such as travel and the increasing cost of housing.

Whatever the combination of reasons the trend to delay entry into home ownership is unmistakable. Figure 12.9 indicates the decreasing proportion of people who had entered home ownership by the age of 26. In the late 1950s, two thirds of people were purchasing a home by the time they were 26 years old. By 1961-65 this percentage declined to around 60 per cent and remained stable until 1975. Thereafter, as economic circumstances became more difficult, entry into home ownership by the mid twenties declined sharply so that just 20 years later less than a third (31 per cent) of people were buying a home by their mid twenties (Stone 1998).

While young people are less likely to be buying a home by their mid twenties, there is nevertheless a rapid rise in home ownership as young people move through their early twenties. The Longitudinal Study

![Figure 12.8 Age-specific fertility rates, women aged 15-29, 1960-2002](image-url)

of Australian Youth (Hillman and Marks, 2002) has tracked the changes of home ownership among cohorts of young people in their early twenties.

Table 12.17 shows that, for the 1975 birth cohort, home ownership increased steadily from the age of 20 through 25. However, the same table shows that the levels of purchasing at each age was substantially lower in the 1975 cohort than for the cohort that was born just 10 years earlier. However, it does not appear from these figures that the delays into home ownership have been delaying young people in their early twenties from leaving home. Instead of purchasing they are renting. The decline in home ownership of the 1975 cohort is mirrored by an increase in renting. The percentage of young people either renting or buying in the 1975 cohort is at least as high or higher than for those in the 1965 cohort.

**Why the delay in purchasing a home?**

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth (Hillman and Marks, 2002) has shown that the most important reason for delaying home ownership is the delay in marriage. This study shows that, in general, married young men and women were between two and four times more likely than their unmarried counterparts to own a home. For example, in the cohort born in 1970, married males aged 20-25 had a home ownership rate 4.7 times higher than their unmarried counterparts.

The link with marital status is unsurprising. Marriage both promotes the need for a home independent of parents and friends and can increase the capacity to purchase a home. It is estimated that most households require two incomes to enter into home ownership. This means that many people simply cannot afford to purchase a home until they are in a stable partnership in which there are two incomes from which to pay a mortgage.

In the past, employment has had a strong impact on home ownership among young people but this seems to be becoming less important – especially among young men. Employed young men born in the 1960s were between two and four times more likely than their not employed counterparts to own a home. However, for young people born in the 1970s (and thus in their twenties in the 1990s) being employed made no significant difference to their chance of owning a home. This suggests that in more recent times young men are delaying purchasing a home despite having a job. This is possibly because of delays in partnering, insecure first jobs or the desire to spend their income in other ways.

The evidence in Table 12.17 shows a decline in home ownership at age 25 from 33 per cent among the 1965 birth cohort to 28 per cent among the 1975 birth cohort. This decline is not as substantial as might have been anticipated given some of the other trends indicated above. Furthermore, it appears that by the time young people are in their early thirties they have “caught up” to the levels of home ownership in previous generations (McDonald 2004). In other words, it appears that home ownership is being delayed rather than declining.

**Is youth suicide still increasing?**

The transitions to adulthood have changed and become more drawn out, less certain and left more up to individuals to shape their own pathway into adulthood. One of the alarming changes that has
accompanied these transitional changes has been the suicide rate among young males since the early 1980s. Prior to this increase, suicide rates of young people aged 15-24 were considerably lower than most other age groups. In the 1980s these rates began to rise sharply among young males and by the late 1980s had reached the same levels as older males.

Between 1982 and 1988 the youth suicide rate rose from 19 per 100,000 males aged 15-24 to reach 28 per 100,000 in 1988. This rate stabilised until the mid-1990s and then rose again to peak at 31 per 100,000 in 1997. Since peaking in 1997, the male youth suicide rate has declined steadily and sharply and by 2002 had returned to the rates seen in the early 1980s (Figure 12.10).

We cannot be certain as to why the suicide rates of young men have declined since 1997 and we cannot be sure that the recent decline will persist. Part of the reason for the decline may be that, as the suicide rates increased, more attention has been paid to the problem (for example, National Youth Suicide Strategy). This awareness may have led to better interventions to support young men through the difficulties that led to their suicide.

**Endnotes**

1. Income as reported by young people in the Census is unlikely to include income from parents.
2. Eligibility for the Youth Allowance ceases at age 25.
3. Dependence is inferred rather than directly measured. It is inferred by comparing the independent income of a young person with that deemed to be necessary for independent living at a very low standard of living (Schneider, 1999, pp 20-22).

**Highlights**

- The transition to conventional adult roles appears to be increasingly delayed among contemporary young people.
- At the same time there is little evidence that young people are rejecting the traditional markers of adulthood (completing education, working, partnering, childbearing and aspiring to home ownership).
- More young people, especially those in their twenties, are staying at home longer and returning for at least some time to live with their parents.
- Young people are staying at school and in further study for longer.
- Many young people combine study and work, making the transition from study to work a rather blurred transition.
- Young people have a high proportion of low income earners.

- Throughout the late teenage years and throughout the twenties young people show a move from financial dependence on parents, to dependence on government to self sufficiency.
- Relatively high proportions of young people live in poverty but levels of financial stress tend to be lower among younger people than those in their late twenties and early thirties.
- Younger people are delaying marriage and having children but nevertheless show high levels of intention to marry and have children.
- While marriage is being delayed, young people are forming their first live-in relationship at much the same age as in the past.
- Compared with young people before the mid 1970s, today’s young people are delaying entry into home ownership.
- After rising sharply between 1986-1997, male youth suicide has returned to 1986 levels.
Marriage and remarriage
# 13 Marriage and remarriage

## Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is marriage becoming less popular?</td>
<td>160</td>
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Marriage is an enormously varied institution which has undergone substantial change over the last thirty years. No longer is marriage an almost mandatory transition that men and women enter into during their early twenties and remain in “for better or for worse” until one partner dies. While the majority of people marry at some point of their life, the probability of marrying is declining and the proportion of a person’s adult life spent as a married person is declining.

Both men and women frequently live together before they marry (p. 114-15), many do not marry at all, those that do marry are doing so later in life and others marry several times. When people do marry they increasingly do so in a civil rather than a religious ceremony. Although the majority of marriages are of two never married parties, an increasing proportion of marriages consist of at least one person who has previously been married and many of these people already have children from a previous marriage (Chapter 5).

This chapter details the extent and nature of the changes in which Australian men and women enter into marriage.

Marriage

Is marriage becoming less popular?

Despite the many changes in marriage patterns over the last thirty years and a decline in marriage rates, marriage remains a popular institution. Even allowing for all those who are divorced, cohabiting, widowed or not at a realistic marriageable age, the majority of the population over the age of fifteen is married. In the 2001 Census 52 per cent of all people over the age of 15 were married and a further 16.5 per cent had been married but were now widowed, divorced or separated (Figure 13.1).

The marital status of the Australian population has always been in a state of change. The last quarter of a century has seen a number of significant changes. Of the population aged over 15:

- The percentage who are legally married has declined from 65.4 per cent in 1976 to 54.6 per cent in 2001 – a 17 per cent decline in the size of the married population in about 25 years.
- The size of the never married population has increased from a quarter of all those aged 15 and over in 1976 to almost a third (31.8 per cent) in 2001.
- The size of the divorced population has increased from 2.3 per cent in 1976 to 7.4 per cent in 2001.

Although the proportion of the population that is divorced at any given time remains relatively small, the change from 2.3 per cent to 7.4 per cent is substantial. Furthermore, since many divorcees remarry, the percentage of people who are divorced at any point underestimates the number who are divorced at some point.

Is marriage less popular than 100 years ago?

It is easy to develop a distorted picture of patterns of change when viewing patterns just over the relatively short term. A longer term perspective provides a different picture regarding the changing trends in marital status.

As Figure 13.2 shows the decline in the size of the married population since the early 1970s has resulted in a return to circumstances apparent in much earlier times.

Indeed, marriage was slightly more prevalent in 2001 than 100 years earlier when just 46.4 per cent of the population aged over 15 were married. From the beginning of the 20th century the percentage of the population that were married grew steadily from 46.4 per cent in 1901 and peaked in 1971 when 64.5 per cent of the population were married.

The relatively low level of marriage at the turn of the 20th century was partly because there was a greater overall sex imbalance in that earlier period (115 men for every 100 women at that time, compared with 96 for every 100 women in 2001), along with a gold rush in Western Australia which enticed more single men than women. In 1901, Australia was also still feeling the effects of the severe economic depression of the 1890s, with economic prosperity not returning until the 1920s (ABS 2001e; McDonald 1995).

Further, there is evidence that towards the beginning of the 20th century, the English middle class
norm for couples to delay marriage until they could achieve a "respectable" standard of living was embraced and encouraged among the working class. These factors not only contributed to delays in marriage but also to a relatively high proportion of people not marrying at all (McDonald 1995).

Statistics on the prevalence of marriage provide snapshots in time that do not take into account all those who have embraced marriage at some stage in their life, including those whose marriages have ended in divorce or widowhood. Despite the declining married population in recent decades, most people do eventually marry, with 1997–99 trends suggesting that this would apply to 72 per cent of men and 77 per cent of women. Nevertheless, these proportions are lower than those of just 12 years earlier, when 79 per cent of men and 86 per cent of women would marry (ABS 2001e).

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

The increasing size of the never married population over the last quarter of a century needs to be seen in the light of longer term trends. Figure 13.3 shows that over the 20th century the size of the never married population largely mirrors changes in the size of the married population. It shows that:

- In 1901, 46.7 per cent of the over 15 population had never married.
- By 1933, the percentage that had never married had declined to 38.5 per cent but this was still considerably higher than today's high figures.
- There has been an increase in the size of the never married population since the early 1970s when just a quarter of the over 15 population had never married.
- By 2001, almost a third (31.8 per cent) of the population aged over 15 had never married.
- Today's high "never married" figures are only high in comparison with the low levels in the post-war period from 1950 to 1975. By comparison with the size of the never married population early in the century, today's never married population is relatively small.

The statistics in Figures 13.1 to 13.3 report registered marital status. Because of the sharp rise in new forms of partnering – especially cohabitation – these figures do not necessarily mean that fewer people are living without a partner. For example, in 2001, 18 per cent of the divorced population were living in a cohabiting relationship and 14.7 per cent of those over the age of 15 that had never married were living in a cohabiting relationship. Changing patterns of partnering have been discussed in Chapter 10 and will be discussed further later in this chapter.

**Have marriage rates changed?**

Getting married is not the “given” that it once was. Since the early 1970s marriage has increasingly become a matter of choice. Certainly, alternative pathways to marriage have developed and alternative forms of partnering have become widely accepted.

**Are fewer people marrying?**

The crude marriage rate is the number of marriages registered during the year per 1000 population. In reading crude marriage rate figures it must be...
remembered that a large proportion of the population are either already married or too young to marry. The crude marriage rate has fluctuated considerably over the years as Figure 13.4 illustrates. Marriage rates are influenced by a variety of factors including economic circumstances, values and the population profile (that is, the proportion of the population available to marry). In the 1880s economic boom and in the period immediately following World War II the marriage rate peaked. The crude marriage rate declined sharply during the economic disasters of the 1890s and 1930s. It peaked following World War II and again in the early 1970s after which it has shown a steady decline. By the late 1990s the crude marriage rate had declined to an all time low but was similar to the lows achieved in the economic depressions of the 1890s and 1930s. The reason for the low rates in the 1990s however, are likely to be different to those in the 1890s and 1930s when economic hardship was the primary cause. In the 1990s, economic factors most probably contributed to the ongoing decline in the marriage rate but the low rates were a continuation of trends that had been in evidence for some time. It is likely that the low rates of the 1990s are partly due to changing values and views about marriage rather than economic circumstances preventing marriage as it did in the earlier periods characterised by low rates of marriage. However, the role of economic factors in the 1990s should not be neglected. Economic restructuring has certainly made economic circumstances less certain for many people and this lack of certainty may well deter marriage and the longer term commitment it implies (p. 177).

While the crude marriage rate provides a useful trend picture it gives little idea of the rate of marriage on the basis of people available to marry. Figure 13.5 indicates the marriage rate calculated against the adult (15+) unmarried population. This shows that, in the year 2001, for every 1000 unmarried men, 31 married and 28 of every 1000 unmarried adult women married. This is a substantial decline in the marriage rate of the population available to marry from the rates in 1976 when the comparable rates were twice as high at 66.9 for men and 61.1 for women.
While marriage is still the dominant marital status for adults, marriage rates are changing and the proportion of people who were married in 2001 is substantially less than in the period from the 1950s to the late 1970s. However, as we have seen already, the percentage of the population who were married in 2001 is still a little higher than it was a century earlier (Figure 13.2). Since 1971, the percentage of the 15+ population that is married has steadily declined.

At the beginning of the 20th century a large proportion of the 15+ population had never married. In 1901, 46.7 per cent had never married. This level of non-marriage declined gradually so that by 1954 just a quarter of the 15+ population had never married. This percentage of around 25 per cent who had never married remained steady until the early 1980s when it began to increase to the present level of 31.6 per cent of the 15+ population (Table 13.1).

**How does Australia compare internationally?**

With a crude marriage rate of 5.9 in 1998, Australia had a middle level marriage rate. The United States has one of the higher crude marriage rates followed by relatively high rates in Muslim and Asian countries. Australian crude marriage rates are nevertheless higher than in most European and Scandinavian countries (Figure 13.6).

**Do Australians regard marriage as an outdated institution?**

The declining rates of marriage, divorce and high rates of cohabitation might lead one to conclude that there is a widespread view in Australia that marriage is an outdated institution. The World Values Survey asked national samples in 1981 and again in 1995-97 for their views about whether marriage was an outdated institution. The findings are contained in Table 13.2.

The first point to note from these results is that the vast majority do not believe that marriage is an outdated institution. Overall, in the mid 1990s, just 19 per cent thought that marriage was outdated and 81 per cent thought that it was not outdated. Even in the group that was most rejecting of marriage as an institution (those younger than 35 in 1995-97) just over a quarter believed that marriage was outdated.

A second point from Table 13.2 is that men and women have identical views about whether marriage is an outdated institution. Third, younger people are considerably more rejecting of marriage than older people. In 1995-97, a quarter of those aged 18-34 said marriage was outdated. However, of those aged 45-64 only 9 per cent thought marriage was outdated. It is not certain whether the greater support by older people is because they have always been more pro-marriage or because people come to support marriage more as they grow older.

Finally, there is clear evidence of declining support for marriage as an institution. Between 1981 and
1995-97, the percentage saying that marriage is outdated increased from 13 to 19 per cent – a statistically significant increase. This change has taken place equally among men and women. However, the declining support for marriage was restricted to younger age groups – especially those aged 25-44. Older groups remained equally supportive of marriage as an institution (Table 13.2).

**At what age do people marry?**

While just over half of the 15+ population are married, this proportion varies greatly according to a person’s age. In 2001, virtually no teenagers (0.5 per cent) were married and only a tiny percentage (8.5 per cent) of those in their early twenties were married. However, by the time they reach their thirties marriage is very much in vogue with 54.9 per cent of those in their early thirties and 64 per cent of those in their late thirties being married.

**How much later are people marrying?**

Since 1966 there have been clear changes in the percentage of people in any age group that are married. Figure 13.7 shows the percentages of men and women in each age group that were married in 1966 and contrasts this with the percentages in 2001. The percentage of each age group that were married in 2001 is quite different than was the case in 1966.

Changes in the percentage of married people is evident among the younger age groups – especially among those aged under 40.

- Between 1966 and 2001 the teenage bride has virtually disappeared. In 1966, 8 per cent of women aged 15-19 were married. By 2001 this had dropped to just 0.5 per cent.
- There has been a sharp decline in the percentage of married people in their early twenties. In 1966, 58 per cent of women aged 20-24 were married. By 2001 just 12.6 per cent of similarly aged women had married. Among men of this age, 29.4 per cent had married in 1966 but by 2001 just 5.6 per cent of men in this age group were married.
- This decline is just as evident among those in their late twenties. Among women, the percentage who were married dropped from 84.5 per cent in 1966 to 43.2 per cent in 2001. Among men the comparable decline was from 68.8 per cent to 29.8 per cent.

Among older age groups the proportion of people who are married has increased. For example:

- In 1966, 19.5 per cent of women aged 75-79 were married but in 2001 this percentage had doubled to 41.6 per cent.
- Among men aged 75-79 just over half (54.9 per cent) were married in 1966. By 2001 this had jumped to 74.5 per cent.

This means that the way in which older people live their later life would have been quite different in 2001 than it was in 1966. Being married at this age is a useful antidote to poverty and increases the chance of having assistance if illness or disability occurs. Marriage at this age also improves the chance of continuing to live in one’s own home. This increase in the proportion of older people who are married partly reflects the higher marriage rates of the 1950s and 1960s and the improved longevity of both men and women.
How old are people when they marry for the first time?

While information regarding the percentage of people in each age group that are married gives some clue as to when people marry it does not provide a full picture. The percentage of any specific age group that are married is the result of the number who have married from earlier age groups, the number in that specific age group who marry, and the number of those who married when younger subsequently divorced or were widowed.

This section focuses on changes in the age at which men and women actually marry for the first time. It provides two sets of information. First it describes age-specific marriage rates from 1921 to 2001. It then examines changes in the median age of first marriage from 1940-2001.

Age-specific marriage rates indicate the number of people per 1000 never married people in an age group that marry in a specific year. Thus an age-specific marriage rate of 66.5 for males aged 25-29 in 2001 means that for every 1000 never married males aged 25-29, 66.5 married in 2001.

Table 13.3 reports age-specific marriage rates separately for men and women for the years, 1921, 1940, 1970, 1985 and 2001. Focusing first on the rates in 2001, a number of observations can be made:

- For both males and females, the ages 25-34 were the peak ages for first marriage. For 25-29 year old males the marriage rate for these years was 66.5; for 25-29 year old females it was 83.2.
- For 30-34 year old males it was 63.1 and was 65.2 for 30-34 year old females.
- Very few men or women marry for the first time after the age of 50 (males, 3.5 per cent; females, 2.5 per cent).
- From the age of 30 onwards, the first marriage rate for women approximately halved every five years until the age of 50. For men the marriage rate halved every five years between the ages of 35-49.

Are first marriages being delayed?

The trend figures in Table 13.3 indicate a dramatic change in age-specific marriage rates over time. Marriage rates peaked in the early 1970s and this peak is evident for both males and females. In 1970, the...
DIVERSITY AND CHANGE IN AUSTRALIAN FAMILIES

overall marriage rate for females (regardless of age) was 110.1 per 1000 never married females. This compares with rates of 67.5 in 1921, 86.5 in 1940 and 39.7 in 2000. The same was true for males where overall marriage rates peaked around 1970 when 78 out of every 1000 never married males married. This figure was higher than the comparable figures in 1921 (53.4), 1940 (69.2) and 2000 (32).

Not only were marriage rates high in 1970, far more younger people were marrying. This is especially noticeable when examining the age-specific rates for those aged 15-19. In 1970, 68.2 per 1000 never married females in this age group got married. Among men the comparable figure was 15.3. These 1970 figures were far higher than in the earlier periods. Even more dramatic has been the virtual disappearance of teenage marriages in the 30 years since 1970. Among these young females the rates dropped from 68.2 in 1970 to 17.9 in 1985 to just 4.2 in 2000. Among males the drop has been from 15.3 in 1970 to 2.8 in 1985 to just one per 1000 in the year 2000.

This decline in first marriage rates has taken place in every age cohort for both males and females. In every age cohort the first marriage rates in 2000 are lower than in each of the four comparison years in Table 13.3. The decline in first marriage rates since 1970 is the most dramatic. Among these sharp declines, the following are particularly noteworthy:

- In 1970, the marriage rate for females in their early twenties was high by virtually any standards. For every 1000 never married females in their early twenties, 290 married in 1970 – more than one in four. Just 15 years later this had more than halved to 120.4 and 15 years on again it had declined to 46.6 – which means that in 2000 less than 1 in 20 never married women aged 20-24 got married.

- A substantial, but less dramatic decline took place among women aged 25-29 where rates halved from 187.6 in 1970 to 90.2 in 2000.

- Among women aged 30 and over, there was an increase in first marriage rates between 1970 and 1985. For example, among 35-39 year old females the marriage rates increased from 46.5 in 1970 to 66.4 in 1985 before declining below 1970 levels in 2000 to a rate of 38.6. This pattern of an initial rise in first marriage rates among older women mainly reflects delays in first marriages between 1970 and 1985. The dramatic decline in the number of younger women marrying was reflected in the increase of older women marrying in 1985. However, the subsequent decline in marriage rates across all age groups after 1985 suggests a general decline in the proportion of people marrying at all.

- The patterns of marriage rate change among men is very similar to that among women. The main difference is that men marry for the first time at a later age than do women. This has not changed over the years.

Changes in the age at which men and women first marry can be seen more readily by focusing on the median age at which they marry. Since the mid 1970s the median age at which both men and women have married for the first time has steadily increased (Figure 13.8). In 1975, men typically first married when they were 23.3 years old and women first married when they were 21.1 years old. By the year 2001, these typical ages of first marriage had increased substantially so that men married for the first time when they are 29.0 years old and women first married when they are 27.1 years old.

This increase since 1975 was a reversal of a trend to younger marriage that had been evident since at least 1940. In 1940, men were first marrying when they were 26.4 years old and women when they were 23.7. The age of first marriage steadily declined until 1975 when men and women were marrying at a very young age.

It is interesting to observe that over these 60 years of change in the age at which men and women married, there has been a remarkable stability in the average difference in the age gap of men and women when they marry. Between 1940-1975, brides were on average about three years younger than grooms. Since 1975 the average age gap between brides and grooms has narrowed slightly.

How many marriages are first marriages?
Following the 1975 Family Law Act, the divorce rate increased (p. 211-12). This means that there
are more people available to remarry and this in turn means that fewer marriages will be first marriages and that more marriages will consist of people with quite different marital histories. These matters are discussed more fully later in this chapter.

Figure 13.9 reflects the declining percentage of marriages that are first marriages for both parties. In 1970, 86 per cent of all marriages consisted of both a bride and a groom who had never been married before. Soon after the introduction of the Family Law Act, just 68 per cent of first marriages were first marriages for both parties. This figure has remained stable since then.

**How many people never marry?**

Only a small proportion of people never marry. The exact proportion of people who never marry can only be determined by examining the marital history of people when they die. However, since few people marry for the first time after the age of 60, a reasonable estimate of the proportion of the population who never marry can be obtained by examining the proportion of people aged 60 who have never married.

In 2001, for all the age groups over 60, 6.1 per cent of men and 4.2 per cent of women had never been married.

It comes as no surprise that the percentage that have never married declines steadily with age. While in 2001, 94.2 per cent of men and 86.9 per cent of women in their early twenties have never been married this drops sharply to 68.8 per cent of men and 53.9 per cent of women in their late twenties. By their early thirties only 41.4 per cent of men and 29.6 per cent of women had never married (Table 13.4).

Using the percentage of never married people at age 60-64 as an estimate of the proportion of the population that never marry, the level of never married people was considerably lower in 2001 than in 1911, 1947 and 1971.

However, the low level of never married people in 2001 partly reflects high levels of marriage in the 1960s and 1970s. Table 13.4 shows that in 1971, for the groups aged under 45, relatively few had never married. By 2001, considerably more men and women under the age of 45 had never married. Among younger people in 2001, the percentage...
who had never married is much higher than in 1971 and the earlier years of 1911 and 1947. Among those in their thirties and early forties, the proportion in 2001 who had never been married had increased sharply since 1971 and had matched that in the earlier years or was moving towards the levels of earlier years.

Are church weddings on the way out?

In the year 2002 a minority of marriages were “church” weddings – that is were performed by a minister of religion. In 2002, 55 per cent of marriages were performed by a civil celebrant. This fact represents part of an ongoing decline in religious marriages since 1975 (Figure 13.10).

The decline no doubt partly reflects the increasing secularisation of Australia but it also is due to attractive alternatives to religious weddings being available. In 1975 a system of civil celebrants was introduced to provide people with a secular alternative to religious marriages. Prior to that time the only secular alternative was the rather unattractive and bureaucratic “registry office” marriage.

The decline in religious weddings is also related to the increasing number of marriages that include men or women who have been divorced. In some churches such remarriage is discouraged.

Are second marriages secular marriages?

Civil celebrants dominate second marriages. In 2000, six out of every ten of those who remarried following widowhood used a civil celebrant. The use of civil celebrants is even more pronounced among those who remarry following divorce where, in 2000, almost three quarters (73.3 per cent) of such marriages employed a civil celebrant (Figure 13.11).

How long do marriages last?

Based on patterns prevailing in 1997-99, the Australian Bureau of Statistics has predicted that on average men and women who ever marry will spend 28.3 years and 28.9 years respectively as a married person. This represents a decline in the number of years for which they will be married based on predictions using the prevailing patterns in 1985-87. This decline largely reflects the increasing age at which people marry (Figure 13.12).

Figures 13.12 and 13.13 show that while the number of years that men and women spend married is declining, the average number of years that men and women are expected to be never married has increased. Based on 1997-99 patterns, men on average will spend 41.6 years as never married, and women will spend 39.8 years as never married. This does not mean that the typical age at which people marry will match these figures. The increasing average duration of being never married is due to men and women marrying at a later age and an increasing...
proportion of people who never formally marry (thus inflating the figure). On average, men who do marry spend 29 years as never married and women who do marry spend 27 years as never married.

The increasing rate of men and women not marrying at all is reflected in the probability of people ever marrying. Table 13.5 reports ABS estimates of the probability of men and women ever marrying. Based on 1997-99 patterns, 71.4 per cent of men and 76.6 per cent of women born in 1997-99 are predicted to marry. These estimates indicate a decline in the chance of marrying compared to patterns that prevailed in 1985-87 when 79.3 per cent of men and 85.6 per cent of women were predicted to marry in their lifetime.

Delays in marriage, the risk of divorce (Chapter 15), an increasing reluctance to remarry following divorce (p. 177) and the increased acceptability of cohabitation means that a declining proportion of the adult life of men and women is spent as a married person. Based on patterns in 1985-87 it has been predicted that men who marry would spend 61.2 per cent of their adult life as a married man. However, based on 1997-99 figures this percentage has declined to just half (50.4 per cent) of their adult life. Among women the comparable figures were 56.8 per cent (1985-87) and 46.8 per cent (1997-99).

**How do marriages end: death or divorce?**

About a third of marriages end in divorce (p. 210). The other two thirds end through the death of a partner. The experience of husbands and wives is very different in this regard.

Wives are far more likely to outlive their husband than their husband will outlive their wife. Of married women, 46 per cent outlive their husband and just 22 per cent of married men outlive their wife (Figure 13.14). The remainder divorce.

**Mixed marriages – does like marry like?**

**Do men still marry younger women?**

The consistent pattern throughout the 20th century has been for men to marry younger women (Qu 1998). On average, men are about two years older than women when they first marry. This gap has declined slightly since the mid-1970s when the men were, on average, about three years older than women when they first marry (see Figure 13.8). The average age gap of those who remarry following divorce is a little greater with men, on average, being about three and a half years older than women when they remarry.
These figures however, are averages and aggregate figures – they do not indicate the actual age gap between real couples. Figure 13.15 shows the age gap between couples who marry. In 1995, 28.7 per cent of men were at least five years older than the woman they married and a further 27.2 per cent were between two to four years older than their wife. Far fewer men marry older women. In 1995 just 5.5 per cent of men married a woman who was five or more years older than he was and a further 9.5 per cent married a woman who was between two to four years older than he was.

There is some evidence of a small change in the age gap between men and women who marry. In 1921, 36 per cent of men were five or more years older than the woman they married. By 1995, this had declined to just under 29 per cent. In 1921, about 62.5 per cent of men were at least two years older than their wife. By 1995, this had declined to 55 per cent. At the same time there are slightly more men who marry older women. In 1921, 12 per cent of men married a woman who was at least two years older than he was. By 1995, this had risen slightly to 15 per cent.

**Do people find partners mainly within their own ethnic group?**

There is a strong pattern whereby people marry within their own ethnic or cultural group. The chances of marrying within one’s own ethnic or cultural group is affected by many factors including cultural prescriptions against marrying “out”, the availability of a suitable range of potential partners within one’s own group and the degree of integration of a particular ethnic group within the dominant culture.

Most Australian born men partner with an Australian born woman (88.9 per cent) and most Australian born women have an Australian born partner (85.9 per cent) (Table 13.6). This is hardly surprising since Australian born people represent by far the largest pool of potential partners.

Of those who were born outside Australia, far fewer have an Australian born partner. In general, those born outside Australia are much more likely to partner with someone born in the same country as themselves. For example:

- 72 per cent of partnered men and 83 per cent of women born in the Middle East or North Africa have a partner born in the same region.
- 74 per cent of partnered men and 85.7 per cent of women born in Greece had a Greek born partner.
- 62 per cent of partnered men born in Italy and 82 per cent of Italian born women had an Italian born partner.
- 90.9 per cent of partnered Vietnamese born men and 87.6 per cent of Vietnamese born women had a Vietnamese born partner.
- 85.6 per cent of partnered Chinese born men and 80.7 per cent of Chinese born women had a Chinese born partner.

However, there were exceptions to this general pattern. Men and women born in New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Ireland all had relatively high rates of marriage to Australian born partners (Table 13.6). This comes as little surprise given the cultural

---

**Table 13.5**

Predicted proportion of life as married and probability of marrying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Based on trends in:</th>
<th>Male %</th>
<th>Female %</th>
<th>Male %</th>
<th>Female %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985-87</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>85.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-92</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>81.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-99</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>76.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


---

**Figure 13.15**

Age gap between bride and bridegroom, 1921-95
similarity between these countries. Another notable exception is the pattern of Philippine born women. While Philippine born men mainly partner with Philippine born women (89.5 per cent) a relatively high proportion of Philippine born women have Australian born partners. Of partnered Philippine born women 38.1 per cent had an Australian born partner and 38.6 per cent had a Philippine born partner.

Is religion a barrier to choice of partners?

Although Australia is a relatively secularised country religion still appears to continue to play a role in the choice of partner. Certainly partners are likely to indicate the same religious preference as each other. Table 13.7 shows that in most religious groups at least 60 per cent of partnered men and women had a partner of the same religious persuasion as themselves. In most smaller religious groups there was a much higher degree of religious similarity between partners where around 80 per cent of people had a partner from the same religious group as themselves. Whether or not this degree of religious similarity is because people select partners of the same religious persuasion or because partners change to adopt the same religious persuasion as their partner is not entirely clear.

Earlier in the 20th century religious divides were deep and sharp – especially the divide between Catholics and Protestants. Does this divide continue and is it reflected in marital choice? Although Catholics largely marry other Catholics (65 per cent of partnered male Catholics and 62 per cent of female Catholics do so) quite a few marry Protestants. In 2001, 18 per cent of partnered male Catholics had an Anglican partner with a further 10.5 per cent of partners identifying with another

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Group</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>53.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>50.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>64.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Orthodox</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>83.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Orthodox</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>83.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>85.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>72.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>83.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>94.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>76.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religion</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>78.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Religion</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Protestant denomination. Of partnered Anglican males 21.5 per cent had a Catholic partner. Of partnered Anglican females 18 per cent had a Catholic partner.

Do women partner with men who are more highly educated than themselves?

There is a tendency for partners to have a similar level of education. In the 2001 Census 59 per cent of all partnered adults had a partner with a similar level of education to themselves. However, when partners had different levels of education the male partner was much more likely to have the higher level. For example of partnered men, 28 per cent had higher education than their female partner. Only 13 per cent of women had higher education than their male partner. The same basic pattern applies across the various age groups.

The extent of educational similarity between partners can be illustrated by looking at those with degrees and those without any qualifications (Table 13.8). Of partnered men with a degree or higher degree, 53 per cent had a partner who also had at least a degree. Of partnered women with at least a degree, 52 per cent had a partner with a degree.

Conversely, of partnered men who had no post-school qualifications, 83 per cent had a partner who also had no post-school qualification. Of partnered women without post-school qualifications 62 per cent had a partner without post-school qualifications.

What makes for a successful marriage?

Recent years have seen increasing diversity in relationship patterns and a reasonably high level of marriage and relationship breakdown. The Australian Family Values Survey asked Australian men and women to identify the things they thought were important for a successful marriage.

Table 13.9 indicates the mean responses for all survey respondents on a scale of 0 through to 10 with a higher score indicating greater importance for a particular attribute. Several points are worth highlighting:

• By far the most important attributes stressed were faithfulness, communication, respect and understanding and tolerance.
• A good sexual relationship was seen as a relatively important component of a successful marriage.
• Having children and independence in marriage were ranked relatively low, as were having similar political, religious and social beliefs.

Do women stress different marriage attributes than men?

It is often asserted that many of the difficulties that arise in marriage occur because of different expectations held by men and women. An examination of the weight that men and women in the Australian Family Values Survey placed on each of the various attributes required for a successful marriage indicated that:

• Men and women attached similar importance to faithfulness, a good sexual relationship and adequate income.
• Women rated communication, respect, independence, understanding and tolerance, having interests in common, and having a similar background more highly than men.
• Men placed a little more weight than women on putting their partner’s wishes first and having children.
• In general, gender differences were more evident for those aged in their thirties and forties.
Do younger people look for different things in a marriage?

It has also been observed that young people approach marriage in ways that are different from those of their parents’ generation. The Australian Family Values Survey looked at the extent to which age influenced the perceived importance of particular attributes in marriage.

- Age had no influence on the importance attached to attributes which are about treating one’s partner as a valued person – attributes such as faithfulness, mutual respect, understanding and tolerance and independence.
- The older people were, the greater importance they placed on social background, shared religious and political beliefs, having children, putting a partner’s wishes first and having adequate income.
- The younger people were, the greater the emphasis they placed on maintaining separateness and difference in marriage, good communication and sharing household tasks.

In summary, there was clear evidence that the marriage expectations of younger people differed in important ways to those of the older age groups. Whether this reflects changing expectations of modern marriage or simply changing expectations as people grow older, is impossible to tell from these survey results.

What do Australians think about sex outside of marriage?

According to the International Social Science Surveys in Australia in 1996 and 1998, the acceptance of cohabitation is matched by a widespread acceptance of sex outside of marriage – but only under certain conditions. Consistent with the acceptance of cohabitation, only 18 per cent of adults disapproved of premarital sex where the couple is in love. Among younger age groups (20-49) less than 10 per cent disapproved of premarital sex where the couple is in love. This disapproval doubles to 19 per cent among those in their fifties and doubles again to 39 per cent among those aged seventy or over (Table 13.10).

However, acceptance of premarital sex among those who are in love does not mean that non marital sex is approved of under all circumstances. A third of adults disapproved of premarital sex if a couple is attracted but not in love and almost 60 per cent disapproved of casual premarital sex. Almost 90 per cent condemned extramarital sex (Table 13.10).

Older people tend to be more conservative than younger people regarding non marital sex and most other matters discussed in this chapter. For example, only a third of those in their twenties disapproved of casual sex compared to 53 per cent of those in their forties and three quarters of those in their sixties. Similarly, just 18 per cent of those in their twenties disapproved of sex between those who are attracted but not in love while a third of those in their fifties and half of those in their sixties expressed disapproval of sex under these circumstances. However, the vast majority of all age groups disapproved of extramarital sex.

According to the same surveys, women were also more conservative in these regards than are men. For example:

- Two thirds of women compared to just half the men disapproved of casual sex.
- 39 per cent of women and 29 per cent of men disapproved of sex between people who are attracted but not in love.
- Extramarital sex was disapproved of by 93 per cent of women but by just 85 per cent of men.

Partnering

In addition to the 52 per cent of the population aged over 15 who are legally married, an additional 7.3 per cent were cohabiting in 2001. Given the rise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 13.10</th>
<th>Attitudes to sex outside of marriage (per cent agreeing with statement)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premarital sex always or normally wrong (1998)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapprove of casual premarital sex (1996)</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapprove of premarital sex if attracted but not in love (1996)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapprove of premarital sex even if in love (1996)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex before marriage is not acceptable (2001)</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having an affair when in a committed relationship is wrong (2001)</td>
<td>77.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1 International Social Science Survey, Australia, 1998
2 International Social Science Survey, Australia, 1996
3 Australian Study of Health and Relationships, 2001
4 Breakdown of attitudes by age group were not available
***p<.001
in cohabitation, a fuller understanding of contemporary patterns of partnering needs to take account of cohabitation as well as marriage.

**Are fewer people partnering than previously?**

Since detailed information about people living in cohabiting relationships has only been collected in recent years, the following analysis focuses on people cohabiting and living in legal marriages between 1986 and 2001.

Table 13.11 provides a detailed picture of the percentage of adults living with a partner. It shows the percentage who are married, the percentage who have a partner (married or cohabiting) and the percentage without a partner. The table shows figures separately for men and women for each age group. Percentages are provided for 1986, 1996 and 2001 to provide an idea of changes in partnering levels in this 15 year period. A number of important facts are contained in this table.

First, in the 10 years from 1986-1996 there was a marked decline in the percentage of men and women who were married. This decline occurred in all age groups but is especially dramatic among those in their twenties. The decline in the percentage of younger people who were married partly reflects delays in marriage. However, the decline in the percentage of the older groups that were married indicates that it is more than just marital delays that are operating.

Some of the decline between 1986-1996 in the percentage of married people among the older age groups may reflect marital breakdown but it is unlikely that all the decline in older marriage is due to marriage dissolution.

Second, some of the decline in marriage will reflect the different ways in which relationships are formed. It will partly reflect a move from marriage to cohabitation. When the percentage with a partner (married or cohabiting) is examined, the decline in partnering between 1986-1996 is much less than the decline in marriage. For example, among women in their late twenties there was a 25 per cent decline in marriage but only a 15 per cent decline in being partnered.

Third, while combining cohabiting relationships with marriages shows a smaller decline in the extent to which men and women were living with a partner, it is nevertheless the case that in all age groups there was a consistent decline between 1986-1996 in the percentage of men and women living with a partner. While this decline is sharper for people in their twenties it is not restricted to them. There were still notable declines in the percentage who had a partner among the older age groups. These are very substantial changes over the ten year period from 1986-1996.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Partnered</th>
<th>Not partnered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13.11 Relationship status of men and women 1986-2001 by age group

Fourth, the flip side of the decline in having a partner has been the rise between 1986-1996 in the percentage of men and women in all age groups who were living without a partner. The “not partnered” columns in Table 13.11 indicate the extent of this change. Among women there was a 21 per cent to 35 per cent increase between 1986-1996 in non partnered women (depending on the age group examined). Furthermore, in 1996 three quarters of women in their early twenties were without a partner. By their later twenties 43 per cent were unpartnered while over a quarter of women in their thirties and forties were unpartnered.

Among men similar increases in being unpartnered occurred among those aged 25 and over. In these age groups there was a 19 per cent to 35 per cent increase from 1986 to 1996 in the rates of being unpartnered. Among men in their late twenties 57 per cent were unpartnered in 1996 and 38 per cent of those in their early thirties were without a partner. Even among those in their forties more than a quarter were without a partner.

Finally, the changes from 1986-1996 in the proportion of partnered people in all age groups has continued through to 2001. While the rate of change seems to have slowed among those in their twenties, the rate of decline in partnering among those aged thirty or over seems to be continuing at the same pace as observed between 1986-1996.

**Which types of men and women are unpartnered and which types have partners?**

Having a partner will depend on a person’s desire to have a partner, their ability to find and attract a suitable partner and their ability to sustain the relationship. Finding a partner will depend on finding a “suitable” partner. But what defines suitable? In social terms there is a strong tendency towards homogamy (p. 169-72) – that is, for partners to have similar religious, age, educational, occupational and ethnic backgrounds. Within a general context of homogamy, Western marriages generally reflect a marriage gradient in relation to age, education, occupation and income of male and female partners (Bernard 1972). The marriage gradient is a term applied to the phenomenon whereby men tend to marry women who are slightly “below” them in terms of age, education, income and occupation. Generally the gaps between men and women are not great but the direction of the gaps is that men tend to marry “down” and women tend to marry “up”.

The marriage gradient will mean that there will always be a group of women at the “top” who cannot marry up since there are too few available men higher up. Similarly, at the bottom of the social hierarchy will be a group of men who cannot marry down since there are too few available women at a lower social level. This phenomenon means that there will be a group of women with high education, good jobs and good income who find it hard to locate a suitable partner because of too few men with higher education, job prospects and income. Bernard calls these women the “cream of the crop”. Conversely, the men with low education, income and poor work prospects who are unable to attract suitable female partners are labelled the “bottom of the barrel” (See also Birrell and Rapson, 1998 who have explored this idea in detail in the Australian context).

If this marriage gradient model is correct we would expect that:

- Among men, the lower their social standing, the more likely they are to be without a partner. That is, men with lower incomes, lower status occupations, more marginal workforce attachment and lower education will be the most likely to be without a partner (the “bottom of the barrel”).
- Among women, the higher their social standing, the more likely they are to be without a partner (the “cream of the crop”).

**Which men seem to be the most in demand?**

**Are employed men more able to partner?**

Men in the full time workforce are considerably more likely to be partnered than those who either work part time or are not in the labour force. Table 13.12 clearly demonstrates this pattern within each age group.

Table 13.12 reports the percentage of *not partnered* men. These figures show that:

- Regardless of their age group men who were fully employed were the *least* likely to be without a partner.
- In most age groups the fully employed were more than twice as likely as the not employed to have a partner.
- Part time employed males were more likely than fully employed to be without a partner but less
likely than the not employed to be without a partner.

- Men in all the age groups reported in Table 13.12 who were not employed had the highest rates of being without a partner.

These figures indicate that men who are not likely to be good “breadwinners” are much less likely to have a partner. Not having a partner may be because these men are not seen by women to be a viable partner, they do not feel able to support a partner, they cannot keep a partner or they do not wish to have a partner.

**Do the high income earning men find it easier to find a partner?**

The same general pattern emerges in relation to the income that men earn.

Table 13.13 shows that in each age group, the higher the male's income the more likely they were to be partnered. The key figures are contained in each column of the table.

- In each age group, those earning over $1000 per year were the least likely to be without a partner.

In each age group those in the two lower income levels (below $400 per week) had much higher levels of being unpartnered.

- In most age groups, the men who earned most were at least twice as likely to have a partner as those who earned least.

**Does education improve a man’s chances of finding a partner?**

Similar patterns are observed in relation to education as were observed regarding the impact of employment and income levels of partnering among men. Three main points are evident in Table 13.14:

- Men who had post-school educational qualifications had lower rates of non partnering than those without qualifications.
- The impact of education begins to appear in partnering levels of men aged 30 and older.
- The particular level of post-school qualification does not seem to matter. The main point is that men with any post-school qualifications are less likely to be without a partner than those with no such qualifications.

**In summary, men with a full time job, a reasonable income and some qualifications were more likely than those without these attributes to have a partner. The men who were not good prospects as breadwinners (no full time job, low income and no qualifications) were considerably less likely to have a partner.**

**Does higher education reduce a woman’s chance of finding a partner?**

We cannot follow the same strategy to analyse the marriage gradient model among women. Since marriage reduces the likelihood of women working full time and consequently lowers their income levels we cannot disentangle the effect of income and working on the marriage prospects of women.

However, since education is less directly affected by marriage than is income or workforce participation,
we can look at the impact of education levels on the marriage and partnering rates of women. Table 13.15 shows that in 2001, a woman’s level of education made virtually no difference to her chances of being partnered or without a partner. While the marriage gradient model would suggest that those with high levels of education might be more likely to be unpartnered this was not the case. Table 13.16 compares the percentages of men and women with a diploma, degree or higher who were living without a partner. It shows that men aged 35 and over with these higher qualifications were less likely to be without a partner than similarly aged women with such qualifications.

**Why are fewer people partnering?**

Table 13.11 reported the decline in levels of partnering in all age groups among both men and women. How can this decline be explained? Birrell and Rapson (1998) developed a resources model to help explain the marriage patterns of men and women and the changes in partnering over the ten year period from 1986-1996. Their argument implicitly uses the notion of the marriage gradient. The marriage gradient might be useful in explaining the decline in partnering over the decade from 1986-1996. If the size of the women in the “cream of the crop” group increased and the size of the male “bottom of the barrel” group increased then there would be larger groups of men and women not able to find suitable partners.

The decade from 1986-1996 was a period of substantial and rapid economic restructuring that altered the nature of the Australian workforce. This restructuring had quite different consequences for men and women. It saw a decline in the workforce participation of men and an increase in that of women. Although men maintained a higher rate of workforce participation than women, the relative position of men and women changed sharply in this 10 year period. The relative advantage of men declined. This would mean, in relative terms, that there would be more women who could fall into the “cream of the crop” category and more men in the “bottom of the barrel” category.

This means that the increase in non partnered men and women could at least be partly due to increased female resources and diminished male resources. This reduces the need of women to marry and reduces the capacity of a man to attract a marriage partner (Birrell and Rapson, 1998). **Remarriage**

In 2000, 34 per cent of all marriages involved at least one partner who had previously been married – up from 1967 when the comparable figure was just 14 per cent. In 2000, 15 per cent of all marriages were of two previously married people and a further 19 per cent of marriages included one person who was remarrying.

**Is remarriage going out of date?**

Earlier it was observed that age-related rates of first marriage have declined sharply since 1976. Figures 13.16 and 13.17 display the age-related remarriage rates for previously married men and women. Several points stand out.

The first is that the same pattern of decline has occurred in regard to remarriage rates as with first marriage rates. Men and women who have been widowed or divorced were far less likely to remarry in 2001 than they were in 1976. For example, in 1976 the remarriage rate among previously married women in their late twenties was 278 per 1000. By 2001 the comparable rate had dropped by two thirds to 119 per 1000. Among similar men the comparable decline in remarriage was even sharper dropping from 341.8 per 1000 in 1976 to 101.4 per 1000 in 2001.

While the remarriage rates in 1976 are probably inflated due to the formalisation of many divorces after the introduction of the Family Law Act in 1975, the decline in remarriage rates from 1976 is very similar to the decline in first marriage rates.

The second point that emerges from Figures 13.16 and 13.17 is that generally, the younger a previously married person is, the more likely they are to
remarry. Among men, the rate of remarriage declines from the age of 30 onwards. For women the remarriage rate declines from 25 onwards.

In any age group, previously married people are more likely to remarry than are never married men and women. That is, the experience of previously being married does not make these people more reluctant to remarry than their never married peers. For example, among previously married males aged 25-29, the remarriage rate in 2001 was 101.4 per 1000. The comparable first marriage rate was 66.5. The rate for previously married men in their late thirties was 83.5 per 1000 compared to the comparable first marriage rate of 38.4. The same pattern applies among women. For example, of previously married women aged 25-29 in 2001, 112.4 remarried in 2001. The comparable rate for first marriages was 83.2.

**How old are people when they remarry after divorce?**

The age of remarriage following divorce has increased steadily in line with the increasing age of first marriages and the subsequent increased age of divorce. Three points emerge from Figure 13.18 in relation to the age at which men and women remarry:

- In 2001 the median age of remarriage was 43.6 years for men and 39.8 for women.
- The median age of remarriage following divorce has increased by 7.5 years for men and 7.2 years for women since 1978. This increase is largely consistent with the increases in the age at which people marry for the first time.
- The gap between the median age of remarrying men and remarrying women has increased steadily since 1978, from 3.2 years to 3.8 years. That is, the difference in age at remarriage between men and women is greater than for first marriages where the comparable age gap in 2001 was 2 years.

**How many remarry?**

The chances of remarrying after a marriage has ended, depends very much on whether the marriage ended by divorce or by the death of a partner. Divorcees are far more likely to remarry than widows. Table 13.17 provides the ABS estimates of the percentage of divorcees and widowed people who will remarry. This table shows that among divorcees:
• 58.2 per cent of divorced males would eventually remarry if the 1997-99 remarriage rates persist. This is a much lower percentage rate of remarriage than applied on the basis of remarriage patterns in 1985-87 when 71 per cent were predicted to remarry.

• Fewer divorced women are predicted to remarry than divorced men. Using 1997-99 patterns, 48.7 per cent of divorced women are predicted to remarry eventually.

The reasons for the lower likelihood of divorced women remarrying are not certain. It is not clear to what extent this is due to divorced women being more reluctant than men to remarry or whether they are less attractive marriage prospects because of the responsibilities for children that they frequently have.

Widowed men and women have low rates of remarriage. Based on 1997-99 patterns just 8.3 per cent of widowed men and 3.2 per cent of widowed women are expected to remarry. The lower rate of remarriage of widowed women is substantially due to the greater longevity of women and the simple fact that there are not enough men of the right age available to remarry.

Who do people remarry?

Two thirds of marriages are between two people who have not previously been married. Most never married men (88.4 per cent) who marry, marry a woman who also has never been married (Table 13.18).

• Widowed people who remarry are far more likely to remarry another widow than are people with different marital histories. For example, of widowed men who remarry 35.6 per cent remarried another widow. Very few never married or divorced men marry widows.

• Divorced people who remarry frequently remarry another divorced person. Of all divorced men who remarried 53.7 per cent remarried another divorced person.

• Of all marriages, 12.4 per cent were between two divorced people.

• 17.8 per cent of marriages are of a divorcée and a never married.

![Figure 13.18 Median age at remarriage (divorced people only), 1975-2001](source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Marriages and Divorces (various years).)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Median age at remarriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
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<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>36.5</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 13.18 Marital status of brides and grooms at remarriage, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bride</th>
<th>Never married groom</th>
<th>Of never married grooms %</th>
<th>Of all grooms %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79033</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bride</th>
<th>Widowed groom</th>
<th>Of Widowed grooms %</th>
<th>Of all grooms %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2072</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bride</th>
<th>Divorced groom</th>
<th>Of Divorced grooms %</th>
<th>Of all grooms %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24330</td>
<td>23.1</td>
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Table 13.19 Remarriages involving children from previous marriages, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Has children?</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No children</td>
<td>Widowed %</td>
<td>Divorced %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>66.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has children under the age of 16</td>
<td>Widowed %</td>
<td>Divorced %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Derived from Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003g.
How many remarriages include children?

Two thirds of people who remarry do not have any children under the age of 16. There are three main reasons why so many remarrying men and women do not have younger children.

- Many people are remarrying after their children are older than 16 (Table 13.19). Most widowed people who remarry will be in this position as will many divorced people.
- Many divorces occur before people have children.
- Many people who have children may not be remarrying – at least while their children are under the age of 16.
- In many step and blended families the partners cohabit rather than remarry.

Endnotes

1 The first part of this section is reproduced from de Vaus, Qu and Weston (2003).
2 Of course many of these couples will have married prior to arriving in Australia. Unfortunately data were not available to distinguish between those who married before migrating and those who married after arriving in Australia.
3 Of course this will not apply to those who married outside Australia in countries where religion and religious similarity are extremely important considerations in the choice of marital partner.
4 This section is adapted from de Vaus (1997b) “Marriage” in de Vaus and Wolcott (1997).

Highlights

- 52 per cent of the population aged 15 or over were married in 2001. This represents part of an ongoing decline since 1971.
- The percentage of the population that is currently married is higher than it was 100 years ago.
- Nevertheless, about three quarters of adults currently marry at some point in their life.
- An increasing proportion of the population now never marries. In 2001 about a third of the 15+ population had never married compared to 25 per cent in 1976.
- The current proportion of the population that have never married is still considerably lower than it was at the beginning of the 20th century when 47 per cent had never married.
- The recent rise in the percentage who have never married is due to delays in marriage, increasing cohabitation and an increase in people not partnering at all.
- Australia’s crude marriage rates in 2002 were 5.4 marriages per 1000 people.
- Marriage rates have fallen steadily since the early 1970s.
- Despite the declining marriage rates most Australians still regard marriage as a relevant contemporary institution.
- In recent decades, both men and women are increasingly delaying marriage. This has meant that teenage marriage has virtually disappeared except among particular ethnic groups.
- In the early 1970s half of all first marriages occurred for women by the time they were 21 and half of all first male marriages occurred by the time they were 23 years old. Now marriage in the early twenties is an unusual event.
- Marriage rates have declined in every single age group but particularly among men and women in their teenage years and in their twenties – especially the early twenties.
- The average age of first marriage for men is now 29 and 27.1 for women.
- Men continue to marry women who are about two years younger than they are on average. It is still relatively unusual for men to marry older women.
- Weddings are increasingly being performed by civil celebrants rather than by ministers of religion. Civil marriages are now the majority of all marriages and make up for three quarters of remarriages.
- On average, men will spend 28 years married and women will spend 29 years married.
- Based on trends in 1997-99 it is predicted that 71 per cent of men and 77 per cent of women will marry at some point in their life – down considerably from the predictions of 79 and 86 per cent made in 1985.
- In general men and women tend to marry people of similar age, ethnicity, religion and education as themselves.
- Among men the chances of being married or having a partner improve considerably when he has a good education, a good job and a good income. Men without these things are less likely to be married or partnered.
- Partnering rates of both men and women fell sharply in all age groups from 1986-2001.
- Remarriage rates are declining in a similar way to first marriage rates.
- Nevertheless, in each age group, people who have been married once are more likely to remarry than are people who have not yet married.
- A third of all marriages now consist of at least one person who has previously been married.
Having Children
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Throughout the world women are having fewer children than they were just twenty five years ago. Changing patterns of fertility have important implications both for the way in which families function, for the roles of men and women and for the wider society. There are now debates concerning the desirability of these changing patterns of fertility, the reasons for the changes and their meaning. These debates concern both the ecological, economic and social implications of the emerging patterns of low fertility. Policy makers are increasingly being confronted with the economic implications of declining fertility, the impact on the tax base and the capacity of governments to sustain current levels of expenditure.

In addition to changing levels of fertility, there have been widespread changes in the context in which children are born. More children are being born to unmarried parents, to older parents and are being born into smaller households than in the past. This chapter explores the dimensions of these social changes.

**How far has fertility fallen?**

This worldwide fall in total fertility rates has resulted in many developed countries now having fertility levels well below replacement levels. That is, women in many countries are now having so few children that, over time, there will not be sufficient births to make up for those that die. While some commentators argue that migration can make up for the population shortfall caused by low fertility, this seems unlikely to be a long term solution especially if fertility rates continue to fall. McDonald and Kippen (2000) have argued that if the fertility levels decline below 1.5, the levels of migration required to maintain a stable population may be either unachievable or be politically unacceptable as to make the required levels of migration an unlikely means of sustaining population levels (see also United Nations 2001b). As a result, populations in the future will decline. While such a population decline is widely viewed as ecologically desirable, rapid decline can have major economic and social implications. Declining fertility is a major contributor to population ageing (p. 11-13) and means that under current arrangements, meeting future labour supply needs may be difficult. Population ageing also means a shrinking taxation base required to sustain current levels of income support, health expenditure and other social expenditures.

Demographers calculate that, at present, Australian women need to have 2.1 children in order to maintain a stable population size over the longer term. Without migration, fertility levels below this rate will lead longer term population decline. In 2002, Australia’s fertility rate was 1.75 which is well below replacement level.

Australia’s current fertility rate reflects a decline that began in the early 1960s when oral contraception became readily available. The decline in the fertility rate accelerated in the early 1970s as acceptance of the pill grew and it was made available at a subsidised rate under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme; abortion law reform made abortion more readily available; and female participation in higher education and the labour force grew (figure 14.1). In 1976 the fertility rate fell below replacement levels for the first time in the 20th century and continued to decline thereafter. The rate of fertility decline slowed after 1976 but has nevertheless continued to decline.

While the current rate of fertility in Australia is the lowest on record, birth rates have nevertheless fluctuated over the last eighty years. Figure 14.1 shows that during the economic disaster of the 1930s depression, fertility dropped to replacement levels. The economic boom following the disruption of World War II was accompanied by the post-war baby boom where fertility rates peaked at 3.5 in 1961. The recession of the early 1960s and better access to contraception saw the beginning of a long term fertility decline.

**How does Australia compare internationally?**

The below replacement fertility levels experienced in Australia have occurred in most developed nations. Figure 14.2 shows that, with the exception of the Unites States of America, all OECD countries plus Hong Kong and Singapore have projected replacement fertility rates in 2000-05 that are below replacement level. Italy and Spain had the lowest fertility levels followed by Greece, Hong Kong, Austria and Germany, Japan and Singapore. While Australia’s fertility rate is well below replacement levels it nonetheless has one of the higher levels among the OECD nations.

The fertility decline in Australia has also occurred in most countries throughout the world. All the countries listed in Table 14.1 have experienced fertility decline since the 1960s. This table records the fertility rates in a range of countries in 1955-60, 1975-80 and 2000-05. Virtually all countries are projected to have a fertility rate in 2000-05 that was at least 30 per cent lower than that in 1955-60.
There is evidence that the fertility rates of countries are converging over time. The projected inter-country differences in fertility rates are certainly less in 2000-05 than the actual differences were in 1955-60. With some exceptions (for example, Papua & New Guinea, Canada, Austria, Spain and Italy) those countries with the highest fertility rates in 1955-60 tended to experience the sharpest percentage decline in fertility while those with the lowest fertility rates in 1955-60 experienced the lowest percentage decline in fertility over the same period.

The pattern of declining fertility from 1955-60 to 2000-05 varied across countries. Four main patterns of change can be discerned. Countries in Table 14.1 are grouped according to their pattern of change. The first pattern is that of sharp decline from 1955-60 to 1975-80 followed by a much slower rate of decline from 1975-80 to 2000-05. Australia exemplifies this pattern. Between 1955-60 to 1975-80 Australia’s fertility rate declined by 38.7 per cent but this was followed by a decline of just 18.7 per cent from 1975-80 to 2000-05. This pattern of rapid and then slowing decline is mainly found in developed economies including Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and Sweden.

The second group of countries experienced their greatest decline in fertility from 1955-60 to 1975-80 but have since experienced some increase in fertility rates. The fertility recovery has been greatest in the United States where it has increased from 1.79 in 1975-80 to 2.11 in 2000-05 (an 18 per cent increase). Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands have also experienced a small increase in fertility rates between 1975-80 and 2000-05. The increase in fertility is at least partly attributable to changes in the composition of the population (increase in Hispanics) in the United States and to policy changes in the Scandinavian countries.

The third group of countries are those in which the greatest decline in fertility has come later than those in the developed western countries. This group of countries experienced relatively small fertility decline from 1955-60 to 1975-80 but since then have experienced much larger percentage falls in fertility rates. This group includes Greece, Japan, Papua and New Guinea, Ireland, India, Portugal, Spain and Indonesia.

The final group of countries display a more or less steady decline in fertility across both the 1955-60 to 1975-80 and 1975-80 to 2000-05 periods. This group includes Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia.

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group includes Korea, China, Hong Kong, Vietnam and Italy.

Who has the babies?
As well as varying between countries fertility rates also differ between different groups within the one country. This section examines fertility differences according to the country of birth and race of mothers, where they live, level of social advantage and disadvantage and education, their occupation and their age.

Shrinking families – how strong is the trend?
The standard way of assessing whether women are having fewer children is to look at the family size of women who have completed having children. To examine the family size of women still in their childbearing years risks confusing delays in childbearing, with having smaller families. If women who have completed childbearing more recently have smaller families than those who completed many years ago, we can conclude that family size is declining.

Table 14.2 shows that the actual completed family size is declining for women. The more recently women reached the end of their childbearing period the smaller their completed family size. For example, of women aged 60-64, 55 per cent had three or more children while just 34 per cent of women aged in their forties had three or more children. In contrast, more women in their forties than in their late fifties or sixties had had just two, one or no children. The most substantial change is that far fewer of the younger women (those in their forties) have had larger families compared to those in their sixties.

### Table 14.1

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<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Total Fertility Rate</th>
<th>Per cent change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pattern 1: Sharp then gradual decline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
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<td>Singapore</td>
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<td>Sweden</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
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<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>1.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pattern 2: Sharp decline then increase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2.54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pattern 3: Slow decline followed by sharp decline</td>
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<td>Austria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papua &amp; New Guinea</td>
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<td>Portugal</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pattern 4: Steady sharp decline</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>3.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>4.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2.35</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>6.55</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

One difference in the Australian fertility patterns and those in Europe is that more Australian women have three or more children (McDonald, 1998). In 2001, 34.7 per cent of women aged 40-44 had three or more children (National Health Survey, 2001). This percentage has been dropping (see Table 14.2) and is projected to decline to 27 per cent. McDonald (1998) has projected that these younger women who have three or more children will account for half the children who are born in the future. If these women reduced their fertility to two children like their European counterparts the total fertility rate would drop to 1.4 births.

**How many babies do highly educated and professional women have?**

Education is linked with the number of children women have (Table 14.3). The more highly educated a woman is:

- The more likely she is to remain childless.
- The less likely it is that she will have three or more children.

Of women in their forties with a degree, more than a quarter had no children. This compares with 15 per cent of women with a diploma and just 6.7 per cent of women with no post-school qualifications who were childless. Furthermore, those with low education were much more likely than those with qualifications to have three of more children (Table 14.3). For example, of women who left school before the age of 15, 51 per cent had three or more children at a younger age makes it more difficult to complete or continue with one’s education.

The link between education level and average family size is partly reflected in the link between occupation and family size. On the whole, women in higher status white collar occupations had higher levels of childlessness than those in blue collar or sales jobs (Table 14.3) For example, 23.6 per cent per cent of the professional women in their forties had no children while just a quarter of those with a degree had three or more children. This pattern of higher fertility among women with lower education is likely to reflect the poorer range of choices for these women. It also probably reflects the fact that having children at a younger age makes it more difficult to complete or continue with one’s education.

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**Do low income earning women have more babies?**

Income is linked to the number of children women have, but this link is difficult to interpret (Table 14.4). When focusing on the individual income of women it is clear that women with the lowest individual income have the most children. The top 20 per cent of female income earners had fewer children than other women. This link may partly be due to the effect of income and education levels on decisions to have children but it may also reflect the impact of the number of children on a woman’s income earning capacity. For example, 28 per cent of the highest income earning women in their forties had no children. The absence of children would clearly help these women achieve higher incomes since, at the very least, they would be more easily able to work full time and to have an uninterrupted career.

However, there appears to be no such link between family income and the number of children women have (Table 14.4). Women in the top 20 per cent of family incomes do not stand out as having fewer children than those from lower income families.

### Table 14.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>54.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** 2001 National Health Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001h).  
*Note: women in older age groups have been excluded as survival factors increasing complicate the interpretation of figures for older age groups*
Consistent with these trends, fertility is higher in areas of greatest social and economic disadvantage. The ABS classifies areas throughout Australia according to a range of measures of social and economic disadvantage of people living in each area. These areas can be grouped into ten groups called “deciles”. These decile groups are ranked from the 10 per cent of regions that are the most disadvantaged through to those that are the least disadvantaged. Figure 14.3 shows the level of fertility in each of these groups of regions.

This Figure shows that the least disadvantaged areas have a total fertility rate of under 1.6. The fertility rate steadily increases as the region becomes more socially and economically disadvantaged. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in the second most disadvantaged regions (9th decile group) is over 2. The TFR declines a little for the most disadvantaged regions but is still high relative to the more advantaged areas.

The different TFR in the more disadvantaged regions should not simply be attributed to the higher levels of social disadvantage. Areas have different population profiles, and a different ethnic mix and these factors, as well as levels of social and economic disadvantage will contribute to the higher fertility levels in the most disadvantaged regions.

Which ethnic groups have the most children?

Ethnic and racial background are also associated with family size. Table 14.5 reports TFR for women living in Australia who were born in selected overseas countries. Women born in the Middle East and North Africa had the highest fertility rates. Women born in developing countries of Asia had higher fertility rates than the Australian norm of 1.75, while women from developed Asian countries had lower fertility rates than the Australian norm. Women born in USA, UK, Greece and Italy all had fertility levels approximating the levels in the countries where they were born.

In 2002, Indigenous women were estimated to have a fertility rate of 2.19 babies per woman compared to
Having Children

1.75 for all women (ABS 2003c). In 1996, 36 per cent of Indigenous women aged 45-49, had had four or more children compared to just 14 per cent of non-Indigenous women. Women born in the Middle East or North Africa and those born in Vietnam were more likely than those born elsewhere to have four or more children (28.1 per cent and 25.9 per cent respectively). The Middle Eastern propensity to have larger families is influenced by the prevalence of the Islamic faith in these countries and the disproportionate number of Islamic women having four or more children (26.9 per cent). Women from the more fundamentalist Protestant religions were the next most likely to have families of this size (23 per cent). Catholic women had a relatively high incidence of large families with 17 per cent having four or more children (Table 14.6). Women associated with Orthodox religious groups were the least likely to have large families (8.6 per cent) followed by those with no religious affiliation (12.2 per cent).

Do rural dwelling people have larger families?

Capital cities have a lower fertility rate than the rest of each state (Figure 14.4).

These differences between the capital city and other areas of each state will be due to a variety of factors including a different population mix in different regions. Different levels of education, the movement of the more highly educated residents (who have fewer children) to the cities, workforce opportunities, housing costs and differences in values will all affect fertility levels.

The regional differences in fertility partly reflect differences in fertility due to remoteness of people from major population centres (Figure 14.5). The ABS has designated regions according to their remoteness. Figure 14.5 shows that fertility rates increase as the remoteness of the region increases. Women who live closer to population centres where a range of services, educational institutions and employment are available have lower fertility rates.

Women living in the capital cities show different fertility behaviour to those living outside these cities in ways other than just having a lower fertility level. Figure 14.6 shows that women in the capital cities are typically older than women living elsewhere when they have children. For example, the median age of mothers in Sydney in 2002 was 30.7 years compared to 29.2 years among those who lived outside the capital. In most states, mothers in the capitals were on average at least a year older than their country coun-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother's religion</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>None %</th>
<th>One child %</th>
<th>4 or more %</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islamic</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>1701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Protestant</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>1047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>1563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>820</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those recorded in one per cent sample file as having 4 or more children are treated as on average having had 4.5 children.
terparts. In the Northern Territory the gap between urban and rural fertility rates is even greater – no doubt due to the smaller Indigenous population in Darwin than elsewhere in the Northern Territory, and the lower average age of Indigenous mothers compared with non Indegenous mothers.

Women in the capital cities also differ from their non urban counterparts in that they are more likely to be married when they have children. This pattern holds in each state except Tasmania. For example, in 2002, 77.2 per cent of births in Sydney were to married mothers compared to 61.6 per cent in the rest of the State. (Figure 14.6)

Is childlessness really becoming more common?
Childlessness may be due to voluntary or involuntary factors although the line between these two routes to childlessness can be rather blurred. Although it is difficult to know whether childlessness is voluntary or involuntary it is estimated that approximately 7 per cent of couples are infertile. Of course, the rate of infertility increases with age.

Estimates of the levels of childlessness are calculated in different ways. One way is to base the levels just on those women who have completed their childbearing. This approach can give misleading estimates of future levels of childlessness given that younger women, whose rate of future childlessness may differ from that of older women, are excluded. Demographers therefore also estimate probable levels of childlessness for women who are not yet out of their childbearing years.

The first method of estimating levels of childlessness (based on women aged 45-49) shows that in 2001, 12.8 per cent of women in this age group were childless (National Health Survey, 2001). The second approach includes estimates of likely patterns for younger women based on year 2000 patterns. These estimates indicate that if current age-related childlessness rates of 2000 apply in the future for women who are in their early childbearing years in 2000, then 24 per cent of women will remain childless (Rowland, 1998). The Midwives Collection (AIHW 2003a) estimates that 28 per cent of women will remain childless if today’s levels continue. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that about a third of women in Victoria and ACT will remain childless (ABS 2000f).

Remaining childless is not always intentional. Circumstances other than fertility, can prevent women who want to have children from doing so. The Australian Temperament Project which has tracked a large sample of children from birth, found that at 18 years of age only 5 per cent of women and 3 per cent of men indicated that they did not want to have children (Smart 2002). Despite these intentions, Bryson et al (1999) estimate from the Longitudinal Study of Women’s Health that about 20 per cent of women aged 18-23 who intend to have children will end up childless.
Rowland (1998a) has calculated levels of childlessness for most of the 20th century. Figure 14.7 reports the levels of childlessness among women aged 45-49 who were born between 1901 and 1957. This shows high levels of childlessness (31 per cent) among women born at the beginning of the century. These rates declined steadily so that, of women born between 1910-20, about 20 per cent remained childless and among the cohort of women born between 1930 to 1945, childlessness reached its lowest level when less than 10 per cent of women remained childless. Rates of childlessness among women born since World War II have gradually increased and, as indicated earlier, are projected to increase yet further. If these projections are correct, the rates of childlessness will return to those evident among women born a century earlier.

**How many married women have no children?**

Divorced, separated and widowed women aged 45-49 have a higher rate of childlessness than married women of the same age. About 5.5 per cent of married women in this age group were childless compared to about 9 per cent of those that are no longer married and 19.7 per cent of those in de facto relationships.

**Are large families a thing of the past?**

Other things being equal, definitions of what constitutes a large family change as the typical family size changes. While a family size of four children might now be considered large it would have been more normal among mothers earlier in the 20th century. Figure 14.8 reports for the period 1932-2001, the percentage of births that were fifth or higher order births. These are births where the mother had already had at least four previous children. The graph shows that in 1934, 17.5 per cent of births were fifth or higher order births. With the exception of a “blip” in 1961 (where the fertility peaked) this declined steadily until 1981 after which less than 2.5 per cent of births were fifth or higher order births.

**How common are one-child families?**

Some women have just one child for a range of reasons. These reasons include: deciding to have one child to achieve a balance between their desire to have a family and a job; delayed partnering; relationship breakdown and difficulties with conception. While just 1.6 per cent of women indicate that one child is their ideal (World Values Survey, Australia, 1995-97) 10.7 per cent of women aged 45-49 had had just one child.

**Who were the women who have just one child?**

According to the 1996 Census women aged 45-49 with just one child were more likely than other women to be:

- Divorced than married.
- Born in Asia or Western Europe (18.3 per cent and 20.5 per cent) than in Australia, Southern Europe or the Middle East/North Africa (about 9 per cent).
- Non Indigenous than Indigenous (10.4 per cent compared with 4 per cent).
- In poor than wealthy families (18.4 per cent compared with 8.3 per cent).

**Do women have as many children as they want?**

While it may once have been the case that many women ended up having more children than they wanted, the ready availability of contraception should mean that more men and women are now able to have the number of children they want. Alternatively, the competing demands of work and children, relationship breakdown and disagreement among partners may mean that some men and women do not have as many children as they ideally want.

The World Values Survey of 1995-97 asked Australian men and women how many children they had and how many they had wanted. Table 14.7 reports the match between the ideal number and

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**Figure 14.8**

*Fifth or higher order births from current relationship, 1935-2001*

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Births (various issues).
the actual number of children among men and women aged over 45.

The patterns for men and women are remarkably similar.

- Just on 50 per cent of those aged over 45 had their desired number of children.
- Overall, one quarter of men and women of this age group had smaller families than they wanted.
- Younger men and women (that is, those aged 45-54) were the most likely to have their desired number of children. Two thirds of women in this age group had their desired number of children compared to just on 40 per cent of women aged 65 or over.
- The older women (the over 65s) were more likely than the younger women (aged 45-54) to have had more children than they wanted.
- Almost a quarter of men and women aged 45-54 had fewer children than they ideally wanted.
- Only 11 per cent of women and 14 per cent of men aged 45-54 had more children than they wanted.
- Further analysis, not detailed above, indicated that having fewer children than they wanted applied to women aged 45-54 regardless of their level of education and social class.

How important do we think children are?

In a context of declining fertility it is relevant to ask whether this has anything to do with many people no longer thinking that having children is an important or valuable part of life. Weston and Parker (2002) have highlighted the diminishing importance given to motherhood. Using three surveys conducted in 1971, 1982 and 1991 they show the declining percentage of women aged under 35 who agreed that “whatever career a woman may have, her most important role in life is still that of a mother”. In 1971, 78 per cent of these younger women agreed with this statement. By 1982, this figure had declined to 46 per cent and by 1991 just 26 per cent of younger women agreed.

Nevertheless, relatively recent survey data still indicate that children are valued (Table 14.8). According to the 1995-97 World Values Survey, 80 per cent of the 1900 respondents indicated that they thought that a woman has to have children in order to be fulfilled. The Negotiating the Life Course Survey – a national survey of 20-55 year olds found that 70 per cent of adults agreed that “life without children is not fully complete”. Men in this survey were a little more likely than women (74 per cent compared to 66 per cent) to feel this way and the older age groups were more inclined to emphasise the importance of children. The positive valuing of children was even more evident in relation to a question which asked whether respondents agreed that “watching children grow up life’s great joys” (Table 14.8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 14.7</th>
<th>Match between desired and actual number of children for men and women aged 45 and over, Australia, 1995-97</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have more than wanted</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have desired number</td>
<td>61.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have fewer than wanted</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 14.8</th>
<th>Attitudes about children, 1996</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life without children is not fully complete (AGREE) %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>74.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Negotiating the Life Course Survey, wave 1, 1996.
grow up is one of life’s great joys”. Close to 90 per cent (88 per cent) agreed with this statement. Both men and women held to this view and both younger and older people were equally supportive of the view that watching children grow is one of life’s great pleasures (Table 14.8).

However, there is certainly some concern about the impact of children on the life of parents – especially the mother (Table 14.8). Over 40 per cent of adults (43.4 per cent) felt that children had too great an impact on the freedom of a mother – almost twice as many as those who felt that children had too much impact on the freedom of a father. Men were more likely than women to feel that children had an impact on the freedom of parents. Of men, 46 per cent, compared to 42 per cent of women, said children had too much impact on the freedom of mothers and 30 per cent of men compared with 20 per cent of women said the same thing in relation to fathers. Younger people were considerably more likely than older people to point to the effect of children on the freedom of parents.

How do people try to manage their fertility?

To a large extent the rapid fertility decline is due to improvements in women’s ability to control their fertility. Delays in having families has, however, led to a greater difficulty for some women in conceiving at all. However, developments in reproductive technology have played some part in assisting the fertility of these women.

What types of contraception are used?

The contraceptive pill has been the most significant development that has enhanced women’s ability to control their fertility. In 2001, 45 per cent of women aged 18 and 19 were using the pill and half of those in their early and late twenties were doing so (Table 14.9). Thereafter, the usage rates of the pill declines for reasons that include: more women planning to become pregnant; loss of a partner and failure to repartner; medical reasons such as hysterectomies; and because other methods of contraception become more popular among older women.

Although the pill was first available in 1961 its use has become increasingly widespread among all age groups of women until 1989 (Table 14.9). Part of the reason for the increasing use of the pill, especially by younger women, was the changing levels of sexual activity and changing attitudes of doctors towards prescribing the pill – especially for unmarried women. The use of the pill grew steadily until 1989. Since then the growth in the rates of pill usage has been confined mainly to women aged over 30.

Table 14.10 shows that the contraceptive pill is the single most common form of contraception used by women. As noted above, it is much more widely used by younger women than older women. Similarly, condom usage, the second most common form of contraception overall, is much more common among partners of younger than older women.

As the use of the pill and condoms declines as women become older, sterilisation becomes a more common form of birth control9. From the age of 30 onwards the percentage of men and women who are sterilised increases steadily so that among

| Table 14.10 Use of contraceptive pill, 1977-2001* |
|----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18–19         | 21.2 | 29.0 | 39.4 | 33.0 | 45.2 |
| 20–24         | 35.4 | 45.6 | 52.2 | 46.7 | 50.9 |
| 25–29         | 29.1 | 34.1 | 43.3 | 38.2 | 44.9 |
| 30–34         | 19.8 | 22.2 | 28.5 | 28.1 | 32.1 |
| 35–39         | 11.8 | 11.8 | 18.5 | 22.4 | 23.6 |
| 40–44         | 8.0  | 6.6  | 6.8  | 12.1 | 17.0 |
| 45–49         | 6.1  | 3.2  | 4.2  | 6.8  | 8.5  |
| Total         | 20.4 | 23.6 | 28.1 | 26.7 | 28.8 |


| Table 14.9 Use of contraceptive pill, 1977-2001* |
|----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18–19         | 21.2 | 29.0 | 39.4 | 33.0 | 45.2 |
| 20–24         | 35.4 | 45.6 | 52.2 | 46.7 | 50.9 |
| 25–29         | 29.1 | 34.1 | 43.3 | 38.2 | 44.9 |
| 30–34         | 19.8 | 22.2 | 28.5 | 28.1 | 32.1 |
| 35–39         | 11.8 | 11.8 | 18.5 | 22.4 | 23.6 |
| 40–44         | 8.0  | 6.6  | 6.8  | 12.1 | 17.0 |
| 45–49         | 6.1  | 3.2  | 4.2  | 6.8  | 8.5  |
| Total         | 20.4 | 23.6 | 28.1 | 26.7 | 28.8 |


| Table 14.10 Contraception used by women (and men) aged 18–49, 2001 |
|----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Contraceptive pill | 45.2 | 50.9 | 44.9 | 32.1 | 23.6 | 17.0 | 8.5 | 28.8 |
| Condom | 40.1 | 37.7 | 32.1 | 25.6 | 19.7 | 14.6 | 9.2 | 22.8 |
| IUD | 0.4 | 0.6 | 0.6 | 1.3 | 1.9 | 1.8 | 1.3 | 1.3 |
| Periodic abstinence | 0.4 | 1.9 | 2.9 | 4.2 | 4.1 | 3.2 | 2.5 | 3.2 |
| Contraceptive injection | 2.2 | 3.6 | 3.5 | 3.3 | 1.9 | 1.8 | 0.7 | 2.4 |
| Morning after pill | 5.2 | 4.9 | 2.1 | 1.0 | 0.5 | 0.3 | 0.7 | 1.5 |
| Female sterilisation (tubal ligation) | 0.5 | 1.8 | 5.6 | 10.1 | 15.1 | 20.5 | 9.1 |
| Hysterectomy (and thus sterilisation) | 0.3 | 1.3 | 3.9 | 8.1 | 15.3 | 4.9 |
| Male sterilisation | 0.8 | 2.6 | 6.4 | 16.9 | 21.0 | 18.5 | 11.5 |
women aged 45-49 over half (54.3 per cent) the women or their partner has had a surgical procedure that prevents fertility.

The use of sterilisation to control fertility has increased over the years but appears to have declined among women in more recent times. For example, Santow (1991) reports rates of sterilisation for women aged 35-39 as increasing from 16 per cent in 1971 to 38 per cent by 1986. However, the 2001 National Health Survey data report rates of 14 per cent for the same age group by 2001 (down from 21.2 per cent in 1995). Medicare data reported by Siedlecky (1996) support this recent downward trend. She reports that in 1984 the sterilisation rate for women aged 15-44 was 8.9 per 1000 but that by 1995 the rate had declined to 2.4 per 1000. At the same time the rate of male sterilisation has remained steady at 8.1 per 1000 males aged 25-49. It appears therefore that an increasing proportion of sterilisations are now being performed on males and that older males are taking more responsibility for birth control than they once may have.

How common is induced abortion?

Abortion has become increasingly available to women since the early 1970s. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that in 1996 there were approximately 95,200 abortions recorded by Medicare and public patient hospital records. This represents about 27 per cent of known pregnancies ending in an abortion during that period (ABS 1998b).

Unfortunately, accurate information on the rate of abortions and the characteristics of those who have an abortion is difficult to obtain. The most readily available reliable data are limited to abortions in South Australia (Chan et al 1999). These data probably reflect general patterns throughout Australia.

Figure 14.9 shows an increase in the abortion rate in South Australia from 1970 onwards. In 1970, six out of every 1000 women aged 15-44 had an abortion. This increased sharply in 1971 to 9.6 per 1000 and then continued to rise until 1977 after which the rate was fairly stable at about 13 per 1000 women until the early 1990s, when the rates began to increase again. By 1999, 17.8 per 1000 women in South Australia aged 15-44 had an abortion in 1999.

In 1999, over 70 per cent of abortions in South Australia were to women aged between 15-29. Furthermore, in 1999, for every 1000 women aged:

- 15-19, 24 had an abortion.
- 20-24, 34 had an abortion.
- 25-29, 23 had an abortion.

Of course, the number of abortions is affected by how many women become pregnant in the first place. Chan et al (1999) report the percentage of all pregnancies in an age group that end in an induced abortion.

This figure indicates that in South Australia in 1999:

- 53 per cent of pregnancies to women aged 15-19 were aborted.
- 36 per cent of pregnancies to women aged 20-24 were aborted.
- 17 per cent of pregnancies to women aged 25-29 were aborted.
- 13 per cent of pregnancies to women aged 30-34 were aborted.
- 20 per cent of pregnancies to women aged 35-39 were aborted.
- 33 per cent of pregnancies to women aged 40-44 were aborted.
- 75 per cent of pregnancies to women aged over 45 were aborted.

Abortions were predominantly to women who were not married at the time. In South Australia 25 per cent of abortions were given to married women, 47 per cent were to women who had never married, 12 per cent to cohabiting women and 13 per cent to (not cohabiting) divorced or separated women.

Figure 14.9 Abortion rate per 1000 women aged 14-44, South Australia, 1970-99

What do Australians think about abortion?

Abortion has been a contentious and divisive issue in Australia and many other countries. It was a particularly lively issue during the 1970s but even the effective legalisation of abortion-on-demand has not meant that there is agreement about whether women should be able to obtain an abortion should they want to do so. Nor is there agreement regarding the conditions under which people believe that an abortion is acceptable.

There appears to have been some changes in attitudes towards abortion since the late 1980s. The regular Australian Election Surveys routinely ask about whether women ought to be able to obtain an abortion on request. Table 14.11 reports the percentage of people who think that a woman ought to be able to obtain an abortion readily.

These results indicate that:

- In 2001, the majority (58 per cent) believed that a woman should be able to get an abortion readily. Only 4 per cent thought that abortion was always wrong.
- Between 1987 and 2001 the percentage of people approving of ready access to abortion has increased substantially from 39 per cent to 58 per cent.
- This increase has been equally evident among both men and women.
- Men and women are equally likely to support a woman’s right to obtain ready access to an abortion.
- The increased approval of ready abortion has occurred across all age groups.
- In general, younger age groups are more supportive of a woman having ready access to abortion.

While there is majority support for ready access to abortion there is evidence that some support is conditional on the reason for the abortion. In the 2001 Australian Election Survey a further 33 per cent supported abortion under certain conditions.

The International Social Science Survey in Australia tapped abortion attitudes in 1998 and found that support varied depending on the reason for which the woman wanted the abortion. Almost 70 per cent supported abortion if there was a serious defect in the baby but only 42 per cent supported abortion in the case of a woman wanting the abortion because of the low income of her family (International Social Science Survey, Australia 1998).

How many people use IVF and related methods?

Medical developments have led to improvements in assisting otherwise infertile couples to have children. The three main forms of assisted techniques are in-vitro fertilisation (IVF); sperm injection; and gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT). In 2000, there were 4285 viable pregnancies (that is, 20 weeks) from assisted conception methods which resulted in 5,223 live births. These births represented almost 2 per cent of all births (Dean and Sullivan 2003).

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare statistics indicate that:

- The viable pregnancy rate (20 weeks) from all forms of assisted conception has increased from 13 per cent in 1992 to 20.6 in 2001.
- The success rate of assisted conception methods decreases as women get older. Of assisted conceptions to women aged over 40 (that is, in those cases where the woman actually became pregnant), 60 per cent resulted in a live birth. This compares with live births of over 80 per cent for assisted conceptions for women aged 25-34.

Assisted pregnancies were much more common among women in their thirties than in any other age group. In 2000, only 16.5 per cent of women achieving a pregnancy through assisted conception methods were aged under 30 and only 11.2 per cent were aged 40 or over. Over 72 per cent of women achieving such pregnancies were in their thirties – 37.8 per cent were aged 30 to 34 and a further 34.5 per cent were aged 35 to 39.

Are women giving birth at later ages?

How old are mothers when they give birth?

The trend for the average age of mothers when they give birth has matched trends in the age of marriage. Both the age of marriage and the age at which women gave birth fell after World War II and then increased from the early 1970s until 2002, when the median age at which women gave birth was 28.1 years (Dean and Sullivan 2003). However, more recently the trend has been for average age at birth to decline again. In 2000, 44.6 per cent of births were to women under the age of 30 compared with 41.3 per cent in 1992 (Dean and Sullivan 2003). In 2001, 41.2 per cent of women were aged 30 years or less at the birth of their first child (Hassan and Dean 2004). The median age at first birth was 28.8 years in 1987 and 27.8 years in 2001 (Hassan and Dean 2004).
Birth was 30.2 years (Figure 14.10). This means that half of all mothers were aged 30.2 years or older when they had a child. The median age of mothers is now higher than at any time in the 20th century. The median age for fathers (where known) was 32.4 years (ABS 2003c).

Of course, being summary measures, medians do not tell the whole story. Figure 14.11 reports recent trends in the percentage of births to teenagers and to women over 35 years of age. This Figure shows a gradual decline in the proportion of all births that are to teenagers from 7.2 per cent of births in 1982 to 4.6 per cent in 2002. At the same time, the proportion of births to women aged 35 and over has increased sharply from 7.1 per cent in 1984 to 18.5 per cent in 2002.

When do women first become mothers?
Women are having their first child at a later age than in earlier years. Unfortunately, statistical collections are not well suited to tracking changes in the age at which women have their first child. The main information that is available indicates the average age at which women have their first birth within marriage. But as more and more first births are to unmarried mothers, it is increasingly misleading to rely on data about the age of mothers at their first nuptial birth to indicate the age at which women first become mothers.

However, some data are available from for all first births between 1993 and 2000. These figures show the increasing age at which women have their first child – regardless of whether they were married at the time. Information from the Perinatal Statistics Unit of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW 2003a) show that in 2000:

- 30.5 per cent of all first births were to women aged 15-24 (down from 37.3 per cent in 1993).
- 34.2 per cent of all first births were to women aged 25-29 (35.2 per cent in 1993).
- 25 per cent of all first births were to women aged 30-34 (up from 20.8 per cent in 1993).
- 10.3 per cent of all first births were to women aged 35 and over (up from 6.8 per cent in 1993).
- 1.4 per cent of all first births were to women aged 40 and over.

Further evidence of delaying having a child (combined with permanent childlessness) is available by comparing the percentage of younger women in 1986...
with the percentage in 2001 who had had no children (see ABS 2001f, and the 2001 National Health Survey).

- Of women aged 20-24, two thirds (67 per cent) had not had a child in 1986. By 2001, over three quarters (73 per cent) of women in their early twenties had not had a child.

- Of women in their late twenties (25-29) 40 per cent had not had a child in 1986. By 2001, this percentage had increased to 56 per cent.

While the percentage of births to women aged 35 or over has increased in recent years, an increasing proportion of these births to older women are first time births. Figure 14.12 shows that in 2000, a quarter of all births to these older women were first births. This represents an increase from just on 20 per cent in 1992 which were first births. In 2000 one in ten (10.2 per cent) mothers were having their first baby at age 35 years or older (AIHW 2003a).

A similar pattern holds among mothers aged 40 and over. In 1991, 16.7 per cent of babies born to these mothers were first born babies. This percentage increased throughout the 1990s so that by 2000, 22.5 per cent of births to women aged 40 or over were their first babies. This pattern reflects both the extent to which some women are delaying having their first child and the effect of new reproductive technologies in assisting older women to have babies.

How old are women when they have their first marital birth?

Since the age at which women marry is increasing it is hardly surprising that the age at which women have their first child within a marriage is increasing. Figure 14.13 shows that over a period of just 27 years, the average age of women having their first child within a marriage increased by 6.1 years – from a median of 24 years in 1974 to 30.1 years in 2002.

This increase in the age of the first nuptial child must be seen in the context of the increasing rate of cohabitation, delayed marriage and the increased rate at which women have been having children outside of marriage. Since mothers of ex-nuptial children are younger than mothers of nuptial children, and since the rate of ex-nuptial births has been increasing steadily, concentrating on the average of mothers having their first child within marriage will overstate the average age of first time mothers overall.

In 2000, the median age of mothers giving birth for the first time, regardless of whether they were

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**Figure 14.12**  Per cent of births to older mothers that were first births, Australia, 1991-2000

![Graph showing the percentage of births to older mothers that were first births from 1991 to 2000.](source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001f); Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2003a).

**Figure 14.13**  Median age of mother at first nuptial birth, 1975-2002

![Graph showing the median age of mothers at first nuptial birth from 1975 to 2005.](source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2002h) and Births (various issues).
married or not was 27.3 years (AIHW 2003a). In the same year the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates that the median age of women at their first nuptial birth was 29.5 (ABS 2001g). This means that, although women are delaying their first child, the extent of this delay is exaggerated if we only examine the age at which women have their first nuptial birth.

How likely are women to have children at various ages?

Age-specific fertility rates indicate the number of women per 1000 women in a specific age group who give birth in a given year. Age-specific fertility rates provide a useful snapshot of the ages at which women are most likely to have children.

In 2002, the main ages at which women had children were between 25 and 34. For every 1000 women aged 25-29, 104.2 children were born while 111.2 were born for every 1000 women aged 30-34. Fertility rates at the age extremes of 15-19 or over 40 were low. For every 1000 females aged 15-19 there were just 17.1 babies born. For every 1000 women aged 40-44, just 9.7 babies were born (Figure 14.14).

An inspection of changes in age-specific fertility rates over time provides a sense of changes in the age-related patterns at which women are most likely to give birth. The over-time patterns show a clear shift towards having children later in life.

Figure 14.15 shows the age-specific fertility rates for the three younger age groups – those aged 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29. In all three age groups the fertility rate has declined since 1960. The sharpest fertility declines were among those in their early twenties. In 1960, 220 per 1000 women aged 20-24 had a child. By 2002 this rate had fallen to a quarter of the 1960 level with just 55.5 women per 1000 in this age group having a baby. The decline among women in their late twenties was also sharp but not as dramatic as for those in their early twenties. In 1960, 216 per 1000 women in their late twenties had a baby. By 2002, this had halved to 104 births per 1000 women.

Figure 14.16 shows the fertility rates for the three older groups of mothers – those in their thirties and early forties. All three age groups show an increase in fertility from about 1980 onwards. Of women in their early thirties, 75 of every 1000 had a baby in 1980. By 2002 this had increased by almost a half to 111.2 per 1000. Of women in their late thirties the 1980 rate of 23.7 per 1000 had more than doubled to 52.5 per 1000.

While the fertility rate of the three younger groups of women is downwards from 1960, the older groups have a different fertility profile over this period. Initially, the fertility of the older age groups of women declined from 1960 to 1980 before picking up after 1980. This was especially so for women in their thirties. This pattern of fertility decline and then the post 1980s increase among the older women in part reflects the delay in childbearing of the younger women. Although the fertility of all age groups declined in the 1960s and 1970s, the fertility of the older age groups increased somewhat after 1980 as the younger women who had previously deferred having children, then had children later in life.

The changing age profile of mothers can be seen by the most popular ages for having children in 1960 and 2002. In 1960, women in their early twenties
had the highest fertility rate of all women followed by those in their late twenties and then by those in their early thirties (Table 14.12). By 2002, this ranking had reversed. Women in their early thirties had the highest fertility rates, followed by those in their late twenties with those in their early twenties having much lower fertility levels.

The other striking feature in Table 14.12 is that in every age group the fertility rate of women has declined between 1960 (the peak of the baby boom) and 2002. The decline in fertility of younger age groups was not fully compensated for by an increase in fertility rates among the older age groups. Although some of the fertility decline in the younger age groups was made up by increased fertility among the older groups after 1980, this partial recovery of fertility among women in their thirties was nowhere near sufficient to make up for the general fertility decline.

Do many teenagers still have babies?

One aspect of age-related fertility that has received considerable attention in some overseas countries, especially the United States, has been the rate at which teenagers have babies. The particular focus of this attention has been the rate of unmarried teenagers having babies. This has been an area of concern because some have considered that such births are undesirable. This is not just because of the age and marital status of the mothers, but because relationship breakdown among teenage parents is high (p. 213-14) and having babies at this age can prevent young women from completing their education, thereby compromising later opportunities to obtain paid work.

The clearest observation that can be made regarding teenage parents in Australia is that very few babies are now born to teenage mothers. The current low level of births to teenage women represents a decline from higher past levels. Figure 14.17 shows the changes in the teenage female fertility rate since 1921. This graph shows
that teenage fertility rates peaked in 1971 when they reached 55.5 per 1000 women aged 15-19. Since then these rates have declined rapidly and sharply so that by 2002 the rate was just 17.1 per 1000.

While the current teenage fertility rates are the lowest since 1921, low teenage fertility rates were the norm in the 1930s and 1940s when the rate averaged about 24 over these decades. However, the reasons for lower teenage fertility in 2002 are different from those in the 1930s and 1940s. Low current rates are due much more to better access to birth control and abortion than to greater abstinence (p. 194). The lower birth rates in the 1930s and 1940s reflect different patterns of teenage sexual behaviour in that period.

How many teenage mothers are married?

Apart from the declining fertility rate among teenagers, the other notable change has been the sharp turnaround in the marital status of teenage mothers (Table 14.13). In 1971, about a third of all births to teenage mothers were to unmarried mothers. This percentage has increased steadily each year so that by 2002, most (91.9 per cent) births to unmarried teenage mothers were to unmarried mothers. However, while the percentage of births that were to teenage mothers increased dramatically over this period the actual number of such births only increased by 5 per cent.

Not all unmarried teenage mothers, of course, are lone mothers. The high rate of cohabitation among younger people means that many births to unmarried teenage mothers will be to a couple. In 1999, of all confinements of teenage mothers, 44.6 per cent were to mothers who were either married or cohabiting. Fifty four per cent of teenage confinements were to teenage mothers who were not living with a partner (Nassar and Sullivan, 2001).

How does Australia compare internationally?

Australia’s teenage fertility rate (18.1 in 1999) was lower than comparable English speaking countries such as New Zealand (29.8), Canada (20.1), United Kingdom (29.7) and USA (51.1) (Table 14.14). However, compared to a number of European countries such as France (7.9), Greece (13.0), Italy (6.8), Netherlands (4.1) and Sweden (7.8), Australia has relatively high teenage fertility levels. Australia also has considerably higher teenage fertility levels than the developed Asian countries such as Japan (3.9), South Korea (3.3), Hong Kong (5.8) and Singapore (7.0). The reasons for different patterns are complex. The relative position of Australia in terms of teenage fertility levels is due to a mixture of the following factors:

- Differential access to contraception and abortion.
- Different cultural values (and the associated ethnic and racial profiles) and the acceptability of ex-nuptial births and age of marriage.
- Educational levels.

Do teenage mothers come from particular ethnic and racial groups?

Within Australia, rates of teenage fertility differ across ethnic and racial groups as indicated by the mother’s country of birth (Table 14.15). Indigenous women have the highest teenage fertility rate (76.0) followed by teenagers born in Lebanon (75.8) and Turkey (47.5). These teenage fertility rates are far higher than the 2002 rate of 17.1 for all Australian teenage women aged 15-19. These high rates reflect cultural differences in the age of marriage in the case of women born in Turkey and Lebanon and the high rate of cohabiting relationships among Indigenous teenage women.

The fertility rates for Australian born teenagers are higher than those for teenagers living in Australia but born in other English speaking countries such as Canada (4.8) and the United Kingdom (13.2). The Australian rates however, are substantially lower than those of New Zealand born teenage women (31.3).
Teenage fertility rates are very low among teenage women from developed Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Japan and Malaysia (in the order of one or two per 1000), but among women from the less developed Asian countries, the teenage fertility rates are closer to those of Australian born teenagers (for example, 20.7 in Cambodia, 18.9 in Vietnam and 21.9 in Thailand) (Table 14.15).

What are the other characteristics of teenage mothers?

The 1996 Census\(^{11}\) shows that among the teenage mothers:

- Indigenous teenagers were over represented. 11.6 per cent of teenage mothers were Indigenous women compared with just 2.1 per cent of women aged 15-19 who were non-Indigenous.
- Women who left school early were over represented. 13.5 per cent of teenage mothers had left school aged 14 or younger compared to just 2.1 per cent of this age group as a whole. Overall, 62 per cent of teenage mothers had left school aged 16 or younger compared to just 18.6 per cent of women in this age group as a whole.
- Those with no religion were over represented. 29.3 per cent of teenage mothers had no religious affiliation compared to 19.3 per cent of all females in this age group. Thus, Catholics were under represented. While 29.6 per cent of teenage women were Catholics just 19.7 per cent of the teenage mothers were Catholics.
- Australian born teenagers were slightly under represented. While 85 per cent of teenage women in this age group were Australian born, only 80.3 per cent of teenage mothers were Australian born.

What proportion of babies are born to married couples?

Since the mid 1970s there has been a steady rise in the proportion of children who are born to unmarried parents. Some of this rise is due to more single women giving birth and some is due to the increase in cohabiting relationships. Nevertheless, over two thirds (69 per cent) of babies are born to married couples.

Figure 14.18 indicates a steady increase in births to unmarried mothers (ex-nuptial births). Just after World War II approximately 4 per cent of births were ex-nuptial. This rate began to rise in the 1960s and then rose sharply from the mid 1970s. By 1981, 13.9 per cent of births were ex-nuptial. This increased to 23 per cent just 10 years later in 1991. By 2002 this had risen by a further 8 per cent to reach a peak of 31.3 per cent.

An even larger proportion of first births are ex-nuptial. In 2000, of all first births, 37 per cent were to parents who were not married (ABS 2001g).

On average, unmarried mothers having a child are younger than are married mothers. In 2002, the median age of married mothers at confinement was 31.2\(^{12}\) years. In the same year the median age of unmarried mothers at confinement was 26.7 years where paternity was acknowledged and 24.8 where paternity was not acknowledged\(^{13}\) (ABS 2003c).

Are most births to unmarried mothers, to couples or to lone women?

The ABS statistics regarding ex-nuptial births only indicate the percentages of births to mothers not in a registered marriage. The rise in cohabitation, especially since the mid 1970s (p. 115) means that many of these births are to couples but not to married couples. Data from the Perinatal Statistics Unit (AIHW 2003a) indicate that in 2000:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of birth</th>
<th>Rate per 1000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Australian</td>
<td>76.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Yugoslavia</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Table 14.15 Teenage fertility rate of women living in Australia by country of birth, (females aged 15-19), 2002**
87 per cent of children were born to couples – either married or cohabiting.

11.6 per cent of children were born to single women not living with the father.

1.4 per cent of children were born towidowed, separated or divorced women not with a partner;

Approximately 16 per cent of births in that year were to cohabiting couples.14

**Are births to lone mothers an Australian “thing”?**

The couple/marital status of mothers differs for Australian women depending on the country in which they were born (Table 14.16). This Table reports the marital and couple status of women at the time of their confinement in 2000. Several points emerge from this table:

- Although just over two thirds (67.6 per cent) of Australian born mothers who had a child in 2000 were married at the time of their confinement, 86 per cent were living with a partner at the time. Nevertheless, 12.8 per cent of Australian born mothers were single – a rate that is considerably higher than for mothers born in all other countries listed in Table 14.16, except New Zealand and Vietnam.

- New Zealand born mothers were the least likely of all mothers to be married at the time of confinement with less than 54.4 per cent being married. However, 83.9 per cent had a partner.

- Of mothers from India and Lebanon very few at all were single when they had a child.

- With the exception of mothers from Vietnam, a relatively high percentage of Asian born women were married at the time of confinement and most had a partner. Very few children were born to single, Asian born women.

**What do Australians think about single women having children?**

While the bulk of lone parent families are the result of relationship breakdown some are formed as a result of single women having a child without being in any ongoing relationship. The World Values Survey in 1995-97 asked for views about this practice. Specifically, it asked “If a woman wants to have a child as a single parent but she doesn’t want to have a stable relationship with a man, do you approve or disapprove?”

In 1995-97, over half (53.0 per cent) of the 2014 respondents from this national random sample survey disapproved of a lone single woman having a child as a single parent (Table 14.17). Over a third of respondents (36 per cent) approved – the remainder (12 per cent) were ambivalent. Overall, the level of disapproval expressed in 1995-97 is almost identical to that expressed in the same survey in the early 1980s.

In 1995-97 men were a little more likely than women to disapprove of intentional single motherhood (55.7 per cent compared with 48.6 per cent). This is a reversal of the gender pattern that held in 1981 when women were more disapproving of a lone single woman choosing to have a child on her own.

Age was an important factor in attitudes to lone single women deciding to have a child on their own in both 1981 and in 1995-97. In 1995-97, of those aged in their twenties, 37.3 per cent disapproved of this type of lone parenthood. Of those aged in their forties over half (51.5 per cent) disapproved and two thirds of those in their sixties and almost three quarters in their seventies disapproved of lone women intentionally having a baby without intending to partner.
How long do married couples “wait” before having children?

The ability of women to control their fertility and a reduction in the social pressure to marry because a woman becomes pregnant (sometimes known as “shotgun marriages”), has meant that the spacing between marriage and the birth of the first child within the marriage has increased sharply since the mid 1960s when the oral contraceptive pill became widely available. In the early 1920s the average time between marriage and the birth of a child was just 11 months. This gap increased during World War II, no doubt partly due to husband absences. After the war the gap between marriage and a child dropped somewhat but from 1965 onward there was a sharp increase in this gap between marriage and having a child. This gap increased further in the 1970s so that by the late 1970s the average gap was over 28 months. Since then the gap has remained reasonably stable just increasing to 31 months by 2002 (Figure 14.19).

As noted above, this same period has seen a sharp decline in “shotgun marriages” – defined as those where a baby is born within seven months of marriage. In 1998, only 9.5 per cent of all first births within marriage occurred within the first seven months. Births where the bride would have known she was pregnant when she married were much more common among teenage brides than other brides. Of first births to newlywed teenage brides over half (54.8 per cent) were within seven months of marriage compared with less than 20 per cent of women in other age groups as seen in Figure 14.20 (range from 6.4 per cent to 18.8 per cent).

Nevertheless, “shotgun weddings” among teenage mothers were rare. Of all births to teenagers (not just births to teenage brides) in 1998, only 4.3 per cent occurred within seven months of their marriage. This compares with 40 per cent of births to teenagers in 1971 that occurred within seven months of marriage. The reason for this decline is mainly because of the sharp rise in ex-nuptial births – pregnancy is no longer seen as requiring marriage.

Although people are married on average for about two and a half years before they have their first child within the marriage, a third of couples have their first nuptial child within less than a year of getting married. Almost another quarter (22.8 per cent) have their first child within one and two years of marriage (Figure 14.21). Most married couples who have children, have their first nuptial child within five years of marriage. In 1998, 79.2 per cent of first nuptial births were to couples who had been married for less than five years.
Endnotes

1 A common method of measuring fertility is to calculate the Total Fertility Rate (TFR). The TFR "represents the number of children a woman would bear during her lifetime if she experienced current age-specific fertility rates at each age of her reproductive life" (ABS 2003c).

2 Replacement fertility level is the estimated number of children a women would need to have in her lifetime to replace herself and her partner. The precise replacement level will vary between countries and over time depending on the survival of babies to reproductive age.

3 This is in the situation in which there is no net migration. Migration can help sustain stable population levels when fertility rates are below 2.1.

4 A fertility level of 1.75 is the estimated number of children a woman will have in her lifetime if she has the current age-specific fertility rates at each age of her reproductive life.

5 Comparing trends using only selected points of time has to be undertaken with caution and some information will inevitably be lost. For example, by not reporting 1990, hides the fact that Sweden had a fertility rate of 2.1 in 1990 whereas the data points in Table 14.1 would suggest little change between 1975-2005. Similarly, France in 1990 had a lower fertility rate than projected for 2000-05. Omitting 1990 figures in Table 14.1 hides the ‘recovery’ of France’s fertility since 1990.

6 Those born in 1957 would have reached the end of their childbearing years by 1996 Census.

7 McDonald (1985), using a different methodology, has provided lower estimates of the levels of childlessness earlier in the 20th century that suggests that the levels of childlessness among the birth cohorts between 1901 and 1921 were not as high as those estimated by Rowland.

8 Not all female sterilisations are due to the desire to control fertility. Many hysterectomies are performed for reasons other than fertility control.

9 All information concerning assisted conception are for Australia and New Zealand combined. The vast bulk of treatments are of Australian women.

10 These data do not include NSW figures. However, figures from previous years indicate that the omission of NSW does not alter these percentages.

11 The 2001 Census did not provide this information and the 2001 National Health Survey had insufficient teenage mothers to allow reliable estimates for subgroups. 1996 Census data therefore provides the best available estimates of the characteristics of teenage mothers.

12 This median is based on all nuptial births not just the first nuptial birth.

13 Paternity can be and usually is acknowledged on the birth registration. Only 4 per cent of births do not indicate who the father is. Paternity acknowledgement is often taken to indicate some involvement of the father with the child.

14 These figures yield slightly different estimates of births to married couples than the ABS figures. The ABS registrations data indicate that in 2001, 69 per cent of births were to married couples. These AIHW figures yield a figure of 71 per cent. The differences may be partly due to the absence of NSW data from the AIHW figures.

Highlights

• Australia’s fertility rate has been falling since 1961 and since the mid 1970s has been below the population replacement rate.

• The rate of fertility decline was sharpest from 1961 till the mid 1970s and has continued at a gradual rate since then.

• Australia’s fertility decline is matched by similar declines in almost all other countries. By OECD standards, Australia has a relatively high fertility level.

• Australian women are having smaller families than in the 1960s and 1970s. The most marked changes have been in more women restricting their family size to two children and fewer having three or more children.

• Fertility is considerably lower among women with a degree or other post-school qualifications than among women without such qualifications.

• The earlier women have left school, the more children they have.

• Women from professional white collar occupations have fewer children than those from lower level white collar and blue collar occupations.

• Childlessness is considerably higher among professional women with a degree.

• Fertility levels are higher in the more socially disadvantaged areas.

• Fertility levels are higher outside of capital cities. The more remote the area where a woman lives the higher is her fertility.

• Indigenous women have relatively high fertility levels and low levels of childlessness as do women born in the Middle East, North Africa and Vietnam.

• Mothers in capital cities are older than those living elsewhere and are more likely than those living elsewhere to be married.

• In historical terms the current levels of childlessness are relatively low but are projected to increase to about a quarter of all women.

• The declining fertility is not simply a matter of people not wanting children at all. Most women have children – but they are having fewer children than earlier cohorts of women. More than a quarter of men and women have fewer children than they would ideally like to have. Furthermore,
attitude surveys indicate a widespread high value placed on having children.

• However, women are controlling their fertility more effectively than women thirty or forty years ago. The contraceptive pill continues to be a fundamental part of fertility control – especially for women up to their mid to late twenties.

• Sterilisation of both men and women continues to be a widely used mode of birth control especially for women over the age of 40 and men over the age of 35.

• Abortion appears to be another widely used means by which women control their fertility – especially among teenagers and those in their early twenties and women in their forties.

• Approval of abortion has increased over the last two decades among both men and women and in all age groups. Nevertheless, many people only approve of abortion under some circumstances.

• Medical technologies are being used increasingly to enable infertile people to have a child. About 2 per cent of all births are due to IVF style technologies.

• The success rate of assisted conception technologies has increased from 13 per cent in 1992 to 21 per cent in 2001.

• Women are increasingly having their first child at a later age. In 2001, the median age at which all mothers gave birth was 30 years.

• There has been a steady decline in births to teenage women but an increase in the proportion of births to women aged 35 and older.

• The median age at which women have their first baby (regardless of whether they are married) was 27.3 years of age in 2000.

• The main age bands in which women now have children is between 25-34.

• Teenage fertility in Australia is much lower than in the United States, United Kingdom and New Zealand but much higher than in many European countries and the developed Asian countries.

• Within Australia, teenage fertility is very high among women born in Lebanon and Turkey due to early marriage and among Indigenous women due to early cohabitation.

• Australia has experienced a sharp increase in births to unmarried mothers so that in 2001, 31 per cent of births were to unmarried mothers. However, many of these mothers were partnered so that approximately 11.6 per cent of births were to lone mothers.

• Most births to teenagers are to unmarried teenagers.

• Approximately half of all Australians disapprove of intentional lone motherhood and there is no evidence that this disapproval has declined in recent years.

• Married couples are waiting longer after they marry before they have children. They now wait for approximately two and a half years before they have their first child within the marriage.
Divorce and separation
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The instability of marriages and other relationships has been one of the hallmarks of the last quarter of the 20th century. The ending of marriages and other relationships can result in considerable distress for the people involved. Emotional and economic costs to partners and the consequences for children, both in the short and long term, are matters for widespread concern.

The increased divorce rates have been facilitated by law reform, most notably the 1975 Family Law Act which introduced many changes including no fault divorce. However, the rising divorce rate was not simply a function of law reform. The law was altered to reflect the changing realities and the changing social and cultural contexts in which people married.

It would be a mistake to focus exclusively on relationships that end in divorce. Cohabitation has become an increasingly important part of the process of partnering (see Chapter 10), and thus any reasonable understanding of how contemporary relationships end must include an examination of the ways in which cohabiting relationships end. Unfortunately, we only have limited information on the ending of cohabiting relationships. While divorces are registered, there is no central place in which the ending of cohabiting relationships is recorded.

How common is divorce?

The level of divorce can be described in three different ways:

- The divorce rate in any given year – that is, the number of divorces per 1000 people.
- The percentage of the population that are currently divorced.
- The risk of divorce over a lifetime – that is, the probability that a person who marries in a given year will eventually divorce.

What is the current divorce rate?

In 2001, 55,300 divorces were granted. This means that there were 110,600 newly divorced adults in 2001. The number of divorces in 2001 was the highest since the peak year of 1976 when the introduction of the Family Law Act was followed by 63,230 divorces. The divorce figure in 2001 represents a general increase in the number of divorces each year. One reason that the number of divorces grows is that, despite the declining rate of marriage, there are more people who are married and therefore at risk of divorce. For this reason, increases in the number of divorces do not give a good indication of the risk of divorce.

Divorce rates however adjust for the size of the pool of “at risk” people. Divorce rates can be calculated in two ways: the number of divorces per 1000 members of the population (the crude divorce rate), or the number of divorces per 1000 women in the married female population. The crude divorce rate is the easier of the two to calculate but is less useful in that it does not take into account whether people are at risk of divorce. The more useful divorce rates are those that are expressed as divorces per 1000 women in the married population. In 2000, this divorce rate was 12. This means that for every 1000 married women 12 divorces were granted in 2000.

What is the risk of divorce?

The divorce rate of 12 divorces per 1000 married women simply describes the number of divorces in a given year. If the same 1000 people were tracked over many years, the cumulative number of divorces in that group would, of course, be far higher than that recorded in any particular year.

What has the risk been until now?

One way of examining the risk of divorce is to examine current levels of divorce. Rather than projecting into the future to see what risks future age cohorts face, this approach works backwards and asks “What proportion of marriages from a particular year have already ended in divorce?” (ABS 2000d).

Table 15.1 shows that, of marriages that began in 1975-76, 31.9 per cent had actually ended in divorce 24 years later. For more recent marriages we can only look at the percentages that have ended in divorce over a shorter time span. Table 15.1 shows that there has been a gradual increase in the actual risk of divorce for more recent marriages. Of marriages that began in 1975-76, 17.1 per cent had ended in divorce within 10 years. Of marriages that began in 1989-90, 20.4 per cent had ended in divorce within 10 years.

What can we expect in the future?

An alternative way of thinking about the risk of divorce is to estimate the future risk of divorce of those who are currently marrying. These estimates of future risk vary, depending on the method of estimation. Using nuptiality tables (ABS 2001e) it...
is estimated that if babies born in 2000 experience 1997-99 levels of marriage, widowhood, divorce, remarriage and mortality) then 32 per cent of the marriages of these babies who marry will end up in divorce.

An alternative method of estimating the future divorce risk – the total divorce rate method – uses cumulated rates of divorce by duration of marriage or rates for all persons. Using this method and applying 1999 divorce rates it is projected that:

- 9 per cent of all 1999 marriages will end in divorce within 5 years.
- 20 per cent of all 1999 marriages will end in divorce within 10 years.
- 35 per cent of all 1999 marriages will end in divorce within 20 years.
- 42 per cent of all 1999 marriages will end in divorce within 30 years.
- 46 per cent of all 1999 marriages will end in divorce eventually (ABS 2000h).

**How many people are currently divorced?**

While many people divorce, many also remarry (p. 178). This means that at any point in time the percentage of the population who are currently divorced will be quite different to the percentage who have at some point been divorced. The percentage of the population who are currently divorced will underestimate the proportion of the population whose lives are directly affected by divorce.

In 2001, 7.4 per cent (1,107,005 people) of the population aged 15 and over were currently divorced. This represents an increase from 1976 when just over 2 per cent of this population were divorced.

**Is the divorce rate still increasing?**

Regardless of the method of calculating the levels of divorce the evidence shows a gradually increasing level of divorce.

Figure 15.1 shows the long term trends in the crude divorce rate. It demonstrates the now familiar picture of very low divorce rates until the end of World War I (1918), a slight increase during the 1920s, another slight increase in the 1930s during the Depression, a sharp increase following World War II (1945), a decline in the 1950s, and a rise from the mid 1960s until 1976 when the Family Law Act of 1975 simplified divorce procedures. In 1976 there was a dramatic rise in divorces and the crude divorce rate increased to 4.5 – a rise that partly reflected the formalisation of many marriages that had ended in separation some years earlier. However, after this peak, the divorce rate declined again but remained much higher than it had before the 1975 Act. By the early 1980s the crude divorce rate had dropped to a level of about 2.8. Since then the rate has fluctuated somewhat. From the mid 1980s until the late 1990s the crude divorce rate increased but since then has trended slightly downwards but has been subject to annual fluctuations. Despite these fluctuations we can say that since peaking at 4.5 in 1976, the crude divorce...
rate appears to have settled to between 2.5 to 2.8 divorces per 1000 population since 1996. However, there have been substantial changes both to the population profile and to marriage patterns. This means that crude divorce rates may be a poor measure of the rate of marriage breakdown. As the proportion of the population that is not married increases (p. 174), the number of people per 1000 who could possibly divorce declines. This can mask any increase in the proportion of marriages that end in divorce. Furthermore, the divorce rate cannot identify relationship breakdowns in the increasing number of cohabiting relationships. If those who are cohabiting had formalised their marriage, the divorce rate may be higher than it currently is.

Figure 15.2 reports the divorce rates of married men in selected years from 1976-2000. These figures indicate a dip in the divorce rate in the second half of the 1980s and then a gradual increase in the rate from 1990 to 1999 with a dip in 2000. It remains to be seen whether the 2000 dip is the beginning of a decline in the divorce rate or just a short term fluctuation.

The percentage of the population that is divorced at a given point in time has increased at a sharper rate than the divorce rate (Figure 15.3). In 1976 about 2 per cent of males aged 15 or over and 2.5 per cent of comparable females were divorced. These percentages have increased by more than 300 per cent between 1976 and 2001. By 2001, 6.5 per cent of men over 15 were divorced and 8.1 per cent of women were divorced.

Throughout this period a greater proportion of women than men were divorced at any given point in time. It is not clear to what extent this is due to a greater reluctance by divorced women to remarry and to what extent it is due to the greater difficulty divorced women have in finding a partner willing to marry. Since divorced women have poorer economic prospects than divorced men and often have responsibility for the children of a previous marriage, they may find it more difficult to find a suitable new marriage partner.

Is marriage getting riskier?
The likelihood of divorcing has increased since 1979. Figure 15.4 shows the predicted likelihood of divorce after various durations of marriage based on divorce rates in the given years. Between 1979-99, the likelihood of divorce has increased from:

- 7.2 per cent after 5 years in 1979 to 8.6 per cent based on 1999 figures.
- 16.3 per cent after 10 years in 1979 to 20.4 per cent in 1999.
- 22.7 per cent after 15 years in 1979 to 28.5 per cent in 1999.
- 28.1 per cent after 20 years in 1979 to 39.1 per cent in 1999.
- 35.7 per cent after 30 years in 1979 to 44.3 per cent in 1999.

How do Australian divorce rates compare internationally?
Due to the type of data that are available, divorce rates between countries are most readily compared using crude divorce rates. Table 15.2 lists the crude divorce rates for a range of countries. The countries are ranked from those with the highest to lowest crude divorce rates. With the exception of Sweden, the English speaking countries have the highest divorce rates. Among the countries listed in Table 15.2, Australia has a relatively high crude divorce rate only exceeded by that of the USA and the United Kingdom.

The countries with the lowest divorce rates are also those that are among the least secularised. Low divorce rates are most evident in countries with substantial Islamic populations (for example, Indonesia, Turkey and Yugoslavia), substantial Catholic populations (for example, Italy, Poland and Chile) or Orthodox denominations (Yugoslavia and Greece).
Divorce rates are higher in the more developed Asian nations (for example, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore) than in the developing Asian nations such as Thailand and Indonesia.

**Is early marriage especially risky?**

The age at which people marry is linked to their risk of divorce. The younger a couple is when they marry, the greater their risk of divorce. Figures 15.5 and 15.6 show the expected rates of divorce for men and women according to the age at which they married. The graphs report estimates for the percentages likely to have divorced after 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, and 30 years of marriage. These estimates are based on 1999 divorce rates and assume that these same rates will hold into the future. These figures address a number of important questions relating to the age at which men and women marry.

**Do teenage marriages last?**

Both men and women who marry as teenagers are at the greatest risk of divorce. While the risk is higher for teenage men who marry than for teenage women, the likelihood of divorce is high for both men and women. Teenage brides and grooms are most likely to divorce during the 5 to 9 year period following marriage. It is estimated that:

- A third of teenage grooms and a quarter (23.9 per cent) of teenage brides will be divorced within five years of marriage.
- After ten years of marriage almost three quarters (72.7 per cent) of the teenage grooms and over half (54.4 per cent) of the teenage brides will be divorced.
- By 20 years of marriage all the teenage grooms will have divorced while 80 per cent of teenage brides will probably have divorced.

There is evidence that teen marriage is increasingly vulnerable to divorce. For example, of teenage brides who married in 1975-76, about 30 per cent were divorced ten years later. However, of teenage brides who married about fifteen years later in 1989-90, about 52 per cent were divorced ten years later. Similarly, among teenage grooms in 1975-76 about 43 per cent were divorced within ten years. Of those who married in 1989-90, over 65 per cent were divorced within ten years (ABS 2000h).

**How risky is it to marry in the early twenties?**

Men and women who marry in their early twenties (aged 20-24) are the second most “at risk” age group. However, the risk of divorce for brides and grooms who marry in their early twenties is far lower than for teenagers who marry. For example, while a third of teenage grooms are likely to divorce during the 5 to 9 year period following marriage, only 20.5 per cent of grooms and 19.5 per cent of brides will be divorced within five years of marriage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Crude rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States of America</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

divorce within five years of marriage, only 12.2 per cent of men who marry in their early twenties are likely to divorce within five years. For each duration of marriage, those who marry in their early twenties are far less likely than the teenage brides and grooms to divorce. This applies equally to men and women. Nevertheless, these early twenties brides and grooms are at considerable risk of divorce.

- Of those who marry in their early twenties, more than a quarter (28.6 per cent) of men and a quarter (24.8 per cent) of women are likely to divorce within ten years of marriage.
- Within 20 years of marriage, 45.2 per cent of men who married in their early twenties, and a third of women who married at a similar age are likely to have divorced.
- By 25 years of marriage, half of the men who married in their early twenties and 43 per cent of women who married at the same age are expected to have divorced.

As with teenage brides and grooms those who marry in their early twenties are increasingly at risk of divorce. Of those marrying in 1975-76, about 14 per cent of brides and 19 per cent of grooms were divorced within ten years. But for those who married in 1989-90, these divorce levels had increased to about 19 per cent and 26 per cent respectively (ABS 2000d).

**Does marrying later reduce the risk of divorce?**

The risk of divorce decreases further for those who do not marry until their late twenties (25-29).

- Among men who marry in their late twenties, 7.9 per cent are likely to divorce within 5 years; 19.1 per cent within ten years; 32.5 per cent within twenty years and 39.5 per cent within 30 years.
- Of women who marry in their late twenties, 6.8 per cent are likely to divorce within 5 years; 16.6 per cent within ten years; 29.5 per cent within twenty years and 36.2 per cent within 30 years.

- The risk of divorce of those who marry in their late twenties is similar to that of those who get married in their thirties and forties.

Of those who marry when they are over 50, the risk of divorce is lower than for any other age group. Although the divorce risk is only a little lower after five or ten years of marriage, the divorce risk is considerably lower after 15 or more years. However, this lower risk is not simply because older people work harder at staying married. The more likely reason for the lower divorce rate of older people – especially after fifteen or more years of marriage – is that many of these marriages are ending due to the death of a partner rather than divorce. We cannot tell what the divorce rate would be for these brides and grooms if widowhood did not intervene.

**How old are people when they divorce?**

The likelihood of divorce depends on how long a couple has been married (p. 220). This has the effect of making some age groups much more divorce-prone than others.

The average age of divorce in 2001 was 42 for men and 39 for women. But over the years the average age of divorce has increased (Figure 15.7). This is largely due to the later ages at which people are marrying. Following the rise in the age of marriage from the early 1970s, the median age of divorce begins to increase by the late 1970s. Along with the ongoing increasing age of marriage, the age of divorce has continued to rise.

**Which ages are the most dangerous for divorce?**

Some age groups are more divorce-prone than others. Age-specific divorce rates provide a picture of the level of divorce within each age group. When reported separately for men and women, as in Table 15.3, these rates indicate the number of divorces per 1000 married men and women respectively.

In 2000, the most divorce-prone age group of men were those in their early thirties (21.1 per 1000),
closely followed by those in their late twenties (19.1) and late thirties (18.8). From the early forties onwards the risk of divorce declines steadily to a low of 2.7 among those aged 60 or over. This pattern of divorces peaking among men aged 25-39 reflects the age at which people marry and the fact that the first ten years of marriage are the most vulnerable to divorce. It also reflects selective factors among older couples (that is, the most vulnerable marriages end relatively quickly when people are younger, so marriages that survive until people are older are those that are most likely to survive).

Among women in 2000, the picture is similar except that the divorce risk peaks earlier – (21.8 per 1000) among women in their late twenties, and early thirties (20.5). This earlier peak reflects the younger age at which women marry.

Among men there has been a small shift in the profile of the most at risk age groups. In 1985 and 1990 men in their late twenties were at slightly more risk of divorce than those in their early thirties. Since then the greatest risk of divorce has moved to slightly older men – those in their thirties. This reflects both the later age of marriage and the increase in the duration of marriages before divorce occurs.

A similar trend is evident among women. Although women in their late twenties have remained the most divorce-prone between 1985-2000, the greatest increase in divorce risk is now among women in their thirties. In 1985, 16.5 women per 1000 married women in their early thirties divorced. By 2000 this had increased to 20.5 – a risk increase of 24 per cent.

**Who is divorced?**

*Age and divorced marital status*

While divorce rates are lower among older people, the cumulative effect of divorces when people are younger and do not remarry, means that the proportion of older people who are divorced is higher than among younger age groups. Table 15.4 shows that, overall, of those who are or have been partnered the chances of those people currently being divorced or separated peaks among those in their forties and fifties. Of married or formerly married men in their forties and fifties, between 18 and 20 per cent were divorced or separated at the time of the 2001 Census. For comparable women, the peak of currently divorced women occurs earlier – in the mid thirties and continues through to their forties and fifties.
Are some cultural groups more likely to be divorced than others?

The country in which people are born makes a difference to their divorce behaviour. This is not surprising since divorce rates vary between countries and these different rates will reflect cultural rather than solely legal differences between countries. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that differences in divorce behaviour can also be observed among Australians born in different countries.

Tables 15.5 and 15.6 report divorce rates of Australians born in selected countries. These rates indicate the number of divorces for every 1000 married men or women born in that country. Column 3 in each table shows that compared to Australian born married people, men and women born in China, New Zealand and Vietnam have relatively high divorce rates while those from Greece, Italy, India and Malaysia have relatively low rates of divorce.

These Tables also show that for some cultural groups the divorce rate varies a great deal depending on whether the person is married to a person born in the same country as themselves or is married to an Australian born partner. For example, men born in Greece who are married to an Australian born wife had a divorce rate of 16.5 compared to just 3.5 when he married a Greek born wife. Italian born men marrying an Australian born wife have a divorce rate of 11.0 compared to just 2.7 among those marrying an Italian born wife. The same general pattern of much higher divorce rates among ethnically mixed marriages applies to men and women born in China, Germany, India, Malaysia, the United Kingdom and the Philippines. Similar patterns apply to men and women although the pattern for Filipino born women married to Australian men is particularly striking. When Filipino women marry an Australian born man the divorce rate is 40.8 compared to 20.1 when a Filipino man marries an Australian born woman (Table 15.5 and 15.6).

As well as being linked to divorce rates, country of birth is linked to the duration of marriages that end in divorce. In 2000, Australian born men and women who divorced did so on average after 11.7 years of marriage. Compared to this, Chinese born men and women who divorced did so after an average of about six and a half years after marriage and those born in Vietnam who divorce typically did so within just under 6 years of marrying. In contrast, divorcing men and women born in Greece, Italy and to a lesser extent those born in Germany and the United Kingdom, took much longer to divorce. For example, Greek men who divorced did so after an average of 18.3 years after marrying and Greek born divorcing women did so an average after 20.6 years after marrying (Tables 15.5 and 15.6).

It is difficult to be certain why the divorce rates and marriage durations differ so sharply between men and women born in different countries. Some of
the differences, no doubt, are cultural in origin. Other reasons could include selective factors relating to the characteristics and motivations of those who migrate to Australia. The higher rates among some groups may reflect the pressures that result from migration or the circumstances surrounding their decision to migrate to Australia. Greater isolation, poverty, and difficulty accessing suitable support services may place marriages among particular ethnic groups at greater risk than others.

Are Indigenous Australians more likely to be divorced?

Indigenous Australians have a much higher rate of cohabitation than non-Indigenous Australians, but two thirds of Indigenous Australians nevertheless enter into a registered marriage. In 2001, of those who were either currently married, separated or divorced, Indigenous men and women had considerably higher percentages who were currently divorced.

Table 15.7 shows that of the population of Indigenous women who were married, divorced or separated, 31 per cent were currently divorced at the time of the 2001 Census. The comparable divorce level of non-Indigenous women was 19 per cent. Similar differences occur among men.

Does education “protect” against divorce?

Educational qualifications are linked to whether or not people were currently divorced at the time of the 2001 Census. This was especially evident among men. Of all men who were either married, separated or divorced, only 10.7 per cent of those with a degree were separated or divorced. Of those with a diploma or certificate qualification, 15 per cent were separated or divorced while 17.4 per cent of those with no qualifications were separated or divorced. (Table 15.8).

However, it is not clear from these figures whether higher education somehow protects against divorce.

Table 15.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of birth of husband</th>
<th>Divorce rate(^a), 1996 when married to Australian born wife</th>
<th>Divorce rate(^b), 1996 when married to wife born in same country</th>
<th>Divorce rate(^c), 1996 regardless of wife’s birthplace</th>
<th>Median duration of marriage, 2000</th>
<th>Median interval between marriage and final separation, 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>10.7</td>
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<td>Greece</td>
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<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>10.7</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>4.7</td>
<td>18.8</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Malaysia</td>
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<td>11.5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^a\) Divorces per 1000 married men

Table 15.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of birth of wife</th>
<th>Divorce rate(^a), 1996 when married to Australian born husband</th>
<th>Divorce rate(^b), 1996 when married to husband born in same country</th>
<th>Divorce rate(^c), 1996 regardless of husband’s birthplace</th>
<th>Median duration of marriage, 2000</th>
<th>Median interval between marriage and final separation, 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
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<td>15.9</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^a\) Divorces per 1000 married women
or whether it increases the chances of remarrying and thus reduces the percentage of people who are divorced at any particular point of time.

**Are white collar professionals less or more likely than others to be divorced?**

The level of currently divorced men in 2001 differs according to their occupational level in a way that might be expected from the figures reported above in relation to education and divorce. Men in upper white collar occupations – especially, managers, administrators, professionals and associate professionals – comprise relatively fewer currently divorced or separated men than lower occupational groups. For example, just 10.3 per cent of men from the managerial and administrator occupational group, were separated or divorced. This compares with 18.6 per cent of labouring men who were currently divorced in 2001.

As indicated earlier it is not clear to what extent the lower percentage of currently divorced professionals and managers is due to this group being less likely to divorce in the first place or because they are more able to repartner. Whatever the case is, the figures are consistent with the marriage-market thesis proposed by Birrell and Rapson (1998) when discussing marriage rates. They argue that men who are likely to be better economic providers are more attractive marriage prospects. This may mean either that marriages are more likely to survive or that men who are financially well off find it easier to repartner following divorce.

In relation to employed women, Table 15.9 shows very little link between occupational group and levels of divorce. Among employed women who were either married or divorced/separated, around 20 per cent were divorced. This level applied to virtually all occupational groups except managers, administrators and the advanced clerical/sales groups where fewer women were divorced.

**Religion**

Religious groups regard divorce in different ways. For some groups, divorce is completely unacceptable, while for others it is regarded as an undesirable event that nevertheless happens. It might be expected, therefore, that the level of divorce might differ between people with different religious affiliations. Table 15.10 shows the percentage of people who are or have been married (excluding widows) that were divorced at the time of the 2001 Census. These data do not measure the divorce rate within these religious groups – simply the percentage of currently divorced people. The

---

### Table 15.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Indigenous</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Separated</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Separated</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>69.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 15.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Degree or Higher</th>
<th>Diploma or Certificate</th>
<th>No qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated/divorced</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>82.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated/divorced</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>80.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 15.9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Managers &amp; Admin</th>
<th>Professionals</th>
<th>Associate Professionals</th>
<th>Trades &amp; Related</th>
<th>Adv Clerical &amp; Service</th>
<th>Interim Clerical, Sales &amp; Service</th>
<th>Interim Prod’t and Transport</th>
<th>Elemen Clerical, Sales &amp; Service</th>
<th>Labourers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Separated</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>81.7</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>81.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Separated</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>80.3</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>79.1</td>
<td>78.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

levels of currently divorced people will be a function of the number of people with a particular affiliation who divorce and remain divorced.

Those with no religious affiliation were the most likely to be currently divorced – 22.3 per cent were divorced (Table 15.10). This high level is likely to be due to people without a religious affiliation being more likely to divorce and being less likely to remarry following divorce. People with no religious affiliation are more likely to cohabit (p. 118-19) and thus will continue to have a registered marital status of “divorced”.

Among those who nominated a religious affiliation there was a surprising similarity between those from different religious groups. Those from a Greek Orthodox background had the lowest proportion who were divorced (11.7 per cent) followed by Muslims (13.5 per cent), Pentecostals (13.7 per cent) and Baptists (14.5 per cent). All these groups strongly disapprove of divorce (Table 15.10).

However, in the mainstream religious groups, which probably have far more people who are only nominally related to the religious group, than those mentioned above, the levels of currently divorced are not all that much higher. Of Catholics, 16.1 per cent were divorced in 2001; along with 18.2 per cent of Anglicans; and 17.9 per cent of Presbyterians (Table 15.10).

How long do marriages last?
The majority of marriages do not end in divorce. Earlier, it was reported that the observed divorce rate of those who married 25 years ago is about 32 per cent. This means that 68 per cent of marriages survive (at least in the formal sense) until one partner dies. The length of these marriages, of course, depends on the age at which people marry and the age at which one partner dies. The discussion that follows focuses just on marriages that end in divorce. The question addressed is “how long are people who divorce, married for, before they divorce?”

Couples who divorced in 2001 were married, on average, for 11.8 years. However, these former couples had been separated for some time before the divorce was finalised. The average period between marriage and final separation in 2001 was 8.3 years. Both figures represent a gradual trend for marriages to last longer before separation and divorce – a trend that began in the late 1980s. In the 1990s the average duration of marriages increased by a year before final separation and 1.7 years before divorce. The current duration of marriages before divorce is now similar to those in the early 1970s – before the introduction of “no fault” divorce in 1976. While the Family Law Act made divorce easier and its introduction was followed by an increased divorce rate, there has been no long term negative effect on the duration of marriages.

While averages such as those in Figure 15.8 indicate the typical duration for marriages, they provide little sense of the variation in marriage duration before relationship breakdown. Table 15.11 provides this perspective by showing the percentage of marriages that had ended in separation and divorce within 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 and more than 30 years of marriage.

The majority of marriages that end in separation do so within ten years of marriage. Indeed a third of marriages that end in separation do so within 5 years with 6 per cent ending in separation in less than a year. More than half of the marriages that end in divorce do so within 15 years of marriage. Once a marriage has survived for 20 years the risk of it ending in divorce is relatively low. Only 27.6 per cent of all divorces in 2001 were to people who had been married for twenty years or more.
Cohabiting relationships typically do not last as long as marriages. That is, when cohabiting relationships break up they do so much more quickly than do marriages. This matter is discussed more fully in Chapter 10.

Is living together before marrying risky? On face value, it might be expected that a period of cohabitation would give couples unique insight into their compatibility, thereby helping them make informed decisions about whether or not to marry. On this basis it might be expected that marriages preceded by cohabitation would have a better survival rate than those into which people enter without first cohabiting. However, most of the research into this issue in Australia and countries elsewhere suggests quite the opposite. Marriages that are preceded by cohabitation (“indirect marriages”) tend to have a shorter life than direct marriages (see Australia, Parliament 1998; Lillard, Brien & Waite 1995; Smock 2000).

Is it the case that among contemporary marriages, indirect marriages have a poorer survival rate than direct marriages?

Table 15.12 addresses the current situation. It shows the survival of direct and indirect marriages after 5, 10, 15 and 20 years of marriage.

The data in Table 15.12 are the most up-to-date available. The table shows that, for each marriage duration, indirect marriages have a lower survival rate than direct marriages. The first two columns provide the marriage survival rates after 5, 10, 15 and 20 years after the marriage began, with the third column referring to the differences or gaps in the post-marriage survival rates for direct and indirect marriages.

The first row of the table reports the percentage of marriages that began in 1990-94 that survived for five years. Of these recent direct marriages, almost 90 per cent had survived for 5 years compared with 81.4 per cent of the indirect marriages – a survival gap of 8.2 per cent. For marriages that began between 1985-89, 84.2 per cent of the direct marriages were still intact after 10 years, compared with 73.5 per cent of indirect marriages – a survival gap of 10.7 per cent. Marriage survival gaps between direct and indirect marriages persist after 15 and 20 years of marriage.

One of the reasons for the marriage survival gaps between direct and indirect marriages may be because after, say, ten years of marriage, those in the indirect marriage have been together longer (ten years of marriage plus the time together before marriage). The longer duration of these indirect marriages may partly explain why more of them have ended – they have had more time in which to end.

The fourth and fifth columns of Table 15.12 report marriage survival rates after various lengths of time since the relationship began. These figures show that the survival gaps of direct and indirect marriages are narrower if the duration of the union rather than the marriage is considered (column (e) compared with column (c)) – a trend that is especially evident among the most recent cohorts. Of those who married in 1990-94, the survival rate of indirect and direct marriage was virtually the same...
when the period of living together before marriage was included in calculations. For the next most recent cohort (those who married in 1985-89), the survival gap after ten years of union formation was also much narrower than the gap after ten years of marriage – just 5.9 percentage points compared with 10.7 per cent. However, for those who began their union 20 years previously, including the duration of the union makes little difference to the survival gap between direct and indirect marriages.

Another explanation for the higher marital instability of those who cohabit before they marry is that the people who choose to cohabit first have distinctive characteristics that are associated with a higher risk of divorce (termed a self-selection bias). They are more likely to have divorced parents, be less religious, be from an English speaking background, and have lower education. All these factors are also associated with marriage breakdown.

To test directly whether the poorer marriage survival among indirect marriages is due to the distinctive characteristics of those who choose to cohabit, multivariate statistical techniques are required. Table 15.13 estimates the probability of direct and indirect marriages ending in separation if those entering direct and indirect marriages shared similar characteristics.

These figures indicate that, when differences in the characteristics of those in direct and indirect marriages are removed, in the most recent cohorts (that is, those beginning to cohabit in the early 1990s) there is little difference in their risk of separation. For example, considering the separation rate after 8 years of marriage, the estimated separation rate of direct marriages is 17.3 per cent compared with 16.6 per cent for those in indirect marriages – a gap of just 0.7 per cent. When the length of the union rather than the marriage is considered, the risk of separation after 8 years is 16.6 per cent for direct marriages and 13.2 per cent for indirect marriages – a gap of 3.4 per cent favouring indirect marriages.

The picture for the early 1990s is different from earlier decades. In the early 1970s, for example, indirect marriages were at considerably higher risk of separation even after controlling for differences in the characteristics of those who enter direct and indirect marriages.

**Do remarriages last longer than first marriages?**

Unfortunately, information on this matter is limited since the government authorities no longer collect information on previous marital history when people marry. We must therefore rely on 1994 data, which is the most recent comprehensive source of information on this matter.

Figure 15.9 shows the percentage of men and women who had divorced after 10, 20 and 30 years of marriage according to whether it was their first marriage (that is, never married previously), a remarriage following divorce, or a remarriage following widowhood. These graphs show that regardless of gender and the length of time since getting married:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marriage cohort</th>
<th>Direct marriage (a)</th>
<th>Indirect marriage (b)</th>
<th>Gap (b-a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970-74</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>11.0*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-84</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-94</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marriage cohort</th>
<th>Direct marriage (a)</th>
<th>Indirect marriage (b)</th>
<th>Gap (b-a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970-74</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>5.6*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-84</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-94</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>-3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Combined data sets of HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a); Negotiating the Life Course Study, 1997; Australian Family Life Course Survey, 1996.
Remarriages following widowhood were the least likely to end in divorce. Remarriages following divorce were the most likely to end in divorce. However, while such remarriages were more likely than first marriages to end in divorce, the difference is quite small. For example, in 1994 after 20 years of marriage, 31.9 per cent of men in their first marriage had divorced compared with 34.4 per cent of men who had remarried following an earlier divorce. The comparable figures for women were 31.4 per cent and 35.7 per cent respectively.

Why do people divorce?
Divorce is a complex event that can rarely be attributed to a single factor. Individual characteristics, external pressures, family background, social and cultural values, economic matters and many other factors can contribute to an event which is often the outcome at the end of an extended sequence of events.

The Andrews’ Report (Australian Government 1998), summarised the main themes for marriage breakdown made in submissions to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. These included: unemployment and work-related problems; high risk factors within marriages (such as addictive behaviours, chronic illness, or the death of a child); blended families; marriage and relationship breakdown in the family of origin; a redefinition of gender roles and the feminist agenda of equality; ambivalent or negative attitudes towards marriage; the growth of individualism; poor communication skills; poor parenting skills; domestic violence; premarital cohabitation; ease of divorce; geographical and social isolation of the family; and migration issues (ABS 2001e).

How do divorced men and women explain their divorce?
The reason why people divorce can be approached in two fundamentally different ways. We can try to locate factors associated with divorce, of which individuals may not be especially aware. These types of factors include the values they hold; the impact of economic circumstances; age of marriage; and the role of cohabitation. These factors have already been canvassed in this chapter and elsewhere in this book.

---

**Table 15.14** Perception of main reason for marriage breakdown by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Reason</th>
<th>Women %</th>
<th>Men %</th>
<th>All %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affective issues</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>71.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication problems</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompatibility / 'drifted apart'</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You or former spouse had an affair</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive behaviours</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical violence to you or children</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol/drug abuse</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional and/or verbal abuse</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External pressures</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial problems</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/time</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family interference</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical/mental health</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse’s personality</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children problems</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>354</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Divorce Transitions Project (Wolcott and Hughes 1999). Note: Missing cases=17 (no reason given); $\chi^2=59.38, p<.001$ (women’s reports versus men’s reports).
In addition, individuals who divorce can be asked for their perceptions about what caused the divorce. While the reasons given by the parties to a divorce are unlikely to reflect the full set of reasons for divorce, this perspective is nonetheless still valuable in developing a fuller understanding of the factors that contribute to divorce.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies, Australian Divorce Transitions Project (ADTP) explored the explanations that divorced men and women gave for their divorce. These reasons are reported fully in Wolcott and Hughes (1999).

Consistent with previous Australian and overseas research, divorced men and women were most likely to attribute their divorce to affective issues, that is, to communication problems, incompatibility and infidelity (Table 15.14). Women in particular were likely to point to communication problems as the main reason for marriage breakdown. These explanations provided by divorced men and women only provide limited insight into the cause of the divorce. These explanations are, in many cases, symptoms of a relationship that is deteriorating and are often the outcome of some other underlying set of factors that are contributing to marriage breakdown.

Abusive behaviours were the second most common set of explanations provided by divorced women. Almost a quarter of women (23.4 per cent) attributed the marriage breakdown to either physical/emotional abuse or to alcohol and drug abuse. Very few men (4 per cent) saw the marriage breakdown in these terms.

The next most common factor to which divorced men and women attributed their divorce can be described as “external” factors that affected their relationship. These factors included financial pressures, work/time pressures, health and interference from other family members. Overall, almost 13 per cent attributed their divorce to these types of factors.

**Is gambling a cause of divorce?**

The recent growth in legalised gambling has been pointed to as a factor behind many divorces. What is the evidence for this? The Productivity Commission report on gambling provides some information. The National Gambling Survey (Productivity Commission 1999) found that:

- One in ten gamblers in counselling reported domestic or other violent incidents related to their gambling.
- Of problem gamblers, 11.4 per cent reported losing contact with their children as a result of their gambling.
- 13.1 per cent of problem gamblers reported violence resulting from their gambling.

**Who initiates divorces – husbands or wives?**

In 2001, as in previous years, wives were more likely than husbands to file for divorce. In 2001, almost half (47 per cent) of all divorce applications were filed by wives while less than a third (30 per cent) were filed by husbands. Just under a quarter (23 per cent) of applications were jointly filed.

The 2001 figures continued a trend that had been developing for some years whereby more applications have joint applicants and fewer have been initiated by husbands. Since 1989 the percentage of joint applications has almost doubled from 12.4 per cent to 23 per cent.

It is not entirely clear what the information regarding the divorce applicant means. It is often interpreted as signifying something about the costs of marriage. The higher rate of applications by women has been interpreted to mean that women are more inclined than men to leave marriages. This may be so, but care must be taken with this interpretation. Certainly not all divorce applicants will be the leavers. An unknown percentage will be “the left” who, having been left, “tidy up” and initiate divorce proceedings or initiate proceedings as a retaliation over being left.

However, evidence from the 1997 ADTP suggests that it is, in fact, women who are the most likely to initiate the ending of the relationship. Almost two thirds (64 per cent) of the divorced women compared with just 21 per cent of the divorced men in this national sample said that it was mainly them who made the decision to separate (Wolcott and Hughes 1999).
The more recent HILDA survey in 2001 confirms the same general picture but provides different figures from 1694 divorces in the study. Based on reports from separated men and women, the HILDA survey found that in 50 per cent of separations it was the woman’s decision to finally separate. This survey found that it was the husband’s decision to separate in just 20 per cent of cases with the remaining 30 per cent being a joint decision.

In other words, despite the different ways of assessing who initiated the end of the marriage and across different samples, a consistent pattern emerges – wives were considerably more likely than husbands to initiate the end of the marriage.

**Children and divorce**

One of the concerns about the rate of divorce is the extent to which divorces involve children. Debate continues regarding the extent to which divorce affects the wellbeing of children but the weight of the evidence is that children whose parents have divorced do somewhat less well as a group on a range of measures than those whose parents have not divorced (Pryor and Rodgers, 2001). Interpretations of the reasons for these differences vary. Some people attribute the differences between children with divorced parents to the particular family structure in which such children live, while others attribute the differences to economic factors and higher levels of conflict that children whose parents have divorced have had to endure. It is not the purpose of this book to enter into this debate. The purpose of this section is to provide an indication of the demographics of children and divorce. Unless otherwise stated, all the figures relate to children under the age of 18.

**How old are children when their parents divorce?**

In 2001, in divorcing families with children under the age of 18, the youngest child was aged:

- 0-4 years in 26.2 per cent of families.
- 5-9 years in 36.6 per cent of families.
- 10-14 years in 25.4 per cent of families.
- 15-17 years in 11.8 per cent of families.

**How likely are children to have their parents separate or divorce?**

While many children experience a family break up due to their parents’ divorce, there will be others whose parents only separate rather than divorce. Parental separations occur when married parents separate but do not finalise the separation in divorce. However, an increasingly significant group of separations are those where parents who cohabit without being married decide to separate. As more cohabiting couples have children, this group of children is exposed to family breakdown but are not identified in the divorce statistics.

It is difficult to obtain information about children from cohabiting relationships that break down. However, the HILDA survey provides information that allows estimates of the breakdown of cohabiting relationships that include children.

Most children are born into a family consisting of both their biological parents (p. 136-37). These families are referred to as intact families. Figure 15.11 reports the survival of these intact families as children grew up. It indicates, for three birth cohorts, the percentage of such children who were still living in their intact family at different points throughout their childhood.

The solid line shows the percentage of children born in 1976-83 who continued to live in an intact family for their whole childhood up to the age of 18. Of this cohort, 91.5 per cent were still living with both their birth parents by the time they were five years old, while 81.2 per cent were still with
both their parents by the time they turned 12. By the time they turned 18, 73.4 per cent of children who were born into an intact family were still in that family, that is, their parents had remained together for the whole 18 years.

A more recent cohort of children born between 1984-89 shows the percentage remaining in an intact family by the age of 12. Figure 15.11 shows that the percentage from this cohort was almost identical to that in the earlier cohort. This means that the rates of survival of intact families remained stable for children born between 1979-83 and those born between 1984-89.

The most recent cohort of children born between 1990-1995 have slightly lower rates of intact family survival by the age of five years of age. By the time this most recent cohort of children reached five years of age, 89.6 per cent were still living in their original intact family. This is slightly lower than the 92.7 per cent figure for the previous birth cohorts.

Chapter 11 on childhood transitions provides further information about the extent to which children are faced with family breakdown during their childhood.

Do fewer divorces involve children than in the past?

In 2001, 51 per cent of divorces involved children under the age of 18. This represents a continuation of a long term trend that began in 1971 when two thirds (67.6 per cent) of divorces involved children (Figure 15.12). There are several likely reasons for this decline.

First, more people are having children outside of marriage. There are also now fewer “shotgun marriages” (p. 200) where parents marry simply because of pregnancy. These marriages, especially among teenagers, were very prone to divorce. In addition, more couples are having children without being married (p. 201). These relationships are more prone to breakdown, but are not counted in the divorce statistics. Were they included, it is likely that the downward trend in divorces involving children would not be as steady as indicated in Figure 15.12.

Second, couples are delaying having children after they marry (p. 203). Wider access to reliable contraception enables couples to delay pregnancy until they are both more certain about the future of the relationship and both want children. Greater control over fertility is also likely to reduce the number of children who are implicated in parental divorce.

Despite the decline in the percentage of divorces involving children, there has nevertheless been an increase in the number of children involved in parental divorces. There was a sharp increase in these numbers around the time of the 1975 Family Law Act. During the 1980s the number of children affected by divorce declined, but in the 1990s these numbers began to increase again as the number of divorces increased. Between 1989 and 2001, the number of children implicated in parental divorce rose from 43,317 to 53,400 (Figure 15.13).

In examining statistics on the number of children affected by parental divorce in any one year, it must be remembered that these figures are cumulative. That is, in 2001 there were 53,400 additional children with divorcing parents. These children should be added to those already affected. In 1997, there were 978,400 children under 18 living with one natural parent and with another natural parent living elsewhere (ABS 1999e). This figure includes children whose parents were not married and those who had never lived together.

How does divorce affect the finances of those involved?

The link between divorce and poverty has been discussed in Chapter 4. It was shown that women are more likely than men to experience financial hardship after divorce and that the most effective way
out of financial difficulties for women and their children following divorce is to repartner. The most financially vulnerable adults following divorce are older lone mothers (Smyth and Weston 2000). Accordingly, the discussion here is limited to two matters: spousal support and the division of matrimonial property following divorce. Unfortunately no information is available regarding the arrangements and division of property among cohabiting couples who separate.

Do men support their ex-wife financially?

Spousal support, or “maintenance” is uncommon in Australia. Spousal support is quite different to child support. It is “the money paid by a former spouse for the upkeep of the other spouse – not for the children” (Behrens and Smyth 1999).

There are two main forms of spousal support – regular payments and indirect payments such as property transfers. The Australian Institute of Family Studies ADTP concluded that “spousal support continues to be rare, minimal and brief” (Berhens and Smyth 1999, p. 21). The study found that of people who divorced in the previous decade:

- 6 per cent of spouses received a periodic payment.
- 10 per cent of spouses received support through adjustments to property divisions only.
- A further 1 per cent received both periodic payments and property transfers.
- In 84 per cent of divorces, no form of spousal support was paid.

Typically spousal support is only paid for a limited time. According to the 1997 ADTP, an average of $128 per week was paid in spousal support for an average of two years. Spousal support was more common following relatively long term marriages (that is, ten or more years) and was more likely to be paid to spouses that were financially badly off. However, those that provided regular payments to their former spouse were not especially likely to be any wealthier than those who do not pay (Behrens and Smyth 1999).

There is much greater acceptance of the view that some form of spousal support should be paid than is actually paid. Table 15.15 indicates that over half the respondents in this national survey of divorced men and women agreed that spousal support should be paid. However, this support was conditional with only 5 per cent stating that spousal support should be ongoing. The rest of the sample either opposed spousal support or favoured it only until the former spouse was on their feet or until they repartnered.

Who gets the property?

Issues surrounding the division of property following divorce can be the source of ongoing disputes and resentments. In addition, property division can have substantial implications for the wellbeing of former partners and children. Legally, the starting point for property division is that each spouse retains ownership of property that is legally theirs. However, the Family Court can vary this if it is satisfied that it is just and equitable to do so. In making any such variation, the Court considers the financial and non financial contributions of each spouse to the property accumulation and the welfare of the family, and the future financial needs of partners (including need to care for children of the marriage).

Attributions of the financial and non financial contributions of each spouse can be difficult and can be highly contested, leading to different perceptions by spouses as to the fairness of Court ordered property division following divorce.

Property can be divided into basic and non basic assets. In the ADTP study, basic assets included funds in bank accounts, housing, furniture, cars, boats, and other typical household and leisure goods. Non
basic assets included superannuation and insurance assets, investments and businesses and farms.

The ADTP study found that following divorce:

- 42 per cent of wives received between 60 to 100 per cent of the property (22 per cent received 80 per cent or more of the property).
- 29 per cent of wives received between 40 to 60 per cent.
- 29 per cent of wives received less than 40 per cent of the property (Sheehan and Hughes 2001).

Overall, wives received a larger proportion of the basic assets of the marriage but men received a greater proportion of the non basic assets (for example, superannuation).

Figure 15.14 shows the average share of the non basic assets received by wives. While wives, on average, received two thirds of the basic assets, they received less than a quarter of the non basic assets. In the wealthiest families wives received, on average, 26 per cent of the non basic assets. By contrast, among the asset-poorest marriages, wives received just 12 per cent of the non basic assets.

Superannuation is an increasingly important asset in many families and will become even more so. More and more, the value of superannuation assets will be taken into account in arriving at a division of matrimonial property. The ADTP study found that superannuation assets were taken into account in property division in between 5 per cent to 15 per cent of cases (as reported by men or women respectively) (Dewar, Sheehan and Hughes 1999).

If the value of superannuation assets were taken into account the share of property settlements that were actually received by wives would alter somewhat as Table 15.16 reports.

If the wife received half the value of the superannuation assets of the marriage and received the same share of other property assets as she actually did in the ADTP study, then the value of her share of the matrimonial property would increase from just under $60,000 to over $84,000. A 50/50 split of superannuation assets would increase her share of the property division, on average, from 52 per cent to 58 per cent.

Of course, were a 50/50 superannuation split to be routinely implemented in property division, the division of other assets is likely to be affected. This may have the effect in some cases of reducing the wife’s available resources immediately following divorce, in favour of access to superannuation assets in later life. The outcome which is seen to be the most desirable will vary according to the particular circumstances of the parties involved.

Is there life after divorce?

Since the economic circumstances of men and women following divorce have already been discussed and child rearing responsibilities will be discussed in Chapter 16, this section focuses on the feelings of divorced men and women about life after their divorce.

Do divorced people have poorer mental health?

It has been argued often that marriage has protective effects against mental disorders. These arguments propose that the absence of a partner will have negative consequences for mental health. To what extent does contemporary Australian evidence support this?

Table 15.17 reports an analysis of the 1996 National Survey of Mental Health and Well Being and shows the national prevalence of mental disorders over the previous 12 months according to marital status. These figures indicate that as far as mood and anxiety disorders are concerned, separated and divorced men and women had the highest rates of disorder than any marital status group. Divorced and separated people were more
than twice as likely to suffer from these disorders than were married people, and somewhat more likely than those who had never married.

As far as drug and alcohol disorders were concerned, divorced and separated people had prevalence rates only exceeded by those of never married adults. Taken overall, divorced and separated people had similar rates of mental disorders to those who had never married but were prone to different types of disorders.

These figures do not allow any firm conclusions to be drawn as to whether poorer mental health was a consequence of divorce and separation or whether they were the cause of divorce and separation. However, overseas studies that have been able to study people before and after divorce provide support for the view that the poorer mental health of divorced people is more of a consequence of divorce rather than a cause (Simon 2002).

**How satisfied are men and women after divorce?**

Adjustment to divorce depends in part on what went before, who initiated the divorce (Wolcott and Hughes, 1999), on beliefs about marriage and divorce, and on perceptions regarding the reason for the divorce.

Table 15.18 shows the way in which divorced men and women rated their happiness and life satisfaction following divorce. Although relatively few divorced men and women reported being unhappy, twice as many men as women (8.2 per cent compared with 4.1 per cent) said they were unhappy. There were substantial percentages of men and women, particularly divorced men, who reported having mixed feelings regarding their overall happiness. Overall, divorced women reported higher levels of overall happiness than divorced men (77 per cent compared with 62 per cent).

However, a fair percentage of both divorced men and women reported being less than satisfied with their emotional and personal life. Close to 40 per cent indicated that they at least had mixed feelings about how satisfactory these aspects of their life were.

Similarly, substantial proportions of both divorced men and women were less than satisfied with their standard of living. It was somewhat surprising that divorced men reported greater dissatisfaction than divorced women with their standard of living. Only 57 per cent of divorced men compared with 65 per cent of divorced women were satisfied with their standard of living. It is unclear as to why this was the case – especially given the well documented levels of poverty among lone mothers. These figures may reflect men’s dissatisfaction with paying child support or with the effects of the matrimonial division of property (see Smyth and Weston 2000 for other possibilities).

Finally, the majority of both mothers and fathers were satisfied with their child’s wellbeing following divorce. While it would be valuable to have the child’s perspective on this matter, these figures are, on the surface at least, encouraging regarding the way in which children may cope with parental divorce (Funder 1996). It is significant however, that fathers were less satisfied than mothers regarding their child’s wellbeing. Of divorced fathers, 71 per cent were happy with their child’s well being compared with 83.3 per cent of divorced mothers. These differences between the satisfaction expressed by mothers and fathers may be due to the fact that most children live with their mothers. Non resident fathers may be less happy with the way their children are being raised than are mothers who typically
have the day-to-day responsibility for the children. This type of differential reporting, of course, is a common feature of divorce research.

**Do people regret the divorce?**

Table 15.19 reports results from the ADTP regarding the effect of divorce on their happiness, regrets about the divorce and whether they would like to get back together with their former spouse.

Overall, women were more likely to say that divorce was better for their own happiness than for their partner’s happiness. Of divorced women almost half (46.8 per cent) felt that the divorce had been better for their own happiness than for that of their former spouse. Only 16 per cent of the women felt the divorce had been more to the advantage of their former partner. Divorced men, on the other hand, felt that divorce had been to the advantage of their former wife’s happiness more than to their own happiness.

Women appear to have had fewer doubts than men about their separation. Only 16.9 per cent of women indicated that, in retrospect, they would not have separated. In contrast, almost twice as many men (32.5 per cent) indicated that, in retrospect, they would not have separated.

Despite these gender differences, when men and women reflected back on their divorce it remains the case that over three quarters of the divorced men and women in this nationally representative sample said that, even in retrospect, they would still have separated. Even more (over 80 per cent), indicated that they never felt that they would like to get back together with their former spouse. Care should be used in interpreting this particular set of responses. These statistics report current feelings about events that may have occurred up to 10 years earlier (on average separations occurred six years previously). These longer term reflections do not necessarily reflect feelings experienced closer to the time at which the divorce occurred.

**For how long are people divorced?**

Following divorce, over half the men (58.2 per cent) and just under half the women (48.7 per cent) are predicted to remarry eventually (p. 177). Some repartner without remarrying; others remain on their own; still others have a series of relationships.

### Table 15.20 Duration until remarriage following divorce by gender, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years from divorce till remarriage</th>
<th>Men %</th>
<th>Women %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–4</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>59.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–19</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–24</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–29</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 and over</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 15.21 Percentage of offspring giving or receiving various forms of assistance, by parental family structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of help (N)</th>
<th>Parents intact %</th>
<th>Parents divorced %</th>
<th>Widowed mother %</th>
<th>Widowed father %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help given to parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial (1241)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional (1270)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Around the house (1266)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>76***</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During illness (1259)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical help (1266)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55***</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help received from parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any financial (1293)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary education (1228)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15**</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renovating (1217)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21***</td>
<td>32*</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During illness (1219)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>46**</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>44**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minding children (967)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>65**</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional (1233)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>55**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


---

Notes:

1. Percentages are from Multiple Classification Analysis. Significance levels are based on Logistic Regression, and indicate if the group is significantly different from the intact group. The following variables were controlled for: parental age, mother’s education, offspring gender, age, marital status, income, number of siblings, weekly hours worked, whether in college/university or not, have children living with respondent or not, born in Australia, and living with parents or not.

2. Significance levels: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001
Of those who do remarry following divorce the majority do so in less than 5 years after their divorce with the median being 3.4 years for men and 3.8 years for women (ABS 2002d). A third of men who remarry following divorce and 30 per cent of women, do so within two years of the divorce (Table 15.20).

**How does divorce affect people in old age?**

While relatively few older people divorce (p. 215-217), a divorce earlier in life can have lifelong implications and affect relationships with children and other family networks. Following divorce, almost a third of men lose contact with their children which, in later life, may mean that at least some of these men are without good support networks. Remarriage following divorce can further complicate kinship networks and produce considerable ambiguity about family obligations.

Using the Australian Institute of Family Studies Family Formation Study, Rezac (2002) has shown (Table 15.21) that:

- While adult children did not give any less help to their divorced parents than to their married parents, they did give more help to their widowed mothers than to their divorced parents (net of other factors).

- Adult children received less help from their divorced parents than from their intact parents or from their widowed mothers.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies, Later Life Families study, has shown that divorced parents enjoy a less involved and supportive relationship with their children in later life.

On all the indicators in Table 15.22, parents who had divorced appeared to have less supportive relationships with their adult children. Widowed parents had supportive ties with at least one adult child. Nearly all spoke to at least one adult child at least weekly, and obtained emotional and practical support from an adult child. Thirty per cent of widowed parents received some financial assistance from adult children. Widowed parents were involved with adult children to a similar extent to parents in an intact marriage.

Overall, divorce reduced the level of contact and help between adults and older parents. Millward has shown that parents who had not divorced were twice as likely as those who had divorced, to receive emotional support from an adult child and 1.7 times more likely to receive practical help (Millward 1997). Repartnering following divorce

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 15.22 Relationship between parents’ marital history and contact and help received from at least one adult child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speak to child at least weekly</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent currently partnered</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married or de facto, never divorced or separated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remarried or repartnered after divorce or separation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent not partnered</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed, never divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced or separated, not repartnered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Later Life Families Study. Adapted from Millward (1997).

* Statistically significant difference between partnered groups on contact frequency
** Statistically significant difference between non-partnered groups on contact frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 15.23 Attitudes towards divorce (per cent agree)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage is for life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapprove of marrying thinking that divorce is an option if it does not work out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is too easy to get a divorce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If partner becomes mentally or physically disabled you should stay in marriage regardless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject divorce even if all other solutions fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should stay together for the children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage for life even if unhappy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

1 Australian Family Values Survey, 1995
increases these disruptive effects of divorce even further (Table 15.22).

**What do Australians think about divorce?**

There is a certain inconsistency in the views people hold about divorce. Table 15.23 shows that there was a widespread view that marriage should be for life (78 per cent); that people should enter marriage without even entertaining the possibility of divorce (87 per cent); that marriage should be approached with the intention of it being permanent; and over two-thirds (70 per cent) believed that it is too easy to get a divorce. At the same time, the commitment to marriage was conditional on happiness and fulfillment, and there was agreement that since things can and do go wrong, divorce is acceptable under certain circumstances.

Only 14 per cent said that marriage should be for life if the couple is unhappy; only 29 per cent rejected divorce when a couple cannot work out their problems; and only 19 per cent believed that an unhappily married couple should stay together just for the sake of the children. Less than half (44 per cent) thought that, regardless of individual happiness, a marriage should remain intact if a partner becomes mentally or physically disabled.

Despite the different impacts of divorce for men and women, there were remarkably few gender differences in attitudes towards divorce. Men and women were at one in: rejecting the view that marriage is for life even if a couple is unhappy; believing that it is too easy to get a divorce; and thinking that it is wrong to marry without the intention of it being a lifelong relationship.

Where men and women held different attitudes about divorce, men were more opposed to divorce. They were more likely to say that: marriage is for life (81 per cent men compared with 76 per cent women); an unhappily married couple should stay together for the sake of the children (24 per cent men compared to 15 per cent women); and if a partner becomes mentally or physically disabled that the other person should remain in a marriage regardless of their own happiness (48 per cent men compared with 39 per cent women).

Young women in particular were especially unlikely (only 18 per cent) to accept this “in sickness and in health” view of marriage.

Age made virtually no difference to people’s views about the ideal of marriage being a lifelong commitment. Young and old alike believed that marriage should be for life and should be approached with the intention of it being so.

However, there was a generation gap regarding the circumstances in which people would entertain ending a marriage (Table 15.23). Older people were much more likely than younger people to say that: it is too easy to divorce; the “in sickness and in health, for better or for worse” view of marriage is appropriate; marriage is for life even if a couple is unhappy; and a couple should stay together “for the sake of the children”.

**Endnotes**

1 The 2001 divorce rates expressed per 1000 married women were not provided in the most recent divorce statistics.
2 The nuptiality table used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics is calculated in the same way as a life table. Calculations assume that current age patterns of mortality, marriage, divorce, widowhood, and remarriage are constant over a person’s lifetime. The ABS nuptiality table is a net table in which all the above components are taken into account in arriving at estimates. For further descriptions of this method see ABS (2001e). The nuptiality table approach to calculating divorce rates is regarded as the better approach.
3 The rates for women are virtually identical with differences of about 0.1 in a couple of years.
4 Age-specific divorce rates are not available for 2001.
5 Percentages have been computed by excluding the never married and widowed. This adjusts for the different risks of divorce in the various groups.
6 Much of the material in this section is based on an article by de Vaus, Qu and Weston (2003).
7 It should be noted that the men and women in this study were independent samples. That is, they were not married to each other.
8 This discussion is based on de Vaus (1997).
Estimates of the divorce rate vary depending on the method of estimation but indicate that between around 32 per cent and 46 per cent of marriages will end in divorce.

While the number of divorces is much higher following the introduction of the Family Law Act in 1975, the divorce rate since the mid 1980s has been fairly stable.

It is likely that the increase in cohabiting relationships is masking the extent of increase in relationship breakdown.

Of the population aged 15 or over in 2001, 7.4 per cent were divorced. This is a large increase on the figure of 2 per cent in 1976.

At any given time more women than men are divorced.

Relative to many overseas countries, Australia’s divorce rate is high but remains considerably lower than that of the United States.

People who marry in their teens or early twenties are much more likely to divorce than those who marry in their late twenties or later.

The age at which people are divorcing is increasing. This is due to later marriage and an increase in marriage duration before divorce.

Men and women are at the greatest risk of divorce when in their late twenties and their thirties.

Of those who divorce, the average time until final separation was 8.3 years in 2001 and 11.8 years before the divorce is finalised.

The first four years are the riskiest for marriages. A third of all couples who divorce have arrived at their final separation within the first four years of their marriage.

Living together before marrying is associated with an enhanced risk of subsequent marriage breakdown. However, this enhanced risk is not due to premarital cohabitation but to the characteristics of those who cohabit.

Second and subsequent marriages following divorce have a slightly greater risk of breakdown than first marriages.

Women are more likely than men to initiate divorce and to end the marriage.

Almost a million children have a natural parent living elsewhere.

Each year over 50,000 children under the age of 18 have their parents divorce.

However a smaller proportion of divorces now involve children under the age of 18. In 1971, 67 per cent of divorces involved children while in 2001 only 51 per cent involved children.

Of divorcing families involving children under the age of 18 over a quarter involve children aged 0 to 4 years old.

Of children who are born into an intact family 8.5 per cent have experienced their parent’s final separation by the age of five; 19 per cent have experienced this by the age of 12; and 26.6 per cent have experienced parental separation by the age of 18.

Spousal support following divorce is “rare, minimal and brief”.

Following divorce, wives tend to get a larger share of the basic assets of the marriage but men tended to receive a larger share of the non basic assets (for example, superannuation, insurance).

Despite fair levels of dissatisfaction with emotional and personal lives, women seemed to be happier than men following their divorce.

The large majority of parents were happy with their child’s wellbeing following divorce – mothers were even more satisfied than fathers with their child’s wellbeing.

Women appear to have fewer doubts than men about their separation.

Divorced men and women have higher rates of mental disorders than married men and women but similar levels to those who had never married.

Divorce leads to some reduction of help and support between adults and their divorced parents – especially with fathers and especially if their parents had repartnered.

There is widespread support for the view that marriage should be approached with the intention that it should be for life, but that divorce was a perfectly acceptable solution if the marriage did not work.

Although the large majority of Australians think that it is too easy to get a divorce, very few subscribe to the view that people should stay together if the marriage is unhappy.
16

Caring
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### 16 Caring

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Caring is one of the core activities of families. The type and extent of care (that is, looking after the needs of family members) provided by families varies across the life course and differs across family types. Direct caring in the form of the day-to-day activities needed to look after a person’s needs, is a family activity that is disproportionately borne by women.

The caring role of family members is one that has to be managed alongside many other responsibilities. As more women are participating in the paid workforce, the employment and caring responsibilities of women can result in considerable demands on women – especially at particular parts of the life course such as when children are very young or when child care and elder care responsibilities clash.

One way in which the caring responsibilities of families are managed is for families to use support services to help in this role. These services include formal and informal child care and the use of community resources to assist in caring for elderly family members and those with disabilities. Governments assist families in their caring roles by subsidising child care, providing home and community care services, by paying carer pensions and in other ways to enable families to continue to balance caring responsibilities together with other responsibilities.

In providing support for families in these caring roles, governments are enabling families to contribute an enormous amount of time and other resources to the welfare of family members and the wider community. The financial value of the caring work undertaken within families is enormous.

This chapter outlines some of the statistics about how families care for their children, and the use of non parental care for children. It also examines the way in which families, the community and government sectors go about providing care for older people and those with disabilities.

Parental caring for children

How much time do parents spend looking after their children?

Looking after children consists of a range of different activities. In the tables below a number of different types of child care activities of parents are examined. Table 16.1 indicates the types of activities included in each of these different types of child care. Caring for children can consist of very focused child care, where the child is the primary focus of the parent’s attention. This is called primary time spent on child care. However, a great deal of child care involves being around when the child is present and providing supervision and combining child care with other activities. Although this type of care is not exclusive child care, it nevertheless takes time and energy and constrains other activities of the carer. This type of time spent looking after children is called secondary time.

How much time do mothers spend on child care?

Caring for young children is a gendered activity. Mothers spend far more time caring than do fathers. Using the 1997 Time Use Survey, Table 16.2 shows that, compared with partnered fathers, partnered mothers spent:

- 2.6 times more time per day on child care activities (5.8 hours compared with 2.3 hours).

### Table 16.1 Types of child care activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Type of activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>Physical and emotional care including bathing, dressing, hugging, feeding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching, helping, reprimanding</td>
<td>Helping children do things or showing them how, listening to reading, helping with homework, directions about household chores, settling disputes, helping with problems, correcting behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing, reading, talking</td>
<td>Includes sharing indoor games, outdoor play, singing, reading stories, watching TV with child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minding</td>
<td>Caring for children without the active involvement shown in the categories above. Includes monitoring children playing outside or sleeping, preserving a safe environment, being an adult presence for children to turn to in need, supervising games or swimming activities including swimming lessons. Passive child care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School visits</td>
<td>Includes spending time at day care establishments, pre-school, school etc., attending school assembly, sports, parent-teacher nights, reading sessions, art/craft, school concerts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Travel associated with child care activities in motion/waiting. Includes taking children to and picking them up from places.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (1998d).*
• 4.3 times more time on child care (physical and emotional).
• Twice as much time playing, reading, talking or watching TV.
• Over 6 times as much time related to the child’s schooling.
• Almost three times more time transporting children or travelling on their behalf.

Does employment explain the limited time fathers spend with children?

One reason why fathers spend much less time than mothers with their children may be because fathers spend more time than mothers in paid employment. However, the evidence does not support this explanation. Table 16.3 shows that among partnered parents who worked full time, mothers still did far more child care than did fathers. In total, partnered mothers who worked full time spent 1.7 times more time each day than similar fathers. The same pattern is true among mothers and fathers who both worked part time and those who were not employed. When mothers and fathers had a similar level of workforce participation, mothers still spent between 1.7 and 2.1 times more time on child care activities than did fathers. (Table 16.3) In other words, if all mothers and fathers had similar levels of employment, partnered mothers would still do a lot more child care than fathers.

Table 16.3 shows the differences in the amount of time parents spent with children depending on whether they are employed full time, part time or are not employed. Mothers who were not employed spent far more time on child care each day than those who were employed part time or full time. Overall, mothers who were not employed spent 7.2 hours each day on child care activities, compared to part time employed mothers who spent 5.7 hours and full time employed mothers who spent 3.7 hours per day. The level of employment of fathers also affects the amount of time they spend with their children but not to the same extent as it affects the time spent by mothers. Not employed fathers spent an average of 3.4 hours a day with their children compared to part time employed fathers who spent 3 hours a day and full time employed fathers who spent 2.1 hours each day with their children.

Does being a lone parent affect the time devoted to children?

In households where at least one child is aged under 15, lone mothers spend fairly similar amounts of time on child care as do partnered mothers. Table 16.4 shows that, overall, lone mothers spent 5.4 hours each day on child care activities compared to partnered mothers who spent 5.8 hours. Despite having to manage a household without the assistance of a partner, lone mothers

---

**Table 16.2**: Time per day (minutes) on various care activities by gender (couple households with a child aged under 15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Couple Mothers</th>
<th>Couple Fathers</th>
<th>Ratio (M:F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child care specific</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>4.3***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach, help, reprimand</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.2***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play, read, talk, watching TV</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>2.1***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child minding</td>
<td>154.3</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>2.3***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School visits</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>6.4***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>2.9***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care total</td>
<td>348.4</td>
<td>135.8</td>
<td>2.6***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (1997e) Time Use Survey. Includes child care activities recorded as primary or secondary activities except when child care was recorded as a secondary activity when the parent’s primary activity was recorded as sleeping.

The table only includes child care activities directed to children living in the household when the care was given.

Note: Individual components do not sum to total minutes as not all individual time uses are included.

Statistical significance of differences between mothers and fathers *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05

**Table 16.3**: Time per day (minutes) on various care activities by parent’s gender and workforce participation (households with at least one child aged under 15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child care specific</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>2.8***</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>2.2**</td>
<td>108.0</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>4.5***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach, help, reprimand</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>1.2*</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play, read, talk, TV</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>1.5***</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>1.9**</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>1.8***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minding</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>1.5***</td>
<td>158.9</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>1.8*</td>
<td>189.5</td>
<td>108.6</td>
<td>1.7***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School visits</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.6*</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.6*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>1.8***</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>2.5**</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>2.1**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care total</td>
<td>222.7</td>
<td>128.0</td>
<td>1.7***</td>
<td>343.8</td>
<td>178.7</td>
<td>1.9***</td>
<td>434.0</td>
<td>205.7</td>
<td>2.1***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Includes child care activities recorded as primary or secondary activities except when child care was recorded as a secondary activity when the parent’s primary activity was recorded as sleeping.

The table only includes child care activities directed to children living in the household when the care was given.

Note: Individual components do not sum to total minutes as not all individual time-uses are included.

Statistical significance of differences between mothers and fathers *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05
still manage to spend almost as much time on child care as do partnered mothers who (presumably) receive some assistance with household tasks.

However, despite the similar amounts of time spent on child care by couple and lone mothers, family type makes a considerable difference to the amount of time children are cared for by a parent. Since children in couple households receive some care and attention from their father, as well as their mother, they will receive more parental care in total than children living in a lone parent household. Table 16.4 shows that in general, children in a couple family receive about one and a half times more time for child care activities than children in lone parent families.

For example couple families spent:

- 50 per cent more time each day overall on direct child care activities (484 minutes compared with 324 minutes).
- 50 per cent more time directly on the physical and emotional care of their children.
- 70 per cent more direct time on teaching, playing, reprimanding and minding.
- 40 per cent more time on school visits and school involvement.
- 40 per cent more time transporting each child.

It is not especially surprising that lone mothers will have less time than couples to devote to children. Frequently, lone mothers have to manage a household largely on their own and this necessarily has an impact on the time available for children. While couple fathers contributed only a small amount of time to child care they did contribute to other domestic tasks which, in a lone parent household, must be carried out by just one parent.

What is the financial value of the child care that parents provide?

Like domestic work a great deal of child care is unpaid. The financial worth of this unpaid work can be estimated and thus we can provide an idea of the financial value of the unpaid work that women and men make by caring for children.

It has been estimated that in 1997 women undertook $88.2 billion (1997 dollars) in unpaid child care and men undertook $35.2 billion worth of unpaid child care. This represents an enormous, effective, financial contribution (mainly) by parents.

Child care is largely concentrated in certain types of families and at particular points of the life cycle. Women aged 25-44 spend more time than other people caring for children – two thirds spend some time caring for children. The average annual value of the child care of women in this age group in 1997 was $26,157. Men in the same age group each undertook an average of almost $10,000 worth of child care annually.

As people grow older they do less child care as children become more independent. Nevertheless, many older people continue to do some child care – in many cases for grandchildren. In 1997, women aged 55-64 performed child care at an average $2963 per woman and men undertook child care with an annual worth of $1605 per man (Table 16.5).
What do fathers see as their caring role?

It hardly comes as a surprise that fathers spend less time in child care and child rearing activities than do mothers. While some evidence suggests that men have become a little more involved in these activities in recent years (Bittman 1995a, b), a substantial gender imbalance remains.

A national random sample survey (Russell et al 1999) provides some insights into the way fathers of children aged under 18 feel about their role as fathers.

Do fathers think they have a close relationship with their children?

- About 45 per cent of all fathers reported feeling extremely close to each of their children and approximately 40 per cent reported feeling very close.
- Mothers were more inclined than fathers to report feeling extremely close to their children.
- Approximately 20 per cent of fathers reported often sharing affection with their children and 40 per cent reported seldom or never doing so.
- Around 20 per cent of fathers reported frequently disapproving of their child’s behaviour and around 40 per cent reported seldom or never disapproving of their child’s behaviour.
- Both fathers and mothers reported fathers as being more involved in play and discipline of children than in educational activities or day to day activities.

What do fathers think they contribute to their children?

Fathers spend considerably less time than mothers directly caring for their children. Many would no doubt feel that they nevertheless spend a great deal of their time caring for their children indirectly through earning an income and supporting the family in other ways. Certainly, as indicated in Table 16.6, a father’s role as a breadwinner is the most common role mentioned by fathers. At the same time, 57 per cent of fathers in the sample indicated that work-related pressures interfered with their role as a father – by far the most common barrier to effective fathering that they mentioned. It is nevertheless interesting to recall from Table 16.3 that the amount of time fathers spent directly with their children was much the same regardless of their level of workforce participation.

Values and beliefs also underlie the different division of labour between mothers and fathers. Although the Russell survey found that 96 per cent of fathers believed that mothers and fathers should have an equal responsibility in bringing up children, they did not necessarily mean that mothers and fathers should do the same things. Two thirds of men in the survey indicated that they believed that “mothers are naturally better nurturers and therefore more suited to raising children than men” and over half (54 per cent) believed that pre-school children needed their mothers more than their fathers.

Apart from being a breadwinner, fathers emphasised their role in socialisation and teaching right from wrong – more so than did mothers.

When asked what they felt their two most important parental contributions were, fathers stressed their educational and instrumental learning contributions. The most common responses were “self control and self discipline” (36 per cent), “attitudes and values” (35 per cent), “education and learning” (34 per cent) and “interests and sport” (32 per cent). Relatively few fathers saw their main contributions in terms of “expressions of love and care” (4 per cent), “personality” (5 per cent) “emotional stability and wellbeing” (8 per cent) (Russell et al 1999).

How do parents care for children after separation?

When parents separate a whole new set of issues arise regarding the way in which children are cared for. These matters include:

- With which parent will the child live?
- Will care be shared?
- How much contact does the non resident parent have?
- How does the non resident parent contribute financially to the child’s care?

Who do children live with following separation?

Following divorce most children live with their mother (Table 16.7). The 1997 Family Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View by</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breadwinner</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General socialisation</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach right from wrong</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure good morals and values</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role model</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist in education</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking after day-to-day needs of children</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety &amp; protection</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give love and affection</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that children are happy and supported</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support partner</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be there when needed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey (ABS 1998a) found that where children had a natural parent living elsewhere:

- 87.9 per cent lived with their natural mother.
- 12.1 per cent lived with their father.

Not all cases of a natural parent living elsewhere are due to parental divorce. Some parents have cohabited and then separated while others have never lived together. Nevertheless, the bulk of children with a natural parent living elsewhere do so because their parents have separated or divorced. Of these children:

- 77.8 per cent lived in lone parent families. Most of these (68.2 per cent) lived with their natural mother rather than their father.
- 13.3 per cent lived in a step family with most of these (11.3 per cent) living in a step family with their natural mother.
- 9.5 per cent lived in a blended family – again mainly (8.4 per cent) with their natural mother.

While children with a natural parent living elsewhere overwhelmingly live with their mother they are more likely to live with their father when they are older than when they are younger. Of children with a natural parent living elsewhere:

- 4.1 per cent of such pre-schoolers (aged 0 to 4) lived with their father.
- 18 per cent of teenagers (aged 12-17) lived with their father (Table 16.7).

Most children with a natural parent living elsewhere are in the sole legal care of the parent with whom they live. Shared care arrangements are relatively uncommon but estimates of the level of shared caring depend on how shared care is defined. However, whichever way shared care is measured, the fact remains that only a small proportion of children are cared for in shared care arrangements.

According to the 1997 Family Characteristics Survey, in which shared care was defined as a child spending at least 30 per cent of their time with each parent, just 3 per cent of children with a parent living elsewhere were living in shared care arrangements (ABS 2002d).

Caseload figures from the Child Support Agency in 2002 suggest shared care levels of 6.4 per cent – that is, of payers of child support, 6.6 per cent have the child stay with them for at least 30 per cent of nights but less than 70 per cent of nights (Child Support Agency 2003).

Using 2001 HILDA data, Parkinson and Smyth (2003) found that 10 per cent of non resident fathers and resident mothers had shared care based on each parent having at least 30 per cent of day-time only contact.

### How much contact do children have with their non resident parent following separation?

Of course, the low percentage of children in shared care does not mean that the child does not have regular contact with both parents. However, in many cases there is only minimal contact with the non resident parent. Table 16.8 reports findings from the 1997 Family Characteristics Survey regarding the amount of contact children have with their non resident parent. This Table shows several key patterns.

First, there are two distinct clusters of contact patterns:

- About 41 per cent of children had regular contact with their non resident parent at least once a fortnight – a quarter had at least weekly contact.
- The other contact pattern is where children either had no contact or had contact with their non resident parent less than once a year.
- About 30 per cent of children had no contact with their non resident parents.

Second, the frequency of contact declines as children grow older:

- Almost 60 per cent of children aged under 2 years had at least fortnightly contact with their non resident parent.
- Just over 40 per cent of primary school aged children (5-11) had at least fortnightly contact.
- Only 30 per cent of 15-17 year olds had fortnightly contact with their non resident parent.

Children tend to lose contact with non resident parents as they grow older. About a quarter of pre-schoolers had virtually no contact with their non resident parent. This increases to 30 per cent
among primary school aged children and reaches a third (33 per cent) among children aged 15 to 17. A more recent 2001 study (Parkinson and Smyth 2003) also found that around a third of children (36 per cent) had virtually no contact with their fathers following family breakdown. However, only one in five fathers with no contact appeared to have emotionally disengaged from their children or were not interested in contact (Parkinson and Smyth 2003). The same study found that:

- Both mothers and fathers were dissatisfied with the amount of contact between children and their non resident fathers.
- Of the resident mothers, 41 per cent said they would like to see more contact between their child(ren) and their non resident fathers while 5 per cent felt there was too much contact.
- Dissatisfaction with the amount of contact was substantially higher among the non resident fathers with 74 per cent desiring more contact.

The nature of contact varies as well as the frequency. While 36 per cent of parents reported no contact with the non resident father, 17 per cent reported daytime only contact and 48 per cent reported a mixture of daytime and night sleepover contacts.

**How many parents provide support for non resident young children?**

One of the important issues following separation is how children will be supported financially. Government benefits assist with the cost of raising children and provide support for lone parents. However, non resident parents are also expected to provide ongoing financial support for their children according to their capacity to pay. The Child Support Scheme is one formal means by which parents financially support their children who live elsewhere. However, financial support is not limited to contributions via the Child Support Scheme.

The 2002 General Social Survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics asked people about whether they provided financial support to a child under 15 who lived elsewhere. It found that there were 283,000 people living with a partner where either one or both partners had a child aged 0-14 who lived elsewhere. Of these couples, 90 per cent reported providing some form of financial support to these children. A further 226,000 people were not living with a partner but had a child aged 0-14 living elsewhere. Of these people, 93 per cent reported providing some form of financial support. Financial support was provided in a variety of ways which are reported in Table 16.9. By far the most common form of financial support was through the Child Support Scheme with over three quarters (76.5 per cent) of people with a child aged 0-14 living elsewhere. Of these people, 93 per cent reported providing some form of financial support. The next most common form of financial support was clothing (40.9 per cent) followed by pocket money or an allowance (37.6 per cent).

### Table 16.9 Proportion of households supporting children under 14 living elsewhere by family/household type and type of help, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of support</th>
<th>Couple family %</th>
<th>Lone parent family %</th>
<th>Lone person household %</th>
<th>All persons with own or partner’s children living elsewhere %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child support payments</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide or pay for food</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide or pay for clothing</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for educational costs or textbooks</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them pocket money or an allowance</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy or give them money to buy big cost items</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other support</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td><strong>298,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>36,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>114,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>509,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Analysis of couple and lone parent families is restricted to households containing one family.

Forms of support are not mutually exclusive and therefore sum to more than 100%.
Parents in lone person households were the most likely to be providing financial support for a child living elsewhere (Table 16.9). This reflects the fact that these households predominantly consist of fathers with a child living elsewhere and the fact that fathers are far more likely than mothers to be providing financial support for a young child living elsewhere.

Does contact after separation depend on whether parents were married?

Whether or not the parents had previously been married made a difference to the amount of contact with the non resident parent. Non resident parents who were previously married to the child’s other parent were more likely to maintain contact with their children than non resident parents who had not married the child’s other parent. Based on the 1997 Family characteristics survey, Walter (2000) reports that:

- 37 per cent of children had virtually no visiting contact with their never married non resident parent compared with 29 per cent of those whose parents had been married.
- 51 per cent of children had virtually no letter or phone contact with their never married non resident parent compared with 31 per cent of those whose parents had been married.

Furthermore, non resident parents who had been married reported a greater sense of obligation to their children than did those who had never been married. Using results from the Australian Institute of Family Studies evaluation of the Child Support Scheme, Walter (2000) reported that the never married, non resident fathers were much more likely than the divorced fathers to reject their obligations to financially support their children (See Harrison and Snider 1990, 1991). Table 16.10 shows the magnitude of these differences.

Repartnering also seems to reduce the amount of contact parents have with their non resident children. Using 2001 HILDA data, Parkinson and Smyth (2003) found that:

- 51 per cent of repartnered mothers said the child had contact with their non resident father compared with 66 per cent of lone mothers.
- Of repartnered fathers, 61 per cent had some contact with their children compared with 80 per cent of lone fathers.

Non parental caring for children

While parents have the main responsibility for caring for their children they do not do this on their own. As children grow older, the direct care provided to children from parents declines as other groups and agencies play a bigger role in the lives of children. One of the changes in recent decades has been the increasing role of other people in assisting parents with their child care responsibilities. As more mothers have continued to be employed there has been a need to help mothers combine their employment and ongoing parenting responsibilities. The rise of lone parent families has also led to the need to provide assistance to lone parents in caring for their children.

How popular is non parental child care?

In 2002, half of all children aged 11 or younger received no formal or informal child care apart from parental care. A third received at least some
informal child care and a quarter received at least some formal child care.

In June 2002 almost three quarters of a million children (720,000) and half a million families were using Australian Government funded child care places (FACS 2002b). Nearly all these families (486,000) received some government rebates (Child Care Benefits) to assist with the cost of this care.

The percentage of young children receiving non parental care in 2002 was quite different from that just 18 years earlier (Figure 16.1). Since 1984 the per cent of children under 12 years of age:

- Receiving formal child care doubled from 12 per cent to 25 per cent.
- Receiving informal care increased until the early 1990s but has since declined and by 2002 returned to levels close to those in 1984.
- Being cared for exclusively by their parents declined from 62 per cent to 51 per cent.

The sharpest changes in child care arrangements took place between 1984-1990 when the rate of informal caring increased rapidly from 30 per cent to 42 per cent and the rate of exclusive parental care fell from 62 per cent to 48 per cent.

Since 1990 the main change in child care arrangements has been the steady increase in formal care at the expense of informal caring. Two changes stand out:

- The increase in formal child care between 1984 and 2002 was sharpest among 0-2 year olds where formal care trebled from 8 per cent to 25 per cent.
- Among children aged 5-11 there was a trebling in the number in before and after school care (ABS 2003l).

Of all the particular forms of child care received, grandparent care was received by the largest number of children with 19 per cent of children under the age of 12 having been cared for by grandparents in the week of the child care survey. Of formal child care, long day care in a centre or crèche was the most frequently used method (9.6 per cent of children) followed by attendance at a pre-school centre (7.7 per cent) (see Table 16.11).

### How are very young children cared for?

The use of child care is closely related to the age of the child. Just one third of children younger than one year old receive any non parental child care. Thereafter, the use of child care increases steadily up until children reach the age of four, when 88 per cent of children received some child care in the week of the child care survey. The high rates of child care among three and four year olds is partly due to many of these children attending a pre-school which is classified as child care. Once children begin attending primary school, the need for formal and informal child care declines sharply (Figure 16.2).

### Table 16.11

| Type of non parental child care used by age of child, 2002 |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                            | 0-2 %       | 3-4 %       | 5-11 %      | Total %    |
| Formal care                | 25.2        | 72.8        | 12.6        | 25.4       |
| Before and/or after school | 0           | 0.8         | 9.0         | 5.5        |
| Long day care centre       | 17.4        | 30.5        | 0.8         | 9.6        |
| Family day care            | 5.6         | 7.0         | 1.0         | 3.1        |
| Occasional care centre     | 2.1         | 3.7         | 0.1         | 1.2        |
| Pre-school                 | 0.1         | 38.6        | 2.4         | 7.7        |
| Other formal care          | 0.6         | 0.7         | 0.2         | 0.4        |
| Informal care              | 36.9        | 36.4        | 30.3        | 32.9       |
| Grandparent                | 26.9        | 22.6        | 15.0        | 19.1       |
| Brother/sister             | 0.7         | 1.1         | 3.2         | 2.3        |
| Other relative             | 6.4         | 7.4         | 6.7         | 6.7        |
| Other person               | 6.3         | 7.8         | 7.6         | 7.3        |
| Neither                    | 47.9        | 17.8        | 61.7        | 51.3       |


### Figure 16.2

**Type of child care by age of child, 2002**

![Graph showing the percentage of children receiving formal and informal child care by age group.](Source: Child Care Survey 2002 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003l). Note: Formal plus informal is greater than total since a child can receive both forms of care)
The age of a child also makes a big difference to the type of child care they receive. In 2002:

- Of children aged less than one year old, just 7 per cent received some formal child care while two thirds were cared for exclusively by their parents (Figure 16.2).
- The percentage of one-year-olds receiving some formal child care was four times higher than among those under one year old (27 per cent compared with 7 per cent).
- The percentage of young children cared for exclusively by their parents declines from 66 per cent among the under-one-year olds to 43 per cent among those aged one, and to 35 per cent among two year olds (Figure 16.2).
- Of two year olds, 42 per cent receive at least some formal child care and just a third are cared for exclusively by their parents (ABS births 2003m) (Figure 16.2).
- Informal care is most commonly used among 0-2 year olds and this care is most often provided by grandparents – a quarter of all children aged 0-2 received grandparent care (Table 16.11).
- Almost three quarters (73 per cent) of all 3-4 year olds received some level of formal child care in 2002 – half in the form of pre-school attendance (Table 16.11).

How much difficulty do parents have obtaining child care?

While many parents use child care for various reasons, this does not mean that they are happy with the child care that is available. Cost has always been an issue for many parents and governments have attempted to alleviate this difficulty (p. 248-49). But many other problems potentially confront parents in their search for appropriate child care.

The HILDA survey in 2001 asked parents who had considered using child care in the previous 12 months about any difficulties they confronted. Parents indicated how great a problem each of 11 potential difficulties had been for them using a zero to ten scale. Parents allocated scores between zero and ten to indicate how much the matter had been a problem for them. A score of zero indicated no difficulty at all while a score of ten indicated a great deal of difficulty.

Table 16.12 shows the extent to which HILDA parents experienced child care difficulties. The first point to observe is that the level of difficulties experienced appear to be relatively low. On all items the mean score (column (a)) was relatively close to the zero end of the scale indicating that, overall, the item caused little difficulty. Column (b) shows that on most items well over half the parents had virtually no difficulty while column (c) shows that only a small proportion found a great deal of difficulty with particular aspects of child care.

The most obvious difficulty confronted by parents is obtaining child care for a sick child. A third of all parents nominated this matter as having caused them a great deal of difficulty. The next most common major problem was the cost of child care – a major problem for one in five families contemplating child care. There appeared to be relatively little concern with the quality of child care or finding good child care for their children.

Half of all parents indicated that they experienced no major difficulties with child care (Figure 16.3) and a further 28 per cent experienced just one or two significant problems. The remaining 25 per cent of parents experienced a series of major problems in arranging affordable and suitable child care for their children. While the majority of parents seem to be managing satisfactorily with their child care arrangements, the sizeable segment who

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty</th>
<th>(a) Mean (0-10 scale)</th>
<th>(b) Not a problem (0 to 2) %</th>
<th>(c) Large problem (8-10) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding good quality child care</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding the right person to take care of child</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting care for the hours needed</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding care for a sick child</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding care during the holidays</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cost of child care</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggling multiple child care arrangements</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding care for a difficult or special needs child</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a place at the child care centre of your choice</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a child care centre in the right location</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding care that child/ren are happy with</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a). Questions were only asked of parents who had considered using child care in the previous 12 months
*0=no difficulty at all; 10= a great deal of difficulty
experienced multiple major problems is obviously a cause for some concern.

**Are young children left to look after themselves?**

As parents of school aged children are increasingly involved in the workforce, concern is often expressed about the welfare of children who return home from school to an empty home – the so called “latch key child” (Galambos and Garbarino 1983; Sih and Shute 2000).

Table 16.13 shows that in the early 1990s, 6.3 per cent of school-aged children aged 5-12 had to look after themselves either before or after school. A further 12.7 per cent were at home with another sibling. On the whole, this type of care was only for short periods – about an hour a day in total. Overall, just 1.6 per cent of these children were on their own or just with their siblings for more than 10 hours a week. Those who were left home on their own were much more likely to be in the 9-12 year age range than the 5-8 year age range (de Vaus and Millward 1997).

**How many hours are children in child care?**

The amount of time children spend in child care each week varies from no time at all to more than 40 hours a week. The amount of time spent in child care will depend considerably on the reasons for which child care is used, the age of the child and the type of care that is used.

Table 16.14 shows that of children aged 0 to 11 who received some child care:

- Relatively few received more than 30 hours a week (12.9 per cent).
- 45.4 per cent of children in care were in care for less than 10 hours a week.
- Rather than just relying on formal care or informal care, children in care for long hours each week tended to have a combination of care modes. Of those in mixed care modes, 32 per cent were in care for 30 or more hours a week.
- Of children who received formal care exclusively, the majority (77 per cent) were in formal care for less than 20 hours a week (that is, part time formal care).
- The majority (60 per cent) of those receiving only informal care received this care for less than 10 hours a week.

**Table 16.13 Prevalence of work-related self/sibling care before or after school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of care</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only self-care</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both self and sibling care</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only sibling care (sibling &lt; 15 years old)</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only sibling care (sibling &gt; 15 years old)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other type of work related care</td>
<td>81.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of children</td>
<td>1900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: de Vaus and Millward (1997) using Australian Living Standards Study (1991-93).*

**Table 16.14 Children aged 0–11 years in child care, by type of care and hours per week in care, 2002**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours per week</th>
<th>Formal only</th>
<th>Mixed only</th>
<th>Informal only</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–19</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–29</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40+</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How does parental employment affect the use of formal child care?

Since one of the main purposes for which governments subsidise the cost of child care is to enable parents to participate in the workforce, it is hardly surprising that child care levels will be highest when parents are employed (Figure 16.4).

- Of children from lone parent households whose parent was employed, three quarters (74 per cent) received some child care.
- Of children in couple households with two employed parents, 59 per cent received some child care.
- Child care usage was lowest in couple households where neither parent was employed (28 per cent). This is most probably a function of less need (since parental availability should be higher) and of lower affordability (because of the financial position of such families).
- Couple families with only one employed parent had relatively low usage of child care with only one third of such families using child care.
- In lone parent families in which the parent was not employed, 44 per cent of children received some child care.
- The rate at which families relied exclusively on formal child care was largely unaffected by the employment status of the household.

Do lone parents make greater use of child care?

Children in lone parent families are more likely than those in couple families to receive some child care. In 2002, 53 per cent of children with a lone parent received some form of child care compared with 44 per cent of those in couple families.

The higher rate of child care among lone parents is because lone parents made more use of informal care than did couple parents – 41 per cent compared with 31 per cent. The higher rate of informal care of lone parents will be driven partly by financial considerations and partly by greater need – if only one parent is available the need for care by someone outside the household may be greater. Lone parent families used formal child care at much the same level as did couple families.

Why do parents use child care?

Employment

In 1999, the single most important reason given by parents for using formal or informal child care was work-related reasons – 46 per cent of parents using formal child care and 45 per cent of those using informal child care did so for this reason (Figure 16.5).

Child care is used for work-related reasons much more frequently for 5-11 year olds than for pre-schoolers. Two thirds of children aged 5-11 in formal care were there for work-related reasons compared with just 37 per cent of pre-schoolers. Among primary school aged children in informal care, half were being cared for because of their parents’ work commitments, compared with 40 per cent of pre-schoolers in informal care (ABS 2000h).

For the child’s benefit

While community debate continues regarding the effects of child care for the wellbeing of children, many parents use child care because they see it as having positive benefits for their child. It should be noted that “pre-school” programs are now widely available for three to five year old children within child care centres as well as in separate pre-school centres.

- In 2002, the main reason given by over a third of parents for using formal child care was that they believed the child care was good for the child’s language and social development. Among pre-schoolers 44 per cent were in child care for this reason and because parents feel that it prepares

![Figure 16.4 Child care usage by parental employment, 2002](source: Child Care Survey 2002 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003)).
them for school. Benefit for the child was particularly strong for four year olds where attendance at pre-school was the main form of child care.

- Few school-aged children were in either formal or informal child care because it was thought to be good for the child. The main reason that school-aged children received child care was because of their parent’s work commitments. 70 per cent of formal care for school-aged children was for work-related reasons.

- Informal care was rarely used primarily because it was seen to be good for the child but was mainly used because of the parent’s work or personal needs.

Personal reasons

Child care, especially informal child care, is often used for personal reasons. Personal reasons include parental study and non-work related training, shopping, entertainment, social and leisure activities, free time, caring for other relatives, medical visits, and time spent involved in voluntary work.

- Forty three per cent of pre-schoolers received informal child care due to these personal reasons.

- A third of school aged children received informal child care for these personal reasons.

The reasons for using child care, especially formal care, have changed significantly between 1984-2002. Parental work commitments have become a much more important reason (Figure 16.6). In 1984, work factors accounted for just a quarter of formal child care. By 2002, half of all formal child care was work-related. This change reflects the larger proportion of mothers in the workforce and the increasing emphasis by governments on supporting work-related child care over this period.

Benefits for children have become a less prominent main reason for child care (Figure 16.6). In 1984, 62 per cent of formal child care was primarily because it was thought the child would benefit. By 2002 this percentage had dropped to 36 per cent.

The reasons for using informal child care have barely changed from 1984-2002, with work-related

![Figure 16.5 Main reasons for child care by age of child, 2002](image)


![Figure 16.6 Reasons for child care, 1984-2002](image)

and personal reasons remaining of equal importance throughout the period.

How much has the use of formal child care grown?

In the 1990s, there was enormous growth in the number of child care places provided for children, mostly provided by private and for-profit child care centres (Figure 16.7).

- Long day care has recorded substantial and steady growth between 1991-2001, from 76,267 to 193,809 places.
- Outside school hours care places have recorded the most dramatic growth – especially from 1997 onwards, increasing from 44,549 places in 1991 to 230,511 places in 2001.
- Family day care also recorded growth but at a slower rate increasing from 42,509 places in 1991 to 70,840 places in 2001.

These differential growth rates of the various child care types, has meant that the profile of child care places has changed substantially over the period (Figure 16.7). Long day care has declined in relative importance. In 1991, 45 per cent of government subsidised child care places were long day care places but by 2001 this had declined to 39 per cent. Family day care has also become relatively less important, declining from 25 per cent of all places in 1991 to just over 14 per cent in 2001. The most dramatic change has been the growth in the relative importance of out of school hours care – now the single most common form of government subsidised child care. Between 1991-2001, out of school hours care places have increased from 26 per cent to 46 per cent of all government subsidised child care places (Figure 16.7).

How much does child care cost parents?

The financial cost of child care provided by people other than the child's parents is met by individual families and by government. The Australian Government provides substantial funds to assist parents with the cost of child care – especially work-related child care. Of government provided child care subsidies, 91 per cent went to providing child care for work-related purposes (FACS 2002b).
The main way in which the Australian Government subsidises the cost of child care is through the Child Care Benefit. The value of this subsidy depends on the financial situation of the parents. In 2002, for a family with two children in full time centre based care, government support would cover:

- 72 per cent of the cost of long day care and 82 per cent of the cost of family day care for a low income family.
- 60 per cent of the cost of long day care and 69 per cent of the cost of family day care for a middle income family (FACS 2002b).

Between 1991 and 1998 increases in government assistance did not keep pace with rising child care costs which in turn made child care less accessible, especially for low income families. However, when the Child Care Benefit replaced the existing Child Care Assistance and Child Care Rebate payments in July 2000, the affordability of child care for families – especially low income families improved (AIHW 2001a).

Evidence of the extent to which the Child Care Benefit brings child care within the reach of low income families is provided in Figure 16.8. This figure shows that without government subsidies, long day care fees for a very low income family with two children would take about 60 per cent of the family's disposable income. The Child Care Benefit reduces this to about 17 per cent of the family's disposable income.

The cost of child care to a family depends on the mix of child care that the family uses. Many families manage their child care for relatively modest amounts per week – although for some families even these amounts will place a strain on tight family budgets. Many families clearly manage the cost of child care by relying on free or minimal cost, informal care (Table 16.5).

- Almost half (47.2 per cent) of families using child care paid nothing. Most of these families relied on informal care from friends and relatives.
- Of those relying exclusively on informal care, 90 per cent paid nothing for this care.
- Of those that paid for child care, almost two thirds paid less than $40 per week.
- Of those who relied solely on formal child care 50 per cent paid less than $20 per week and 70 per cent paid less than $40 per week.

What do Australians think about child care?

The use of child care continues to be a matter that arouses vigorous debate. There are those who believe that child care is bad for young children and that parents should be the principal providers of child care. Others believe that child care is beneficial for both children and parents and is necessary for families to manage in today's society.

Attitudes about child care and about mothers of young children working are inextricably tied up. Chapter 19 discusses some of the views that Australians hold toward mothers with young children taking paid employment. This section deals only with attitudes explicitly about institutional day care for children.

Results from the 1996-97 International Social Science Survey in Australia (Evans and Kelley, 2002a), indicate a fair degree of acceptance and approval of half day care for toddlers (Table 16.16). Forty-four per cent of respondents to this national survey agreed with half day care with a further third being ambivalent. Just a quarter disapproved.

However, a very different set of views was evident about full day care (Table 16.16). Less than one in five approved of full day care (18 per cent), a quarter were ambivalent and over half (56 per cent) disagreed with the use of full day care for toddlers.

The most important reasons for which people disapproved of day care was the belief that the lack of one-to-one caring means that children receive...
insufficient attention and nurturing. The survey also found that:

- Women were more supportive than men of half day care for toddlers – 50 per cent of women approved compared with 39 per cent of men.
- Women were also more approving of full day care than were men – 23 per cent of women approved of full day care compared with just 13 per cent of men.
- The gender gap in approval of child care was consistent across all age groups. There was no evidence that the views of younger men and women were any closer to one another than they were among older men and women. Across all age groups men consistently disapproved of child care more than did women.
- Younger people were more approving than older people of half day care. For example, around 50 per cent of those in their twenties approved of half day care compared with 38 per cent of those in their sixties.
- The age gap in approval of child care was more pronounced in relation to full day care. Of people in their twenties, 27 per cent approved of full day care compared with just 11 per cent of those in their sixties.

However, a more recent survey (HILDA 2001) asked an even more demanding question about child care. There was relatively little support for the statement “As long as the care is good, children under three can be placed in child care all day for five days a week”.

- 64 per cent disapproved of full day, all week child care for children under three years of age.
- Just 21 per cent gave any approval at all to the statement.
- Women were just as likely as men to reject this level of care for young children.
- The disapproval of this level of care was uniform across age groups.

### Caring for older people and people with disabilities

**How much caring takes place?**

In 1998, 19 per cent of Australians (3.6 million) had a disability or long term health condition (ABS 1999i). Of those people who had a disability that affects a core function:

- 19 per cent (537,700) had a profound disability.
- 21 per cent (598,200) had a severe disability.
- 23 per cent (660,300) had a moderate disability.
- 37 per cent (1,031,800) had a mild disability.

Most (94.7 per cent) of those with profound or severe disabilities received some informal and unpaid care from the “household sector” – other members of their household, relatives, friends and neighbours. Further care was provided by the non government and government sectors to assist people with disabilities, but fewer (51.5 per cent) of those with profound or severe disabilities received care from these formal providers.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has estimated that the household sector (as opposed to government, community and non government organisations) provided 1,789 million hours of welfare services – largely in the form of providing unpaid care for people with disabilities. This caring is the equivalent of almost a million people working full time for a year (AIHW 2003c).

In 2001 the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW 2001b) estimated that of the total hours provided by household carers:

- 66 per cent was spent caring for relatives, friends and neighbours (adults) with an estimated dollar value in 1999-00 dollars of over $18 billion.
- 29 per cent was spent on child care and related activities for other people’s children and for their own sick child.
- 5 per cent was spent on voluntary work through community service organisations.

Carers are classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as Primary Carers or Other Carers. A primary carer is any person who provides the most informal help or supervision to a person with a disability. The assistance is ongoing or likely to be ongoing, for at least six months and is provided for one or more of the core activities of self care, mobility or communication (ABS 2000i).

In 1998, 2.4 per cent of Australians (450,900) were classified as primary carers and a further 10.2 per cent as “other” carers – that is, as people who provided some informal assistance but were not the main carer. This means that 2.3 million Australians provided some level of informal care for people with disabilities.

Primary carers provided care for people with a variety of different types of disabilities. These included:

- Physical disabilities (62 per cent of cases).
- Sensory disabilities of sight and hearing (11.6 per cent).
- Intellectual disabilities (12 per cent).
- Psychological disabilities (7 per cent).

**Who does the caring?**

In Australia, about 2.3 million people provide care and about 460,000 people provide care for people at home with a severe or profound disability (Department of Health and Ageing 2003a).
Is care provided by younger or older people?
The likelihood of people caring for older people or those with a disability increases steadily as they grow older themselves (Figure 16.9). Caring peaks among those aged 55-64 where almost a quarter of those in this age group are providing some care. Thereafter, the rate of providing care declines somewhat.

The main reason for caring peaking among those in their late fifties and early sixties is that this is the age at which people have elderly parents who require some help. The effect of this is especially noticeable for women where 26 per cent of women aged 55-64 are caring for an older person or a person with a disability. Thereafter, the level of caring by women drops to 20 per cent for those aged 65-74 and 11 per cent for those aged over 75 and over.

Do women do more caring?
Overall, women are more likely than men to provide care for older people and for people with disabilities. According to the 1998 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (ABS 1999i):

- 14 per cent of women and 11 per cent of men provided some care to older people and people with a disability.
- However, women were almost three times more likely than men to be the primary carer of an older person or a person with a disability (3.4 per cent compared with 1.4 per cent).

The role of women in providing primary care is especially pronounced among women aged 45 to 74 where 7 per cent were the primary carers. Caring responsibilities for men also increased after the age of 45 but remain at about half the level of women (Figure 16.10).

Among the oldest age groups the normal gender pattern reverses. A greater percentage of older men than older women were primary carers (5 per cent compared with 3 per cent). The sharp decline in primary caring among the oldest women partly reflects the fact that much primary care is for a spouse. The level of primary care by older women declined because of their partner’s death or the use of institutional care as she becomes less able to provide the care herself (Figure 16.10).

Men who are primary carers largely care for partners – relatively few were primary carers of parents or children with disabilities. Female carers are much more likely than male carers to care for a child or a parent (Figure 16.11).
• Of male primary carers, two thirds (65 per cent) were caring for their partner compared with just a third of female carers who were caring for their partner.

• Of male primary carers, 8 per cent were caring for their parent (that is, were the child of the person receiving care) compared with 27 per cent of female carers who were primary carers of their parent.

• Of male primary carers, 20 per cent were caring for their child (that is, were the parent of the person receiving care) compared with 26 per cent of female carers who were primary carers of their child.

These gender differences in who does what type of caring means that of people with a primary carer:

• 75.8 per cent of children being cared for were cared for by their mother.

• 88.5 per cent of parents receiving primary care were cared for by their daughter.

• 81 per cent of other people (other than partner, parent of child) receiving primary care were cared for by a woman (ABS 1999i).

How important are families in providing care?
In 1998, most primary carers were caring for a family member:

• 43 per cent were caring mainly for their partner.

• 24 per cent were caring for parents.

• 22 per cent were caring for one of their children (ABS 2001f).

Figure 16.12 shows that in all age groups of carers the carer was mainly caring for an immediate family member such as a parent, a child or a partner. However, the type of family member providing care depends on the age of the carer:

• Younger carers (15-34) were most likely to be caring for a parent (36 per cent of carers) or a child (28 per cent).

• Older carers aged 65+ were mainly caring for their partner (75 per cent). Very few elderly carers (4 per cent) were caring for a disabled child.

Who receives household and community based care?
Increasingly, priority is being given to promoting “ageing in place” by providing Home and Community Care Services. Of older people (those aged 65 and over) who have a disability, the vast bulk live in a private dwelling rather than in an institution. In 1998, of all people aged 65 and over who had a disability just 16.8 per cent were living in institutional care – the rest were living in a private dwelling. Close to 30 per cent of people over the age of 65 with a disability lived on their own and a further 55 per cent lived in a private dwelling with another person. Even among those with a severe or profound disability, only a third (34.1 per cent) lived in an institution. Of those with a severe or profound disability, 20 per cent lived on their own and 45 per cent lived with someone else (AIHW 2002b).

Do carers live with the person they care for?
Primary carers are more likely than not to live with the person for whom they are caring. In 1998:

• 81 per cent of primary carers lived with a person for whom they were caring.

• Men were more likely than women to be caring for a person within their own household (89 per cent compared with 78 per cent). This is because men’s caring is largely focused on caring for their partner rather than parents or adult children (Figure 16.1).
Of women who were primary carers, 30 per cent of women who were primary carers, 30 per cent cared for a person in another household compared with 19 per cent of men who did so. This is largely because women care disproportionately for parents and adult children who were likely to live in separate households.

What care is provided by community based services?

As part of their commitments to “Ageing in Place”, the national, state and territory governments fund a range of services to assist older people to continue to live in their own homes. In 2002, over half a million people (583,000) – two thirds of whom were women, received Home and Community Care (HACC) services (Table 16.17).

These services are provided as part of the Home and Community Care program and include community nursing, domestic assistance, personal care, meals on wheels and day-centre based meals, home modification and maintenance, transport and community based respite care. In addition to receiving care from HACC services, over half (52 per cent) of those receiving HACC support also had a carer. In this respect HACC services assist both the person being cared for and help carers manage their caring load (Department of Health and Ageing 2003a).

HACC services are available to people of all ages but are predominantly used by older people:

- 11.6 per cent of services were to people aged 0-49.
- 19.2 per cent of services were to people aged 50-69.
- 48.6 per cent of services were to people aged 70-84.
- 20.7 per cent of services were to people aged 85+ (Department of Health and Ageing 2003b).

Of people aged 85 and over almost half (47 per cent) receive some services through the Home and Community Care program (Department of Health and Ageing 2003b).

Table 16.17 Annual usage of HACC services, 2002-03

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Average number per client</th>
<th>Number of clients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allied health</td>
<td>4.7 hours</td>
<td>102,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>2.5 hours</td>
<td>202,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case management</td>
<td>13.2 hours</td>
<td>26,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case planning/review</td>
<td>4.5 hours</td>
<td>142,981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre based day care</td>
<td>135.2 hours</td>
<td>70,742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>5.5 hours</td>
<td>49,083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic assistance</td>
<td>33.0 hours</td>
<td>198,746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home maintenance</td>
<td>7.5 hours</td>
<td>87,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing care</td>
<td>13.8 hours</td>
<td>152,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other food services</td>
<td>37.7 hours</td>
<td>3,017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal care</td>
<td>58.6 hours</td>
<td>58,549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respite care</td>
<td>94.1 hours</td>
<td>16,154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>42.0 hours</td>
<td>7,908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal linen service</td>
<td>24.2 hours</td>
<td>1,464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goods and equipment</td>
<td>3.7 hours</td>
<td>46,223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals</td>
<td>84.7 meals</td>
<td>32,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>36.4 single trips</td>
<td>3,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home modification</td>
<td>$321.50</td>
<td>22,211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 16.18 Per cent living in institutions (non private dwellings), by age, 1986-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>65-69</th>
<th>70-74</th>
<th>75-79</th>
<th>80-84</th>
<th>85+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>46.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 16.18 reports census data that shows that:

- Levels of institutional care are low for men and women younger than 80 years of age.
- It is not until people reach their early eighties that more than 10 per cent live in an institution.
- Of men aged over 85, less than a quarter (22.7 per cent) live in an institution.
- Of women aged over 85 about a third (34.2 per cent) live in institutions. The greater percentage of women in institutional care is because they live longer than men and are likely to be widowed and therefore have no one else in the home to care for them. Of women aged over 85, just 9 per cent have a partner living with them compared to 43 per cent of similarly aged men who have their partner living with them (ABS 2003a).
In addition to showing that institutional care for older people is concentrated among those aged 80 and over, Table 16.18 also shows that the proportion of older people in institutional care has declined substantially since 1986. For example, among women aged in their early eighties, 23.1 per cent were in living in an institution in 1986. By 2001, this had declined to 14.9 per cent. Among women aged 85 and over the percentage living in an institution declined from 46.1 per cent in 1986 to 34.2 per cent in 2001. This decline partly reflects access to HACC programs and the effect of carer supports in assisting older people to remain in the community.

What are the chances of going into a nursing home?
For many people the thought of moving into institutional care is hardly a welcome prospect both because of its financial implications and because of its restrictions on independence.

Table 16.19 indicates the chances of a person ever entering into permanent aged care. The probability depends on a person’s age. A person who has survived until they are 90 years old faces a much higher probability of ever being in an aged care home than a person who is just 65 years old. The 65 year old faces a lower probability of institutional care because many will not live long enough to require such care.

The figures in Table 16.19 mean that a 65 year old woman has a 46 per cent chance of entering an aged care home for permanent care during her remaining lifetime. For a 65 year old man the corresponding figure is 29 per cent. The lower figure for men is due largely to dying at a younger age and to having a partner to help care for them at home. An 85 year old year old woman has a 62 per cent chance of eventually entering permanent aged care while an 85 year old man has a 46 per cent chance of entering permanent aged care.

How long do older people stay in nursing homes?
Table 16.20 indicates the average length of time that an average man or woman will spend in a nursing home or hostel. A woman aged 65 can expect, on average, to spend 1.87 years in permanent care in an aged care facility. A similarly aged man will spend 0.71 of a year. A 75 year old woman can expect to spend 2.05 years in permanent care compared with a 75 year old man who, on average will spend 0.83 years in permanent institutional care.

These averages include people who never enter a nursing home or aged care hostel. Therefore the predicted duration spent in such a facility is higher for those who actually go into care.

Is caring bad for the carer?
While caring can generally be assumed to be of benefit to the person receiving care it can also be of benefit to the person providing it. Caring can also have its costs – especially if the person providing care is not given sufficient support in what can sometimes be a demanding task.

Does caring damage or improve relationships?
A person who has heavy caring responsibilities can find it difficult to spend sufficient time with other people such as friends, one’s partner and other family members. Caring can bring people closer together or it can strain relationships.

When asked about how caring affects friendships, marital relationships, relationships with other people in the household and with the person being cared for, the single most common response was that caring had no effect one way or the other (Table 16.21):

- 56 per cent said friendships were unaffected.
- 40 per cent said the relationship with the recipient of care was unaffected.
- 52 per cent of those with other people in the household said that relationships with other household members were unaffected.
- 40 per cent of those with a partner (not being cared for) said that caring for someone else did not affect their relationship with their partner.

However, when caring did affect relationships, the effect was generally more likely to be negative than positive (Table 16.21). For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current age (years)</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Probabilities can be expressed as percentages to indicate the percentage chance of entering permanent care. This probability of 0.24 indicates a 24 per cent chance of entering permanent care at some point in the future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Females (years)</th>
<th>Males (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• 24 per cent said that they had lost touch with friends while only 3 per cent said they had developed more friends.
• 34 per cent of those with a partner (who were not caring for their partner) said that caring for someone else had either strained the relationship with their partner or led to less time together, while only 10 per cent said that caring had drawn them closer to their partner.
• 38 per cent of those with others in the household said that these relationships were more strained or that they had less time together, while only 10 per cent said that caring had brought other members of the household closer together.

However, when caring affected relationships with the recipient of care, these relationships tended to improve rather than deteriorate: a third of all carers said that their relationship with the person they cared for improved while 22 per cent said that caring had strained the relationship (Table 16.21).

### Does caring affect personal wellbeing?

The effect of caring on relationships cannot be separated from the effect of caring on personal wellbeing. But personal wellbeing is not just a matter of relationship quality. It includes matters such as physical wellbeing, tiredness and emotional wellbeing.

Evidence from the 1998 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (ABS 2000i) shows that for many people their primary caring role had neither physical nor emotional ill effects:

- More than a quarter (28.4 per cent) of primary carers said they felt satisfied with their physical and emotional wellbeing.
- A quarter did not report any negative effects of caring on physical or emotional wellbeing.
- Half of all carers indicated that being a primary carer had not interrupted their sleep.
- 54 per cent of primary carers felt that they were coping sufficiently well as to not require any additional support.

However, there were plenty of carers who did experience some negative physical and emotional effects from caring:

- A third (34.7 per cent) reported feeling weary or lacking energy.
- Almost a third (31.4 per cent) were often worried or depressed.
- One in six (17.2 per cent) indicated that they often felt angry or resentful.
- 10 per cent reported suffering from a stress related illness.
- One in five (22 per cent) said that their sleep was frequently interrupted because of their caring responsibilities.

41 per cent of these carers indicated that they needed additional support to cope adequately with their caring responsibilities.

### Does caring affect finances and employment?

Apart from the effect of caring on relationships and emotional and physical wellbeing, caring can also have significant implications for the financial wellbeing of carers. Not only does caring impose certain direct costs, it also can have opportunity costs through its effects on employment opportunities. However, these costs will depend partly on

---

**Table 16.21**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship effects on primary carer 1998</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main effect on relationships with</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friends</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle of friends has increased</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle of friends has changed</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost touch with existing friends</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendships unaffected</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partner</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brought closer together</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack time alone together</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship strained</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship unaffected</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has no partner</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cares for partner</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main recipient of care</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brought closer together</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship strained</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaffected</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other family members in household</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brought closer together</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less time to spend with them</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships strained</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships affected in other way(s)</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships unaffected</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No other family members in household</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Figure 16.13**

Effect of primary caring on financial situation by type of person being cared for, 1998

The person being cared for. The effects of caring for a child with a disability may be quite different from those of caring for an elderly parent.

The most common situation reported by primary carers was that caring had had no impact on their financial situation (Figure 16.13). Caring for parents was the least likely to have had any impact on the carer’s financial situation (54 per cent). However, only a third of carers of children with a disability said that caring had left their financial situation unchanged.

Caring rarely improved a person’s financial situation. For up to a quarter of carers, caring had led to a decline in income – this was especially the case when people were caring for their partner.

Being a primary carer appears to have modest direct effects on the carer’s employment. Only 12 per cent of primary carers had left work because of the caring and a further 3 per cent had had three months or more off work because of caring (Table 16.22). The impact of work on caring was a little higher among primary carers aged 35-64 than on younger primary carers.

Almost a third of primary carers were not employed before commencing their caring work. However, this does not mean that some of these had not been prevented from returning to the workforce because of caring responsibilities. Of primary carers not in the workforce:

- 28 per cent nominated care related factors as preventing them from joining the workforce.
- Of those who wanted to rejoin the workforce almost half (48 per cent) nominated care related reasons that prevented their joining the workforce.

Who cares for the carers: respite care?

While most carers provide care willingly, the demands of caring can be substantial – especially where the person receiving care has profound disabilities, relationships are strained, there is little help from others and the carer has many other responsibilities to meet in addition to caring.

Increasingly, the need to assist carers by providing respite care has been recognised.

Nevertheless, only a small proportion of carers actually make use of formal respite care. In the 1998 survey, just 13 per cent of carers reported having ever been assisted by formal respite care. However, 22 per cent of primary carers expressed a need for formal respite care which suggests that just over half of those who say they need formal respite care actually use it. The main reasons for which formal respite care was not used by people who felt the need for it were (ABS 2000f):

- Unavailability of suitable formal respite care (40 per cent).
- Main care recipient did not want formal respite care (22.6 per cent).
- Insufficient awareness of formal respite care services (19.1 per cent).

While the rates of use of formal respite care were relatively low, half of all primary carers received assistance with their caring role. This was often in the form of a fallback carer such as other family members or friends or through assistance on a regular or periodic basis.

Attitudes about caring for elderly parents

A considerable amount of care for older people is provided by family members. While older partners are the most common source of care for older people, adult children, especially daughters, are...
also an important source of care and support for elderly and frail parents. By assisting with HACC services and the use of carer payments, and the introduction of the user pays principles for aged care accommodation, government policies encourage families to help look after their elderly parents.

The 1995 Family Values Survey asked adults about the extent to which adult children had an obligation to help out elderly parents. The survey indicated that there was a hierarchy of obligations. The more the obligation had a direct impact on the potential carer’s life the more reluctant they were to accept that responsibility (Table 16.23).

Endnotes

1 Since the care of mothers and fathers will overlap to some extent, these figures will overstate the total amount of time for which children in couple families receive care. Using a different estimation model for families with a preschool child, Craig, (2004) concludes that lone mothers match couple parents in the time on child related activities.

2 These estimates are based on time-use as measured in the 1997 ABS Time Use Survey. They include both primary and secondary time-use. For details of the methodology of these estimates see de Vaus, Gray and Stanton (2003).

3 Informal child care is non regulated child care that includes care from family members (apart from parents), friends, neighbours, nannies and baby sitters. Formal care is regulated care which mostly occurs out of the child’s home and includes long day care, family day care, créches, before and after school care and kindergarten/pre-school.

4 Most common in terms of percentage of children receiving this form of care. This does not mean that most care (in terms of hours of care) is provided by grandparents.

5 The percentages caring for a person in their own household and another household sum to more than 100 per cent because about 8 per cent of primary carers care for people in both locations.

6 An approximation of the amount of time in permanent care of those who actually use the facilities can be obtained by dividing the predicted number of years indicated in Table 16.20 by the probability of entering an aged care home that are provided in Table 16.19. The figures in the tables are not from the same years so estimates are only approximate. Thus the predicted time in permanent age care facility for a women currently aged 65 is (1.87/0.46)=4.06 years. A similarly aged man who goes into permanent aged care can be expected to spend approximately 2.4 years in care (0.71/0.29=2.4years).

7 Respite care takes place where the person being cared for goes into residential care for a short period to give the carer a break.

Highlights

Children

• Mothers spend far more time than fathers caring for children even when both parents are employed full time.

• On average couple mothers of younger children (aged under 15) spent 2.6 times more than couple fathers caring for their children.

• Fathers spent an average of two and a quarter hours per day caring for their children.

• Lone and couple mothers spent similar amounts of time per day caring for their children. However, when the time of fathers in couple families is taken into account, children in couple families have 1.5 times more time devoted to their care.

• The annual financial contribution of the time spent by mothers aged 25-44 was $26,157. Comparable fathers provided child care to the value of almost $10,000 annually.

• Older people continue to provide some child care. Women aged 55-65 contributed child care (mainly baby sitting) worth almost $3,000 per year, and those aged 65-74 contributed $2,138 worth of child care annually.

• Following relationship breakdown, most children (87 per cent) live with their mother.

• Older children are more likely than younger children to live with their father following relationship breakdown.

• Only a small proportion of children (somewhere between 3 and 10 per cent) are cared for jointly by both parents following relationship breakdown.

• Approximately a third of fathers have no contact with their children following relationship breakdown. Loss of contact with fathers is more likely with older than younger children.

• Overall, fathers are dissatisfied with the amount of contact they have with their children following relationship breakdown. Many mothers would like the father to have more contact with the children.
• Fathers who had been married to the child’s mother maintain more contact and are more positive about paying child support than those who were never married to the child’s mother.

• Maternal or paternal repartnering reduces the level of contact between children and their non resident fathers.

• Non parental child care is widely used but the level and type varies widely according to the age of the child.

• Approximately half of all children aged 0-11 receive no child care apart from parental child care, about a quarter receive some formal care and a third receive some informal care.

• The use of formal care has doubled since 1984 and the use of informal child care has declined in recent times as formal care has become more widely used.

• The use of out of school hours care has grown by more than 400 per cent since 1991.

• Grandparents are the single most common type of non parental care type used. Nineteen per cent of children receiving non parental child care received some grandparent care. However, this does not mean that 19 per cent of all childcare time is provided by grandparents.

• Overall, most parents reported few difficulties with finding appropriate child care. Finding care for a sick child was the most common problem, followed by issues of cost.

• The Child Care Benefit payment has improved the affordability of child care – especially for low income families.

• Of those families that pay for child care, 70 per cent pay less than $40 per week (after government assistance).

• Few children are cared for in formal child care for the whole working week. Only 13 per cent received child care for more than 30 hours a week. Of those receiving any child care, 45 per cent were in care for less than 10 hours a week.

• Nearly half of adult Australians agree with the use of half day child care for young children, but less than 20 per cent approve of full day care for young children.

• Lone parents make considerably greater use than couple parents of informal child care but use about the same level of formal care.

**Older people and people with a disability**

• 19 per cent of Australians have a disability or long term health condition. Of these, 40 per cent have a severe or profound disability.

• Nearly all those with a severe or profound disability receive some care from friends, relatives and neighbours. Half receive care from formal service providers.

• 2.4 per cent of Australians are “primary carers” and a further 10.2 per cent assist with care.

• Women provide more care than men and the peak ages for women providing care are between the ages of 45-64 (when their own parents are elderly).

• Men who are primary carers mainly care for their own partner.

• Three quarters of children with a disability are cared for by their mother.

• 85 per cent of parents receiving care are cared for by their daughter.

• 89 per cent of primary carers are caring for a close family member – 43 per cent are caring for a partner.

• Institutional care is not widely used until people are aged 85 or over. Of those aged 85 or over about a quarter of the men and about 40 per cent of women live in an institution.

• A 65 year old man has a 29 per cent chance of entering permanent institutional care at some time in his remaining life.

• A 65 year old woman has a 46 per cent chance of doing so.

• The predicted time in institutional care for a 65 year old man who eventually goes into care is 2.4 years. A 65 year old woman who eventually goes into care will probably be in care for just over four years.

• In the majority of cases family members who provide care for older people or those with a disability report no effects on themselves. However, of those who do report effects, the effects of caring are more likely to be negative than positive.

• Only a small proportion of carers make use of formal respite care to help them manage their caring responsibilities.

• While adults accept that they should be prepared to provide some care for older parents, their acceptance of these obligations is limited and conditional on how it would affect their own lives.
17

Spending
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The spending patterns of a family clearly depend on income levels. But other factors contribute to spending patterns. These factors include the particular type of household, the stage in the family life cycle and the particular values and preferences of households. This chapter describes some of the ways in which families spend their money and details some of the difficulties some families confront in meeting their spending goals.

**What do families spend their money on?**

For all families, expenditure decisions are a matter of allocating limited resources among competing priorities. The resources and priorities vary across different points in the lifecycle and in different family structures. Thus it is likely that younger people will have different spending patterns than older people, couples will probably have different spending patterns to lone people and couples with children will have different patterns of expenditure to lone parents and to those without children.

**How much is spent on “necessary” items?**

The spending patterns of most households are dominated by five main types of spending (Table 17.1).

**Taxation**

Of these, income tax in 1998-9 took the largest share of incomes with 18.5 per cent of all household expenditure going on income tax. Older people paid the smallest part of their weekly expenditure on income tax (around 7 per cent) closely followed by lone parents with dependent children (about 7.5 per cent). In these cases the low rates of income tax reflect the low rates of tax on those with low incomes.

On the other hand younger people paid among the highest proportion of their weekly expenditure on income tax. Lone people aged under 35 and couple only households where the reference person was under 35 paid almost 22 per cent of their weekly expenditure on income tax. Similarly, middle aged couples without children in the household and those whose children were all aged over 15 spent over 20 per cent of their weekly budget on income tax. This higher rate of expenditure on tax reflects both the higher incomes of these households and the lower access to taxation deductions and allowances compared to other groups.

**Food**

The next biggest cost for families was food. Across all households 13 per cent of spending in 1998-99 went on food. Spending on food made up a disproportionately large share of the spending in older households (that is, all those in which the reference person was aged 65 years or over) – over 18 per cent. This is not so much because food consumption is higher in these households but because overall expenditure in these households is relatively low and food, being a fairly fixed cost, constitutes a larger share of this limited overall expenditure. Food took up a relatively small share of the weekly costs of younger households and middle aged households without children – in

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**Table 17.1 Proportion of weekly household expenditure on selected items (all households), 1998-99**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household type</th>
<th>Lone person</th>
<th>Couple only</th>
<th>Couple with children</th>
<th>Lone parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aged under 35 %</td>
<td>Aged 65+ %</td>
<td>Ref person under 35 %</td>
<td>Ref person 55-65 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal care</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income tax</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since this table does not include all items of expenditure the columns do no sum to 100 per cent.
these households weekly food expenditure made up about 10 per cent of all expenditure.

**Transport**

Closely following food costs was spending on transport. Across all households, transport costs took up 12.4 per cent of all household spending in 1998-9. The proportion of household spending devoted to transport costs varied somewhat between different types of households. Compared to other types of households, older households incurred the highest proportion of their spending to transport. Older people living alone and older couple only households devoted 13.8 per cent and 15.7 per cent of their weekly expenditure to transport costs. Households where all the children were aged over 15 were also demanding in terms of transport costs. Lone parent households with these older children spent 15.2 per cent of the weekly budget on transport and couple households with just older children devoted 13.9 per cent of their budget to transport. In part, these higher costs will be due to older children acquiring cars and needing transport for work and recreational needs.

**Housing**

Overall, housing costs were less than transport costs but took the next biggest slice of the weekly household budget. Housing costs here include the cost of purchasing the family home (principal and interest), home alterations, housing rates and rent for the family home. While 11.4 per cent of the weekly budget across all households was devoted to these housing costs, the proportion of the weekly budget taken by housing varied considerably between family types. Compared to other households, older couples without children in the household devoted the smallest share of their budget to housing – just 4.8 per cent of their budget on housing. These older couples spent proportionally much less on housing than older lone people who spent 10 per cent on housing. This largely reflects the fact that housing costs are relatively fixed regardless of whether one person or two people live in the home ($30 per week for lone older people compared to $26 per older couple). Thus, for a lone person, housing will take up a larger share of the single income in the household while for the older couple housing will constitute a smaller proportion of the couple’s income.

Housing costs constituted a relatively large share of the expenditure of younger households with just one income earner. Of younger lone person households, 19.5 per cent of the weekly budget went to housing costs. In lone parent households where all the children were under 15, housing costs made up 20.4 per cent of the weekly budget. Young couples without children were the next most burdened by their housing costs with 16.5 per cent of the budget used to pay for housing. Couples in which all the children were aged under 15 had the next highest commitments to housing costs with 13.7 per cent of their weekly bills consisting of housing expenses. These high proportions of the budget devoted to housing reflect both the fact that some of these households will be single income (or one full income and one part income) households which means that fixed housing costs will constitute a greater proportion of budgets.

The higher proportion of household income devoted to housing costs among younger families is partly due to the more recent entry into the housing market by younger families. The extent of these differences can be seen from a few selected figures. A lone person aged under 35 spent $131 per week in 1998-99 on these housing costs compared with just $30 per week for the lone person aged 65 or over. Similarly, the couple only household in which the reference person was aged under 35 spent $211 per week, compared with just $26 per week for the couple only family where the reference person was aged over 65. The couple family in which all the children were aged under 15 spent $178 per week on housing in 1998-99 compared with $100 per week in the couple family where all the children were aged over 15. Only among lone parent families were housing costs similar in those with younger and older children. In lone parent households where all the children were aged under 15, housing costs were $112 per week compared to $93 per week in lone parent households where all the children are aged over 15. This pattern for lone parent households partly reflects the higher level of renting among these households.

**Recreation and health**

Recreation expenditure made up the next largest item of household spending with 9.5 per cent of weekly budgets being devoted to recreational expenditure. The proportion of household budgets spent on recreation was relatively similar across all household types described in Table 17.1.

Expenditure on health comprised just 3.3 per cent of household expenditure but the proportion of household expenditure varied somewhat by household type. Older households spent the greatest part of their budget on health. Lone person and couple households of those aged 64 or over spent towards 7 per cent of their budget on health. Younger, and presumably more healthy households without children, spent just 2 per cent of their budget on health. Households with children spent between 2.5 and 3.5 per cent of their budget on health.

**How much is spent on “discretionary” items?**

Some items in the household budget are more discretionary than others. While all households have to spend money on housing, electricity, food and clothing there are other items that depend on the
particular lifestyle choices of families. Among these more discretionary expenditures are alcohol, gambling, tobacco and pets.

Table 17.2 indicates that in the two week period over which respondents recorded their expenditures, a third of all households spent money on tobacco products, 61.5 per cent on alcohol, just under half (48.2 per cent) spent money regularly on some form of gambling and just under a half (48 per cent) spent money on pets.

**Alcohol, gambling and tobacco**

Expenditure on alcohol also varied across different types of households. Lone people aged over 65 were the least likely of all groups to spend money on alcohol with just 28.3 per cent doing so – a pattern that is probably attributable to the over-representation of women in these households. Almost 60 per cent of older couple households spent money regularly on alcohol. Couple based households were the most likely to spend money on alcohol with between 60 and 70 per cent of these households regularly spending on alcohol. Lone parent households were among the least likely to spend on alcohol – especially when there were dependent children in the household. Of lone parents with only dependent children in the household just 36 per cent had purchased alcohol within the previous two weeks (Table 17.2).

Of those who spent money on alcohol, young lone people spent the largest proportion of their budget on alcohol (4.2 per cent) followed by lone older people and older couple households (3.9 per cent). Couples with children, and lone parents spent about the same share of their budget on alcohol (Table 17.3).

Spending on gambling was more common among older than younger households. Based on expenditure patterns over a two week period, gambling expenditure was most common among couples where the reference person was aged over 65 (60.2 per cent) and couples where all the children were aged over 15 (65.3 per cent). Gambling was less common among younger lone people (20.5 per cent) and lone parents with younger children (26.1 per cent).

For most gambling households only a small proportion of the household budget was consumed by gambling – just 1.6 per cent of the expenditure of all households that gambled. The proportion of the household budget devoted to gambling was highest in older households. Couple households where the reference person was aged 65 or over, spent 3.1 per cent of their budget on gambling. Lone people aged 65 or over, spent 3.2 per cent of their budget on gambling. Younger lone people and younger people with younger children spent the smallest proportion of their budget on gambling. Both lone and couple households that contained children had the lowest levels that gambled in the two week period of the survey (Table 17.3).

Tobacco spending had quite a different pattern to gambling. Older people were fairly unlikely to spend money on tobacco with just 10.2 per cent of lone older people and 16.5 per cent of older couples purchasing tobacco in the previous two weeks. Lone parents and middle aged couple only households had an above average chance of spending on tobacco products with well over 40 per cent having spent money in this way in the previous two weeks.

Expenditure on particular products does not indicate the relative importance of items in the household budget. While 61.5 per cent of households spent money on alcohol in the previous two weeks this expenditure represented just 2.9 per cent of their total household expenditure. Similarly, while 48.2 per cent gambled, gambling expenditure represented just 1.4 per cent of the expenditure of those who gambled. While 33.2 per cent of households spent money on tobacco this expenditure made up just 3.2 per cent of their household budget.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 17.2</th>
<th>Per cent of households incurring expenditure over a two week period on “discretionary” expenditure items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household type</td>
<td>Lone person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aged &lt;35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pet care</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambling</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: The basis for calculating weekly costs varies for all items in this table was expenditure over a two week period. For more information on particular items see HES users guide.
Pets
About half of all households spent money on their pets. Expenditure on pets was most common among families with children and was least common in lone person households. Among families with children between half and two thirds spent money on pets in the previous two weeks while just a quarter of lone person households spent part of their weekly budget on pets (Table 17.2). Expenditure on pets consumed only a relatively small share of the budget of pet owners – overall just 1.2 per cent of the weekly budget of pet owners went on pet care (Table 17.3).

How much is spent on “financial” expenditures: superannuation, insurance and interest payments?
Of all households, 28.8 per cent spent money on superannuation or life insurance and 59 per cent spent some of their weekly income on interest payments.

Superannuation
Expenditure on superannuation in Australia consists of two components. One component is a levy paid by employers on behalf of employees. In 2002, all employers were required to pay a superannuation payment on behalf of employees that is at least 9 per cent of the employee’s weekly wage or salary. Some employers contribute a greater proportion as part of standard or negotiated conditions of employment. In addition, individuals can contribute directly to a superannuation fund. These contributions may be a requirement of conditions of employment over which the person has no discretion. In other cases this expenditure is entirely discretionary. The superannuation expenditure figures described in this section refer only to employee contributions and include those contributions that employees are required to make as well as those that employees choose to make. Employer contributions are not included.

Expenditure on superannuation and life insurance varied between household types (Table 17.4). Not surprisingly, very few of those aged over 65 spent money on superannuation or life insurance. Couple households were by far the most likely to spend on superannuation and life insurance. Of couples younger than 65, over 40 per cent spent money in this way and couples with young children were the most likely of all households to invest their money in this way with 54 per cent spending regularly on superannuation and life insurance. Only about a quarter of younger lone people spent on superannuation – roughly similar to the proportion of lone parents who spent in this way (Table 17.4).

### Table 17.3
Proportion of weekly household expenditure in a two week period on selected “discretionary” items (based on only those spending some money on these items)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household type</th>
<th>Lone person</th>
<th>Couple only</th>
<th>Couple with children</th>
<th>Lone parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aged &lt;35 %</td>
<td>Aged 65+ %</td>
<td>Ref person &lt;35 %</td>
<td>Ref person 55-65 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pet care</td>
<td>1.2 2.4</td>
<td>1.4 1.2 1.7</td>
<td>0.9 1.4 1.0</td>
<td>1.6 1.2 1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>4.2 3.9</td>
<td>2.8 2.9 3.9</td>
<td>2.0 2.9 2.3</td>
<td>2.9 2.9 2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambling</td>
<td>1.6 3.2</td>
<td>1.3 1.3 3.1</td>
<td>1.0 1.1 0.9</td>
<td>1.4 1.2 2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>4.2 8.1</td>
<td>2.5 3.6 6.7</td>
<td>2.8 4.6 2.3</td>
<td>3.2 4.1 3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The basis for calculating weekly costs varies for all items in this table was expenditure over a two week period. For more information on particular items see HES users guide

### Table 17.4
Per cent of households incurring expenditure on superannuation and interest payments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household type</th>
<th>Lone person</th>
<th>Couple only</th>
<th>Couple with children</th>
<th>Lone parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aged &lt;35 %</td>
<td>Aged 65+ %</td>
<td>Ref person &lt;35 %</td>
<td>Ref person 55-65 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superannuation &amp; life insurance</td>
<td>24.2 1.5</td>
<td>46.2 42.6 3.9</td>
<td>54.4 41.1 29.8</td>
<td>19.6 26.0 25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>61.7 11.2</td>
<td>82.5 70.6 20.3</td>
<td>81.0 74.6 68.5</td>
<td>50.9 61.0 60.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Interest includes interest on home mortgage, car loans, credit cards, personal loans
Superannuation includes superannuation and life insurance
The basis for calculating weekly costs for these items is based on the amount spent in the last payment for each expenditure item (that is, last payment of each type of interest, superannuation and life insurance expenditure). For more information on particular items see HES users guide.
The amount of money a family can devote to superannuation will vary at different points in the life course and for different family types. A lone parent family in which income is low and in which there are quite high levels of joblessness at certain points of the family life course will devote a smaller proportion of the family expenditure to superannuation than the two income couple family after children have left home. Table 17.5 indicates the share of the household income devoted to superannuation across different family types in households where some money is expended on superannuation or life insurance. Overall, of families that have any superannuation, 7.4 per cent of their expenditure went to superannuation. Young people, especially those without children spent an above average share on superannuation as did couples in their pre-retirement years when they had no children in the home. These households spent between 8.6 per cent to 9.9 per cent of their expenditure on superannuation and life insurance. Lone parents and couples with children spent well below the average share on superannuation and life insurance – between 6.7 per cent and 7.2 per cent. The lower expenditure that parents can devote to superannuation has implications for the ability of families with children to provide fully for themselves in later life.

Interest

Interest payments can add a significant burden to the household expenditure of some families. Older people were also less likely than others to have spent money on interest payments. This partly reflects the fact that relatively few older people were still paying interest on a housing loan but it also reflects a lower likelihood of older people having loans of any sort (see Table 17.7). Even when older people had debt, only a very small share of their income went to interest payments – just 1.4 per cent of the expenditure of older couples with debt went to interest payments.

Paying interest is linked to lifecycle and family stage. Those with younger children were the most likely to be paying a proportion of their income in interest – often reflecting their commitments to housing and car loans. Younger people and couples without children and those with dependent children were the most likely of all groups to pay interest with over 80 per cent spending part of their weekly income on interest payments (Table 17.4). Approximately 7 per cent of the weekly expenditure of these households went on interest payments (Table 17.5). Lone parent households were among the least likely to spend money on interest payments with around 60 per cent paying out money on interest (Table 17.4). However, lone parent households that did pay interest paid only a slightly lower proportion of their expenditure on interest than did couple households.

“Financial” expenditure (for example, superannuation, life insurance and interest) made up a larger proportion of household budgets (Table 17.3 and 17.5) than “fun” expenditure (for example alcohol, tobacco, pet care and gambling). Those who spent on superannuation and life insurance devoted 7.4 per cent of their budget to “financial” expenditure and those who had loans spent 5.5 per cent of their weekly expenditure on interest repayments.

Interest payments constituted a considerably larger part of the expenditure of younger people than older people. For example, 6.7 per cent of the weekly expenditure of lone people aged under 35 with loans, went on interest payments – more than double the proportion spent by lone people aged over 65. Similarly, among young couples and parents with dependent children an above average share of their weekly expenditure went to interest payments.

How do expenditure patterns of low income families differ from high income families?

While high income households spend a larger dollar amount on many items, this high dollar expenditure may still represent a smaller proportion of their total income.

The extent of spending differences between high and low income families is substantial. Table 17.6 represents the differences in expenditure of low income and high income families as ratios. A ratio of two means that a high income family spends twice as much in dollar terms as a low income family on a particular item.

Are women the big spenders?

While data are not readily available about who makes decisions about spending, time-use data indicates who does the purchasing in families. According to the 1997 Time Use survey, adults spend three quarters of an hour a day purchasing goods and services. Women spent more time than men each day on these activities – women typically were engaged in purchasing activities for 57 minutes a day compared to men who spent just 35 minutes a day shopping or purchasing. Part of this difference between men and women stems, no doubt, from the greater domestic responsibilities taken on by women.

The amount of time devoted to purchasing goods and services varies over the life course – especially among men (Figure 17.1). Purchasing occupies the most time for women when they are aged between 35 and 59 and declines sharply when they reach their seventies. Among men, the time they spend purchasing things gradually increases across the life course until their late sixties, after which the time spent shopping declines a little.

The decline in time spent shopping in later life probably reflects a declining capacity to go shopping and...
a declining need to shop. Once men and women reach their mid fifties the gender differences in the time devoted to purchasing narrows and by the time they are in their seventies men spend a little more time than women spending (Figure 17.1). This may reflect changing patterns once men retire – as they retire they take on more of the spending activities of the family, or shopping becomes a joint activity in later life.

**Do women do the spending in all types of households?**

While the amount of time spent purchasing goods and services varies across family types there is some consistency in the gender patterns across the different family types. Regardless of whether people live with a partner or whether they have children, women spend more time purchasing than do men. For example, lone women spent 56 minutes a day purchasing compared to lone men who spent 41 minutes a day. Lone mothers spent more time than lone fathers purchasing goods and services. This suggests that the lower time spent by men purchasing goods and services is not simply because their female partner is doing this for them.

Nevertheless, the gender gap in the time spent purchasing was greatest among couples – especially those with children when the gendered domestic division of labour is most evident. Among couples with dependent children, women spent almost double the time purchasing goods and services than did comparable men (Figure 17.2).

**Who uses loans?**

Spending on goods and services is, of course, dependent on having the money to spend. To what extent is spending dependent on borrowing money?

Patterns of borrowing vary widely depending on family type and stage in the life course. According to the 1998-99 Household Expenditure Survey, most older person households had no loans (Table 17.7). Of lone persons aged over 65, 95 per cent had no loans. Similarly, of couples in which the reference person was aged over 65, 91 per cent had no loans. One reason for the low rate of loans among older people is that most older people have paid off their home loan. Another factor will be that the lower incomes of older people will make it more difficult to obtain and service a loan.

### Table 17.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household type</th>
<th>Lone person Aged &lt;35</th>
<th>Lone person Aged 65+</th>
<th>Couple only Ref person &lt;35</th>
<th>Couple only Ref person 55-65</th>
<th>Couple only Ref person 65+</th>
<th>Couple with children All Children &lt;15</th>
<th>Couple with children All Children 15+</th>
<th>Lone parent All Children &lt;15</th>
<th>Lone parent All Children 15+</th>
<th>All households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superannuation &amp; life insurance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Interest includes interest on home mortgage, car loans, credit cards, personal loans. Superannuation includes superannuation and life insurance. The basis for calculating weekly costs for these items is based on the amount spent in the last payment for each expenditure item (that is, last payment of each type of interest, superannuation and life insurance expenditure). For more information on particular items see HES users guide.

### Table 17.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure ratio</th>
<th>Low income</th>
<th>High income</th>
<th>Expenditure ratio</th>
<th>Low income</th>
<th>High income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current housing costs</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Mortgages</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent payments</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Repairs and maintenance</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgage interest</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Domestic fuel and power</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairs and maintenance</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Food and non-alcoholic</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payments to contractors</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Meals out and fast food</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical care and health</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Accident and health</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insurance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>insurance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health practitioners' fees</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Medicines, pharmaceutical</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(includes specialists)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>products and therapeutic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appliances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Alcohol beverages</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco products</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Clothing and footwear</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household furnishings and</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Household services and</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equipment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>operation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household services and</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>Child care services</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home computer equipment</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Recreational fees and</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>charges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>charges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports fees and charges</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Holidays</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural fees and charges</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Education fees for primary</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and secondary schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Education fees for secondary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school education fees</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Loans were most common among couples with children. Of couples with children aged under 15, only a quarter had no loans while a quarter had two or more loans (Table 17.7). Young couples without children also had a high dependence on loans with 31 per cent of these young, childless couples having two or more loans. The high reliance on loans of these younger couples reflects the relatively high rate of home purchasing among such couples as well as loans for other purposes such as cars. Credit card use was also high among these family types. The other reason for the high usage of loans to finance spending is the greater ability of these age groups to service loans. Many of these families will have two incomes which means that they can qualify for loans.

Lone parents had a lower level of loans than did couples. More than half of the lone parents had no loans and less than 15 per cent had two or more loans. This lower rate of reliance on loans to finance spending partly reflects lower rates of home purchasing among lone parents. Higher levels of poverty among lone parents (p. 52-4) also means that such families have a poorer capacity to qualify for or service loans. Despite the lower reliance of lone parents on loans they nevertheless spend a similar proportion of their weekly budget as do couple families repaying loan interest.

Credit card use and interest is frequently cited as an ever growing source of debt in Australia. How widespread is the use of credit cards and do most users pay interest on their credit cards? Statistics from the 1998-99 Household Expenditure Survey reported in 2002 (ABS 2002k) indicate that in 1998-99:

- two thirds of households used a credit card.
- only a third of households paid interest on their credit card.
- of those who paid credit card interest, the weekly amount paid was $7.30.
- credit card use was lowest (about 45 per cent) in lone parent households and in older households.
- couple households had the highest level of credit card use with about three quarters of couple households using credit cards.

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- only a third of households paid interest on their credit card.
- of those who paid credit card interest, the weekly amount paid was $7.30.
- credit card use was lowest (about 45 per cent) in lone parent households and in older households.
- couple households had the highest level of credit card use with about three quarters of couple households using credit cards.
• couple households were also more likely than other households to pay interest on their credit card – just under half of couple households paid credit card interest compared to less than a third of other household types.

**Do we spend more than we earn?**

To a fair extent, lifetime spending is constrained by lifetime income. However, at certain stages of life families go into debt, rely on savings, realise assets or are assisted by other family members and friends. Financial stress can be an important source of family conflict and affect family wellbeing more generally. The capacity to save for a rainy day can provide an important buffer and assist families to cope with the anxieties of everyday life. The capacity to save and the ability to meet weekly expenses vary sharply between family types.

Younger couples without children have the greatest capacity to save. Over half (54 per cent) managed to save money most weeks while only 8 per cent overspent their weekly budget (Table 17.8). For many such couples these savings will provide a buffer later in the life course when their expenses rise because of children or their income drops due to family commitments. When couples have children their rate of saving declines. Of couples with children under 15, just a quarter managed to save each week while about 16 per cent overspent most weeks.

As children grow up the financial position of families improves. Of those couples where all the children are aged over 15, 40 per cent managed to save most weeks (Table 17.8). While this may reflect some reduction in some expenses (for example, lower housing repayment costs and possibly school fees) for such families, the increased saving capacity of these families is due more to the increased labour force participation of mothers as their children grow up.

Compared to other families, older couples and older lone people managed reasonably. Of lone older people just 11 per cent overspent their weekly income and just 13.7 per cent of older couples overspent most weeks. In contrast, about a third of these older households managed to put some money away most weeks (Table 17.8).

Lone parent households, especially those with children aged under 15 struggled the most. Over a quarter of lone parents with younger children spent more each week than they received while only about 12 per cent managed to save something most weeks. Once their children were older (aged over 15) the position of lone mothers improved considerably. The percentage of weekly overspenders dropped to 15 per cent while the percentage of savers almost doubled to 21 per cent (Table 17.8).

The shortage of money means that there are certain things that families have to go without. Often this means that basic spending has to be either deferred or done without.

Table 17.9 indicates that young people living on their own and lone parents with children aged under 15, struggled the most paying basic bills. Almost half the lone parents with younger children and over a quarter of lone people under the age of 35 had been unable to pay a utilities bill. Couples with younger children also often had difficulties paying utilities bills with more than 1 in 5 struggling to pay such bills. The same family types also struggled paying car registration and insurance.

The more difficult position of lone parents and lone younger people is shown in the percentages who have pawned or sold goods to raise money, gone without meals or were unable to heat their home. In all these areas couples, older people and lone parents with older children did better. If the full range of measures of financial stress are considered, lone parents with dependent children typically had difficulties in a whole range of spending areas. McColl, Pietsch and Gatenby (2001) have shown that 41 per cent of lone parents with dependent children face high levels of financial stress compared to 13.7 per cent of couples with dependent children. They also found that older people were the least likely to face high levels of spending stress with just 7.3 per cent of lone older people and 4.2 per cent of older couples being highly stressed in this regard.

---

**Note:**

Table 17.7: *Use of loans to finance spending by family type*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household type</th>
<th>No. of loans</th>
<th>Aged &lt;35</th>
<th>Aged 65+</th>
<th>Ref person &lt;35</th>
<th>Ref person 55-65</th>
<th>Ref person 65+</th>
<th>All children &lt;15</th>
<th>All children 15+</th>
<th>All children 15+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>532</td>
<td></td>
<td>1385</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>5046</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One factor that makes the spending position of lone parents with younger children more difficult is that even though more than 60 per cent experienced cash flow problems they had the greatest difficulty of all households in raising money in an emergency (Table 17.9). Almost half of these lone parents said that they could not raise money in an emergency – a much higher level of difficulty than any other family type. Less than 20 per cent of couples said they could not raise emergency money – probably a reflection of their generally better financial situation and more extensive family networks that could come to their financial assistance in an emergency.

While lone parents with at least some children under the age of 15 struggle the most to pay their bills, the position of lone parents with older children appears to improve substantially. On many measures of financial stress these lone parents with older children had only about half the incidence of financial difficulties as their counterparts with younger children. An important reason for this is the increased labour force participation of lone parents with older children. The labour force participation rates of lone mothers whose youngest child is aged 16 or over are very similar to those of couple mothers (see Gray, Qu, de Vaus and Millward, 2002).

Are we “outsourcing” domestic services?

One of the stresses reported in many families is the lack of time to fit all the necessary tasks of everyday living into the 24 hours of each day (p. 314-15). The time stress is due to many factors. These factors include the high rate of labour force participation of many couple mothers, long work hours, the increasing rate of lone parenthood and the time that is often required to raise children.

One response to these time pressures is to pay other people to undertake the necessary tasks of daily living. There has been a growth of services and products designed to assist with this time stress. There has been a rapid growth in food products that make it easier to prepare meals. In addition, take-away meals and eating out can also reduce the time burden of meal preparation. But other domestic services are also becoming available. Laundry services, gardening, child care and cleaning can all be purchased.

To what extent are families “outsourcing” these domestic tasks? Is outsourcing taking over from the “normal” method of performing domestic tasks which relies on unpaid labour from within the family? Is purchasing domestic tasks one way in which women are managing both their domestic work and their paid work?

Bittman, Meagher and Matheson (1998) have observed that women are now spending less time on domestic tasks and ask whether this is being achieved by paying other people to do the tasks they once did. They also challenge the common view that the outsourcing of domestic tasks is growing rapidly and is widespread.

What do the most recent statistics indicate? The 1998-99 Household Expenditure Survey shows that the number of households outsourcing domestic tasks and the amount spent on these tasks is relatively small and does not appear to have changed much over the last decade.

Cooking

There is no doubt that cooking is the most frequently outsourced domestic task. Table 17.10 reports the extent to which households pay for take-away meals, restaurant meals and school lunches but does not include the extent to which families purchased largely prepared meals to consume in the home. The Table shows that in the two weeks prior to the survey, 89 per cent of households had purchased meals prepared entirely outside the home. On average, families spent $38 each week in 1998-99 on these “outsourced” meals. With the exception of older person households, the rate of outsourcing meals was fairly even across household types. However, lone older people and older couples had lower rates of outsourcing meals (65 per cent and 81 per cent respectively).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household type</th>
<th>Lone person</th>
<th>Couple only</th>
<th>Couple with children</th>
<th>Lone parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aged &gt; 35%</td>
<td>Aged &lt; 35%</td>
<td>Ref person &lt;35%</td>
<td>Ref person 55-65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend more money than we get</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just break even most weeks</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to save money most weeks</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Paying for child care

Child care was the second most common area in which families pay for other people to assist with tasks that were once wholly or mainly performed without payment by family members. Naturally, this form of outsourcing was mainly confined to those families with young children. Of couples whose children were all under the age of 15, 43 per cent purchased child care at an average cost of $43 per week. Of lone parents with similarly young children 40 per cent purchased child care at an average weekly cost of $30 per week.

Gardening

Gardening is the next most common type of domestic work that was outsourced with 10.4 per cent of all households paying for some help with gardening-related work in the previous two weeks. Gardening help was most often purchased by lone, older person households where 16.7 per cent used such services in the previous two weeks at an average weekly cost of $15. With the exception of young, lone people and younger couples without children, about 10 per cent of other households purchased gardening services.

Laundry

Outsourcing laundry, which mainly consists of dry cleaning and clothing alterations was undertaken by 8 per cent of households in the previous two weeks at an average weekly cost of $9. Laundry outsourcing was most common in couple households – especially those where all children were aged over 15. Lone parents and lone person households were low purchasers of laundry services.

Cleaning

Despite the theorising in some of the sociological literature (see Bittman et al 1998 for a review of this) purchasing cleaning services (including ironing) is the least common of all the domestic services that were outsourced. According to the Household Expenditure Survey just over 4 per cent of households had purchased cleaning help in the previous two weeks. Older lone person households were by far the highest purchasers of cleaning services with 11.7 per cent having done so in the previous two weeks at an average weekly cost of $16. The next highest purchasers of domestic cleaning help were lone parents with children aged under 15 and over 15 followed by couples with at least some children aged under 15. Couples with young children who purchased cleaning services paid more than any other family type – paying an average of $29 each week.

How much does a child cost?

Rearing children can take a large share of household resources but views differ as to how these costs are best calculated. Disagreements about the cost of raising children lead to considerable conflict in arriving at consensus about setting levels of child support payments following family breakdown. Different estimates also affect views about the adequacy of government support for families raising children and can lead to very different estimates regarding the number of children who live in poverty.

Estimates of the cost of raising children will vary depending on what costs are included (for example, cost of getting bigger car, cost of bigger house), which child is included (1st children are more expensive than subsequent children), the age of the child, the sex of the child, whether the forgone income of mothers when children are younger is included and on many other factors. Estimates also vary according to whether actual expenditures are

---

Table 17.9  Indicators of spending stress by family type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household type</th>
<th>Lone person</th>
<th>Couple only</th>
<th>Couple with children</th>
<th>Lone parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aged &lt;35 %</td>
<td>Aged 65+ %</td>
<td>Ref person &lt;35 %</td>
<td>Ref person 55-65 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not pay utilities bill</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not pay registration/ insurance</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pawned or sold something</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went without meals</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to heat home</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought help from welfare organisation</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought financial help from friends/ family</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash flow problems in past year</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couldn’t raise emergency money</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

examined or estimates are based on what is deemed necessary for raising a child (budget standards approach). If this later approach is used then the cost of raising children will differ depending on the standard of living that is seen to be necessary.

**What do families spend on children?**

The National Centre for Economic Modelling (NATSEM) has used the 1998-99 Household Expenditure Survey to estimate the actual amount that parents spent raising children (Percival and Harding 2003). They estimated that the average Australian family will spend $448,000 dollars (2002 dollars) to raise two children up to the age of 20. This means that, on average, these two children cost $310 per week (23 per cent of the average gross weekly income) to raise.

However, these weekly costs will vary depending on the age of the child. Percival and Harding show that the amount that parents spend on a single child increases steadily as the child grows older. Table 17.11 shows that, on average, parents spent $102 per week on a single pre-schooler; $164 on a single child aged 5-9 and $209 per week on a child aged 10-14. Once a single child reaches the age of 15 the spending on that child increases sharply. Parents, on average spend $318 per week on a child aged 15 to 17 and $322 on a dependent child aged 18-24.

These amounts are only averages and vary depending on whether the family is a low or high income family (Table 17.11). However, regardless of the family income, the cost of raising children increases sharply as children grow older. Given this, it is hardly surprising that so many mothers return to work once their child is at school – the financial costs alone of raising children are enough to cause many mothers to need to earn money.

**How much does it cost to raise a child?**

The actual cost of raising children until they are adults depends on many factors as indicated above. Percival and Harding (2003) have constructed a hypothetical family, in which the woman marries when she is 28 and her husband is 29. They have one child a year after marrying and another two years later. After her first child the mother leaves the labour force but returns part time when her second child turns two, and recommences full time work when that child begins school at the age of five. Both parents remain married and work full time until each child finishes university and leaves home just before turning 21. Under this scenario they estimate that the parents would spend $448,000 (in 2002 dollars). Table 17.12 shows that transport, food and recreation are the three largest spending items for children – making up half of all the expenditure on children.

These estimates of the cost of children do not include costs as children move through their adult years but it should be noted that in many families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 17.10</th>
<th>Outsourcing of domestic services in previous two weeks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household type</td>
<td>Lone person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aged &lt;35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>$27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% outsourcing</td>
<td>85.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% outsourcing</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>$7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% outsourcing</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry</td>
<td>$7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% outsourcing</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning</td>
<td>$16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% outsourcing</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The basis for calculating weekly costs varies for different types of expenditure items. Some are based on the last 2 weeks some on the last payment, or expenditure over the last three or 12 months. For more information on particular items see HES users guide

a Based on those who have some outsourced expenditure in this category

b N are too low for reliable estimates or expenditure category not relevant
financial transfers continue to flow from parents to adult children for many years after they turn 20.

Cheaper by the dozen?
The amount that parents spend on a child depends on whether the child is a first or a subsequent child. The first child has the biggest impact on a family. Valenzuela (1999) has shown the effect of each child on the expenditure of a family (Figure 17.3). She expresses the amount spent by a couple without children as an index figure of one. A first child increased the expenditure of the couple by 25 per cent to an index of 1.254. A second child increased family expenditure by just another 6 per cent (less than a quarter than the first child) while a third child increased family expenditure by 10 per cent. Taken overall, three children added 41 per cent to the family’s budget.

Similar changes occur with a lone parent in that each child added less to the weekly budget than the previous child. However, the impact of each child on the budget of a lone parent was much greater than on the budget of a couple. A lone parent with one child spent 51 per cent more than a comparable person with no child (Figure 17.3). A lone parent with two children spent 12 per cent more than the lone parent with one child. The lone parent with three children spends 73 per cent more than a comparable lone person with no children.

There are two main types of reasons why second and subsequent children have less impact than the first child. First children will cost more because of the expenditure on capital items (for example, pusher, toys, books, clothes) which can be used for subsequent children. The second reason is that the presence of a second or subsequent child means that there is less money available per child. Expenditure required for a second child thus reduces the amount of money available for the first child. That is, second and subsequent children lead to a reduction of per child expenditures, not necessarily because second children are cheaper but because the limited amount of money available for children has to be spread more thinly.

How much do children need spent on them?
An alternative method of estimating the cost of children is to use the budget standards approach. This approach identifies what goods and services are needed by particular household types living at a particular time and location to achieve a specified standard of living (for example, basic standard, modest standard). The cost of each such item is then calculated and summed to arrive at a budget required to achieve a particular standard of living in a particular situation.

This approach results in many different estimates of the cost of raising a child so it is not possible to present a single figure. However, the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW calculated the budget standards required for a wide range of families. Some of these estimates are available in Saunders (1998) and McHugh (1999).

How much income do parents give up when they have children?
Not all the costs of children can be measured in terms of the actual financial outlays that parents make for their children. Another form of “spending” is forgone income that is due to having children. While the income opportunities of both men and women can be affected by family responsibilities, the income of mothers is most obviously affected by

---

**Table 17.11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of income</th>
<th>Average income $pw</th>
<th>0-4 $pw</th>
<th>5-9 $pw</th>
<th>10-14 $pw</th>
<th>15-17 $pw</th>
<th>18-24 $pw</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle income</td>
<td>1,195</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High income</td>
<td>2,426</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>1,324</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 1998-99 Household Expenditure Survey uprated to 2002 values (Percival and Harding 2003).*

---

**Table 17.12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st child</th>
<th>2nd child</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>20,900</td>
<td>15,900</td>
<td>36,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>50,100</td>
<td>25,300</td>
<td>75,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>40,400</td>
<td>28,300</td>
<td>68,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education &amp; child care</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>19,600</td>
<td>49,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel &amp; power</td>
<td>5,900</td>
<td>4,100</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>48,700</td>
<td>34,600</td>
<td>83,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>15,400</td>
<td>14,700</td>
<td>30,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furnishings &amp; equipment</td>
<td>12,400</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>20,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services &amp; operations</td>
<td>10,100</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>17,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>10,100</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>18,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>17,800</td>
<td>37,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>264,000</td>
<td>184,000</td>
<td>448,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 1998-99 Household Expenditure Survey uprated to 2002 values (Percival and Harding 2003). See paper for more details of the methodology and a description of the type of family.*
child rearing. These effects are due to time out of the workforce altogether, extended periods of part time work and promotion opportunities that are affected by child rearing responsibilities.

Estimates of the effect of children on the lifetime earnings of women have been made using 1997 data from the Australian National University Negotiating the Life Course Survey (Breusch and Gray 2003). These studies compare the earnings of mothers with that of comparable women without children.

Breusch and Gray (2003) estimate that mothers with one child on average are estimated, over a lifetime, to earn just 72 per cent of the income of a childless woman (Table 17.13). Subsequent children further increase the proportion of income foregone. Having a second child reduced lifetime earnings to 56 per cent of the income of a childless woman and a third child to 45 per cent.

While the impact of children on the lifetime income of women is very significant, the impact has nevertheless declined substantially in recent times (Table 17.14). This change has been especially noticeable among women with less than degree education. For example, in 1986 a woman who had completed secondary education and had one child was estimated to earn 52 per cent of the income of a comparable woman who had no children. By 1997, the similar woman was estimated to earn 72 per cent of the income of a similar childless woman.

Among women with incomplete secondary education, the negative impact of one child has changed even more sharply. In 1986, the mother of one child would earn 47 per cent of the income of a childless woman. By 1997 such a woman would earn 68 per cent of the income of a childless woman over a lifetime.

The negative impact of multiple children has also declined over the 1986-97 decade. For example, in 1986 a woman with a degree and three children was estimated to earn 42 per cent of the income of a childless woman with a degree. A similar woman in 1997 was estimated to earn almost 48 per cent of the lifetime income of a childless woman.

The main reason for the declining negative impact of children on a woman’s life time earnings is because of the increased labour force participation of women with young children. An illustration of this change in labour force participation of women with young children is that in 1986 a woman with a partner and one pre-school child (and typical characteristics of such women) had a probability of employment of 43.7 per cent. By 1996 a similar woman had a 58.1 per cent probability of employment (Gray, Qu, Renda and de Vaus, 2003).

How much do families spend on housing?

Next to having children, spending on housing is one of the largest spending items of Australian households. Almost 12 per cent of household expenditure is being committed to basic housing costs such as mortgage payments, housing interest, rates, rent and insurance.

Is housing really more expensive now?

Housing costs are now taking a much larger share of the weekly household budget than they were in the mid 1970s. Percival (1998) has used household
expenditure surveys to track the percentage change in the spending on particular housing costs between 1975-76 and 1997. More recent changes in housing costs with the property boom since 1997 and the lowering of interest rates may well mean that the figures reported by Percival do not represent the extent of changes by 2003.

Table 17.15 shows that when costs are expressed in constant 1997 dollars, these housing costs have risen by 77 per cent over the 21 year period. The increase in costs have been particularly pronounced in the cost of insurance, the cost of which has risen by 197 per cent in real terms over the period, and the cost of interest which has risen by 108 per cent over the period (although this has probably declined since 1997). Of particular note is the relatively modest increase, in real terms of the cost of repairs and home maintenance (6 per cent real increase) and water and council rates (30 per cent increase).

The increased cost of housing in real terms has been most pronounced among home purchasers and to a lesser extent among private renters. Table 17.16 shows that for home purchasers the weekly cost of housing has increased from $131 per week to $245 per week (an 88 per cent real increase). By 1997, private renters were paying 24 per cent more in real terms on housing than in 1975-76 and owners were paying 12 per cent more. Households in government rental experienced no increase in housing costs in real terms over the same period.

These changes indicate that over the period 1975-76 to 1997 that the housing costs of home purchases increased at a much faster rate than costs for households in different tenure types (Table 17.16). However, it is important not to overstate the deterioration in the position of home purchasers in financial terms as there has also been a substantial increase in the capital value of the homes they are purchasing. While home purchasers are outlaying a greater proportion of their incomes on housing they are also ending up with an increasingly valuable asset. While the housing costs of renters have been relatively stable in real terms these households are not reaping the benefits of the rising capital value of housing.

Which families spend most on housing?

The increase in housing costs has been much more pronounced among some household types than others – largely because some household types are much more likely than others to be home purchasers. Figure 17.4 is based on figures calculated by Percival (1998) from the household expenditure
surveys. It shows that the increase in real housing costs has been especially sharp for couples with dependent children followed by younger couples without dependents. Older single people have also experienced significant rises in household costs. Aged couples, however, have experienced a decline in real housing costs over the period and younger single people have experienced only a very modest increase in real housing costs. The decline in housing costs of older couples most probably reflects the high rate of home ownership among older couples. Among younger singles, the lower rate of increase probably reflects the lower rate of increases in the cost of rental housing.

**Endnotes**

1. These data were collected before the introduction of the Goods and Services tax in 2000. This reform altered the rates of income tax paid across different households. These tax expenditure figures do not include indirect taxes.

2. Since these data were collected before the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax in 2000 the amount spent on food will underestimate the proportion of expenditure on food as the average rate of taxation on food items increased with the introduction of this tax. This may affect some of the relativities between the proportions spent by different family types.

3. Superannuation, life insurance and interest expenditure is based on the amount paid in the most recent payment.

4. The child may incur more than 25 per cent additional expenditure but a couple with children will normally cut back on other costs so that the additional expenditure with a child increases by about 25 per cent.

---

**Highlights**

- Across all households, income tax is the single biggest item of expenditure followed by food, transport and then housing costs.

- Housing costs constitute a much larger share of the expenditure of younger people than older people.

- Only a third of households spent money on life insurance or superannuation.

- 60 per cent of households were spending money on interest payments.

- Almost half of all households spend money weekly on a pet.

- Almost half of all households spend money most weeks on gambling.

- A third of households spend money on tobacco while 60 per cent spend money regularly on alcohol.

- Regardless of living arrangements women spend more time than men purchasing goods and services.

- Loans are used by over half of all households to assist with expenditure but very few older households have loans of any sort. Younger families are far more likely to use loans.

- Two thirds of households use a credit card but only a third of households regularly pay interest on their credit card.

- Approximately 15 per cent of households regularly spend more money each week than they earn while a third are able to save money most weeks. Saving is least common among lone parents and older people.

- Although households can spend money buying in domestic services such as cooking, gardening, cleaning etc, with the exception of purchasing cooking services relatively little use is being made of these services. For example, only 4.3 per cent of households pay for domestic cleaning and 10.4 per cent pay for gardening services.

- For families that have children, rearing children is a very considerable cost. Although estimates of the cost of children vary according to the method of estimation, one reputable estimate is that in 2002 dollars it costs $264,000 to raise a first child, $184,000 to raise the second.

- The amount spent per child declines as the number of children in a family increases.

- Depending on the number of children a woman has and her level of education, mothers forego a great deal of income as a result of having children. Over a lifetime, a woman with one child can expect to earn just 72 per cent of the income of a childless woman.

- Despite the high levels of foregone income that mothers experience, the impact of having children on a mother’s lifetime earnings has declined substantially since 1986.

- Housing costs for home purchases have increased by close to 80 per cent (in real terms) since the mid 1970s. Private renters have also experienced considerable increases in real housing costs while government renters have experienced no increase in housing costs in real terms.
18

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Time is one of the valuable but finite resources we have available. The way in which we allocate time can reflect levels and patterns of inequality in much the same way as does the allocation and use of other resources such as money. Increasingly, in recent years time-use studies have been conducted to explore the way in which people use this valuable resource. This chapter explores the way in which contemporary Australian men and women use their time. It concentrates on the ways in which time-use differs between men and women, and how it varies across different family types and at different stages of the life course. In this way we can see the ways in which time-use is allocated differently according to these key family characteristics.

The chapter also examines for whom Australian adults spend their time. To what extent is time-use directed towards other family members? Do Australians spend most of their time doing things for people at home or outside the home? How much time do people spend doing things for people beyond their family?

A further aspect of time-use in Australian society is the shortage of time. Many families consist of two people who are employed and trying to combine their employment commitments with child rearing and other responsibilities. How do these families manage with their time? How stressed are they? The growth of lone parent families represents another group of families where time is likely to be at a premium – where one parent has to do many of the household tasks that are shared in two parent families. How time stressed are lone parent families?

**Which activities take up most of the day?**

The 1997 Australian Time Use Survey classified people’s time-use into nine broad categories. In most of this chapter these broad categories are used. Table 18.1 briefly describes each of these time-use categories.

Time-use is classified into time devoted to primary activities and to secondary activities. Primary activities are the main activity in which the person is engaged at a particular point of time. Secondary activities are other activities that were being undertaken at the same time as the main activity. An example of the two time-uses is where a parent is preparing a meal (primary activity) but is also keeping their eye on their children (secondary activity) at the same time (ABS 1998d).

Since personal care includes sleeping and eating, dressing and personal hygiene it is hardly surprising that it takes more time in the day than any other type of activity – 11.2 hours per day on average. The next most time consuming activity after personal care is recreation and leisure – this takes up about 8.3 hours per day as a primary activity. Paid work takes up 3.4 hours per day as a primary activity. This appears to be a low figure but it must be remembered that this is an average that includes all those with no paid work and includes weekends and holidays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 18.1 Time-use classification</th>
<th>Types of activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Care</td>
<td>Sleeping and rest, personal hygiene, health care, eating and drinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment related</td>
<td>Working in paid jobs, looking for work, travel to and from work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Attending education courses, homework, job related training, travel to and from education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic activities</td>
<td>Food and drink preparation and clean up, laundry and clothes care, cleaning, other housework, pet care, gardening, home maintenance, household management (paperwork, bills, budgeting, rubbish removal etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>Physical and emotional care of children, teaching and disciplining, playing, reading, talking, child minding, travel and communication related to children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchasing</td>
<td>Purchasing goods and services and the associated travel and communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary work</td>
<td>Caring for the emotional and physical needs of adults, helping others and doing favours, unpaid voluntary work and the associated travel and communication [cooking and housework for other people is not included in voluntary work but as domestic work]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and community interaction</td>
<td>Socialising, visiting cultural and entertainment venues, attending sporting event, religious activities, community participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation and leisure</td>
<td>Sport and outdoor activities, games, hobbies, arts and crafts, reading, watching TV, listening to music, radio etc, using internet, attendance at recreational courses, free time and the associated communication and travel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Domestic work and child care are the next most time consuming activities taking up an average of 2.5 hours per day as a primary activity – across the whole population. Child care takes an average of two hours per day (averaged across all people, not just those with young children). Social and community participation and buying things – each take 48 minutes per day. Education (25 minutes) and voluntary work (12 minutes) take up relatively little of our time overall.

These global averages hide a great deal of variation. Not only does the time spent on different activities vary according to gender (for example, paid work, domestic activities and child care), many activities are very time consuming at certain points of the life course and not at other points (for example, child care, education). Other activities are more time consuming in some types of families than in others (for example, child care, domestic work). These differences are explored throughout this chapter.

Do women spend their time differently to men?

Time-usage has been used as an indication of the extent to which our society and households are gendered. Since time is a resource and different activities are differentially valued, gender differences in time-use have frequently been used as an indication of gender inequality. Even where time-use does not reflect inequality, gender differences in time-use can reflect the extent to which various types of activities reflect a gendered division of labour.

Figure 18.1 reports the average number of hours per day that men and women spend on each of the nine types of activity as the primary activity.

At a general level, gender differences are most evident in the amount of time spent in paid work (2.4 hours across all women and 4.6 hours across all men); domestic work (3.3 hours for women and 1.7 for men); child care (2.0 for women and 0.7 for men) and purchasing (1.0 hour for women and 0.6 hours for men). When examined across all people aged 15 and older, men and women spend a reasonably similar amount of time on education, voluntary work, social and community participation and on recreational and leisure activities.

How does life stage affect the way time is used?

The time spent on different activities varies considerably according to a person’s stage in life and their family circumstances. In the analysis below the total time spent on activities, regardless of whether the activity was a primary or secondary activity, is reported.

It will come as little surprise that Table 18.2 shows that young people aged under 35 spent the most time, on average, in paid work while lone parents with dependent children and people aged over 65 spent the least time. Nor is it surprising that lone people aged under 35 and parents with dependent children spent more time on education than other people.

Domestic work was most time consuming for older people – those aged over 65 spent about 3.5 hours per day on domestic work followed by couple only households. This higher level of domestic work in such households probably reflects the absence of as many competing demands such as demands stemming from education, children and employment.

The time spent on purchasing, voluntary work and on social and community activities as a primary activity is fairly constant across the different family and household types in Table 18.2. The amount of time spent on leisure and recreation is also reasonably even across the life stage groups. However, those aged over 65 spent more time engaged in these activities than any other group – no doubt due to fewer competing demands from child care, employment, and education.
Does paid work take all our time?
While the average time per day spent on paid work is just 3.4 hours, this varies widely according to age, gender and stage in the life course.

Young men and women living with a partner but without children spent the most time on paid work. Including weekends and holidays, these childless partnered young men worked 6.3 hours per day and comparable women worked 5.1 hours a day. If those who did not have any paid work at all were excluded these figures would be higher (Table 18.3).

Partnered men with non dependent children and those aged 35-64 and without children spent less time on paid work than those with younger children. This is partly because of a higher proportion of men in this age group who had retired or worked part time.

As children grow older, mothers increased the time they devoted to paid work to about three hours per day – a considerable increase from the 2.2 hours among women with dependent children. Among women, being a lone mother or a couple mother made no difference to the average amount of time devoted to paid work (Table 18.3).

How many people work for free?
Although the amount that people are paid for their work is widely regarded as a measure of success and of the value of the work, a great deal of work in our society remains unpaid. A large proportion of this unpaid work is undertaken by women and older people and this time is frequently taken for granted and not regarded as “real” work.

However, if it was not for the unpaid work of many people, the same activities would have to be paid for or would not be undertaken – often at considerable social cost (for example, child care, voluntary work, caring for people with disabilities). It is therefore instructive to see how much time people spend on unpaid work and to estimate the dollar value of this work.

How much unpaid work do individuals do?
Table 18.4 reports how many people did unpaid work during the two days for which they reported their time-use patterns in the 1997 Time Use Survey. While nearly all men and women did some unpaid work within their own household, over these two days far fewer did unpaid work for people outside their household. In all age groups more women than men undertook unpaid work for people outside their household – for those under the age of 64 this gender difference was large with far more women than men undertaking this type of unpaid work.

Care must be taken in interpreting these percentage figures. Since they only record activities over a two
day period they will underestimate the percentage who ever undertake these activities. Nevertheless, at an overall level, these percentages provide a useful indication of the relative frequency with which adults engage in these types of activities.

However, the percentage of people undertaking some unpaid work gives little sense of the amount of unpaid work or its economic worth. Table 18.5 converts the amount of time spent on unpaid work into the dollar value of this work (see de Vaus, Gray and Stanton 2003 for the methodology). This shows that in each age group the dollar value of the unpaid work of women is substantial and is higher than that of men. The higher per capita value of the unpaid work of women is particularly marked in the main child rearing years when women are aged 25-44. In these years the average value of the unpaid work of all women in this age group was $45,917 per year in 1997.

**What is the total value of unpaid work to the nation?**

When the value of the unpaid work of individuals is generalised to the population it can be seen that the total value of unpaid work is considerable. In 1997 women performed unpaid work valued at $225 billion while men did $111 billion of unpaid work. While the child rearing years are the period when men and women undertake the most unpaid work, these figures also show the considerable contribution of older people through their unpaid work. Women aged 65 and over did over $34 billion worth of unpaid work in 1997 and older men did over $15 billion worth of unpaid work in 1997.

**Who does the work around the house?**

Most domestic work in households is unpaid (see p. 270-71). In a society in which the worth of work is frequently measured in terms of the amount of income it attracts, there is a massive undervaluing of the contribution of those who contribute through their unpaid domestic labour. This section, rather than reporting the time spent on various domestic activities, reports the financial value of the time spent on unpaid domestic work. The figures below are based on a pay rate of $12.15 per hour – the standard rate for domestic labour in 1997.

**What is the financial value of the domestic work of women?**

Nationally, in 1997, women undertook unpaid domestic work to the value of $130.13 billion per annum. Men undertook unpaid domestic work to the value of $70.77 billion per annum.

Figure 18.2 reports per capita the dollar value of the unpaid domestic work of women and men over a year. It shows that in 1997 in each age group, women undertook more domestic work than did men and the value of this work by women per year was correspondingly higher (Figure 18.2). Among women, the value of their unpaid domestic work peaked among those aged 55-64 where the annual per capita value of unpaid domestic work in 1997 dollars was $18,762. The value then declined slightly among older women but remained substantial at $16,017 per year per woman among women age 75 and over.

Among men and women aged 15 to 64, women did about twice the amount of domestic work than men did. After the age of 64 the gap in the value of the domestic work of men and women narrows.

Table 18.4 Percentage doing unpaid work in previous two days by gender and age (primary or secondary activities) 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>15-24</th>
<th>25-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55-64</th>
<th>65-74</th>
<th>75+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own household</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>98.9</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>98.4</td>
<td>99.4</td>
<td>96.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>For people outside own household</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family outside own household</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non family outside household</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own household</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>92.5</td>
<td>94.4</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>99.2</td>
<td>99.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside own household</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family outside own household</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non family outside household</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes: The sum of family outside own household and non family outside household is greater than for people outside own household given that people can do both types of outside own household.

Unpaid work is defined as Food & drink preparation & clean up; Laundry, ironing & clothes care; Other housework; Gardening & lawn care, cleaning grounds etc; Home maintenance; Household management, associated communication & travel; Child-care, associated communication & travel; Purchasing, associated communication & travel; Adult personal care; Volunteer work, associated communication & travel. See: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), (2000), Unpaid Work and the Australian Economy 1997, ABS Catalogue No. 5240.0, ABS, Canberra.
substantially but women continued to do more domestic work.

The dollar value of the unpaid domestic work of men was considerably less than that of women. For men up to age 64 the value of male domestic labour was approximately half that of similar aged women. However, the value of the unpaid domestic work of men increased the older a man was and continued to grow so that the value of the domestic work of men aged 75 and over was the highest of all male age cohorts – these men contributed an average of $13,735 per man in unpaid domestic work in 1997.

The different patterns of domestic labour of men and women as they grow older results in a narrowing of the gender gap in the time devoted to (and therefore the dollar value of) domestic work. This narrowing is especially noticeable in the age groups over 65 where the gender gap rapidly narrows.

Among these age groups, the oldest men, aged 75 and over, increased their domestic contributions by gardening more, spending more time on house maintenance (they did $1,500 more of such work each year than did 55–65 year olds) by doing more meal preparation ($1,000 more a year) and a little more laundry. On the other hand, the oldest women (75+) reduced their cooking contributions by about $1,000 per annum, did $1,200 less laundry work and $500 less outside domestic work than did 55–64 year old women (Figure 18.3).

The narrowing of the gap in domestic labour in later life most probably reflects the impact of retirement on men. As they retire their contribution to domestic work increased and this enabled their wives to do less. These patterns also challenge the notion that today’s younger men and women are sharing domestic work equally (those aged 25 to 44). The gender gaps in domestic contributions of younger men and women were certainly greater than among the older age cohorts.

Do men and women do different things at home?

While there is a substantial gender gap in the amount and value of unpaid domestic work performed by men and women, the gender differences in domestic work are even greater when particular types of domestic work are examined. Even though men spend less time on domestic work than women, does the domestic work they undertake differ from that which women perform?

Overall men spent a much larger proportion of their domestic workload on outside work and household management while women spent a much larger proportion on inside housework, laundry and cooking (Figure 18.4).

Household management and outside work made up a much larger share of the domestic workload of men (45 per cent of total domestic time) than of women (13 per cent of domestic load). On the other hand, cooking, cleaning up, laundry, cleaning and other inside housework made up 78 per cent of the domestic work of women compared to
41 per cent of that of men. In other words, not only did women spend much more time than men on domestic work, they spent that time very differently to that which men did.

Inside housework and cooking took up a similar share of the domestic load of women fairly much regardless of their age (Figure 18.4). Similarly, inside domestic work played a much smaller part of the domestic load of men than of women across all age groups. However, inside domestic work took up a larger proportion of the domestic load of younger men (close to half) but this declined to just above a third of the domestic load of men in their mid fifties to mid seventies. It is not clear whether these differences between younger and older men reflect changes that take place as men age or whether they reflect a different pattern among today’s younger men.

Outside work and household management occupied a much larger share of a man’s domestic workload than it did for women across all age groups (Figure 18.5). Older men (aged 45 and over) devoted a larger share of their domestic work to outside and home management tasks (about half their domestic workload) than did younger men where these tasks occupied about 40 per cent of their domestic workload. Across all age groups women devoted far less of their domestic time to outside tasks and household management.

**Do women do more domestic work even when they work full time?**

The amount of domestic work that is undertaken will be affected by the amount of work to be done, the time available to do it, the availability of other people to help and the inclination to do domestic work.

One reason why women spend more time on domestic work is likely to be that they are less likely to be in the full time labour force. Certainly, women who were employed full time did less domestic work (2.3 hours daily) than part timers (3.3 hours daily) and those not in the paid labour force (3.9 hours daily). However this is not a sufficient explanation for gender differences in the amount of domestic work.
undertaken. Women did considerably more domestic work than men even when they had similar levels of workforce participation. This is clearly seen in Table 18.6 which shows that, among men and women who worked full time, women still did considerably more domestic work each day – women working full time did 2.3 hours domestic work per day compared to comparable men who did 1.4 hours domestic work per day. Similarly, women working part time did 3.3 hours of housework each day compared to part time employed men who did 1.4 hours of domestic work a day. Women not in the labour force did 3.9 hours of domestic work each day compared to 2.5 hours by not employed men.

The gender gap in domestic work extends across the various family types and life stages. For example, among full time workers, young partnered women without children did 1.9 hours a day compared to young partnered men who did 1.2 hours daily. Full time employed, partnered women with dependent children undertook 2.7 hours domestic work a day compared to full time employed, partnered men with dependent children who did 1.5 hours daily (Table 18.6).

The same pattern applied among part time workers and those not in the labour force. For example, of part time workers, partnered women with dependent children undertook 3.3 hours of domestic work daily compared with comparable men who did 1.3 hours per day. Lone mothers not in the labour force who had dependent children did 3.6 hours of domestic work a day compared to lone fathers with dependent children who did one hour a day.

While gender differences in the amount of domestic work undertaken persist, even when men and women have similar types of workforce participation, working, nevertheless has some impact. The gender differences in domestic labour were smallest between men and women who worked full time. While full time employed women did 0.9 hours more domestic work a day than full time employed men this was a smaller gap than between other men/women comparisons. For example:

- Part time employed women did 1.9 hours a day more domestic work than full time employed men and one hour a day more than full time employed women.

![Figure 18.5 Percentage of domestic work on outside work and household management by gender and age, 1997 (primary and secondary activities)](image)

![Table 18.6 Hours per day on domestic work by family/life stage, gender and workforce participation (primary and secondary activities)](table)
Not employed women did 2.5 hours a day more domestic work than full time employed men, 1.3 hours more than full time employed women and 35 minutes a day more than part time employed women.

How fair do men and women think the workload is in the home?

Gender differences in the domestic division of labour have been used widely to indicate the degree of gender equality in households. It has been argued that equality in the amount of time spent by men and women on domestic tasks is one indicator of domestic equality in homes.

Equating the amount of time on a particular type of task with equality in a relationship is a potentially misleading approach since it often ignores what other activities each individual is contributing to the household. More recently, researchers have gone beyond simply comparing the amount of time men and women spend on particular tasks to exploring their perceptions of the fairness and feelings of satisfaction with the domestic division of labour (Lennon and Rosenfield 1994; Thompson 1991; DeMaris and Longmore 1996; Dempsey 1997; Baxter and Western 1996).

Couples do not, by any means, equate equal time distribution with the fairness of the arrangements. Nor is satisfaction dependent on an equal division of domestic labour. Both Australian and overseas studies indicate that around three quarters of women are satisfied with a very uneven division of domestic labour and regard an unequal distribution as being fair (Baxter and Western 1997; Dempsey 1997).

In the 2001 wave of the HILDA survey, partnered men estimated, on average, that they did 25.5 hours per week on domestic and child care tasks while partnered women estimated that they did 44.4 hours per week on the same tasks.

The HILDA survey collected information from both partners in households that contained a couple. This information enables an examination of how much time each partner spent on domestic work and how fair both partners in a couple thought the domestic division of labour was. It is also possible to see to what extent his perceptions about the fairness of the division of labour match with her perceptions of its fairness.

Who did the most domestic work? The analysis indicated that:

- In three quarters of couples she did more domestic work each week than he did.
- On average, couples estimated that the she did 15.1 hours of domestic and child care per week more than did he did.

This difference says nothing, in itself, about the perceived fairness of these differences. Table 18.7, however, provides direct evidence about the different perceptions of male and female partners regarding the different amount of time spent on domestic work. This table shows that:

- Partnered women were much more likely to think that they did more than their fair share (56.2 per cent). Only 4.1 per cent thought that they did less than their fair share.
- While over half the women thought that they did more than their fair share, only 23.2 per cent of men thought they (that is, men) did less than their fair share.
- 60 per cent of men thought they (that is men) did their fair share while just 40 per cent of the women partners thought that things were shared fairly.

How often do both partners agree that they both do their fair share? In just 29 per cent of couples in the HILDA survey did both partners agree that they did their fair share of the domestic work. In the other 71 per cent they either disagreed about who did their fair share or agreed that one person did more than was fair.

Table 18.8 shows the extent to which female partners share their male partner’s view about whether he did his fair share of work around the home. It shows that in couples where the male partner felt...
he did his fair share, only half their female partners agreed. The other half of the female partners said that they (that is, she) did more than her fair share which, by implication means they thought he did less than his fair share (Table 18.8).

When a male thought he was doing more than his fair share, his female partner thought that she was doing more than her fair share in 45 per cent of cases. By implication this means that when he thinks he’s doing more than his fair share, she thinks he is doing less than his fair share. She only agrees that he is doing much more than his fair share in 6.9 per cent of cases (Table 18.8).

Clearly, in the typical couple, the male and female partner have different views as to what constitutes a fair share of the domestic work. Where the male partner thinks he’s doing his fair share, his female partner frequently thinks that he is doing less than his fair share.

So, in the typical couple, what does he think is a fair share and what does she think is a fair share? We can get some insight into this by looking at the reported differences in hours of domestic work in particular circumstances.

- Men who think they do much more than their fair share typically spend about 1.2 hours more on domestic work than their female partner.
- Women who feel they do much more than their fair share typically report doing 25.7 hours more domestic work per week than their male partner.
- Men who report doing their fair share typically do 13.6 hours less domestic work per week than their female partner.
- Women who feel that they do their fair share report doing 10.6 hours more domestic work per week than their male partner.

It would appear therefore that the typical couple is one in which they would regard it as fair for the female partner to do between 10.6 and 13.6 hours more domestic and child care work each week than the male partner does. Part of the reason why couples regard this difference in domestic work as fair may be that in judgments about fairness they are including time spent on other activities such as paid employment.

**Do men and women spend the same total time on the combination of paid work, child care and domestic work?**

We have seen gender differences in the amount of time spent on paid employment, domestic work and child care. These different types of activities have been explored separately. But in many cases, separating these types of activities may be artificial and in many households the division of labour between men and women will be sorted out as part of a fuller package of time-use. Part of the “deal” in many households will be that one partner (usually the woman) will spend more time on domestic and child care work while the other partner (usually the man) will spend more time on paid employment.

Do gender differences persist at different points of the life course when the “package” of paid employment, domestic work and child care are considered together? The short answer is yes, but the extent varies widely depending on the life course/family stage (Figure 18.6).

According to the 1997 Time Use Survey, women spent 7.8 hours a day on paid work, domestic work and child care while men spent 7.1 hours on these activities. The time consumed by this set of activities was greatest among those in couple families with dependent children. Partnered women with
dependent children spent 9.7 hours per day on the employment/home/child package while men in these family types spent 8.6 hours on these activities – one hour a day less than the mothers (Figure 18.6).

Lone mothers with dependent children had the next heaviest time commitment to work, home and children spending an average of 9.1 hours a day on these activities.

Families with dependent children clearly had the heaviest combined load of employment, child care and domestic work and this load was heavier among women. Men and women in households in which there were no children or no dependent children, all devoted a similar amount of time to the work/home/child package – between six to seven hours per day on average. Older men and women, regardless of whether they were partnered or alone, devoted the least amount of time to employment, domestic work and child care.

Is leisure more time consuming than work?

While adults spent an average of 8.3 hours a day on recreation and leisure, some leisure activities are far more common than others. In 1997, the average person in Australia spent:

- 2.7 hours per day watching TV or videos.
- 1.5 hours per day listening to music and radio.
- 35 minutes a day reading (including newspapers).
- Half an hour per day playing sport.
- 25 minutes daily on hobbies, games, arts and craft.
- 35 minutes per day of free time.

With the exception of sport, men and women spent their leisure time in very similar ways – men spent slightly more time per day on each type of activity but the basic time distribution across the different recreational activities was very similar for both men and women (Figure 18.7).

Who reads?

In the 1997 Time Use Survey, older men and women spent more time than younger people reading each day. Men and women aged 65-74 spent about an hour a day reading and those aged over 75 spent towards one and a half hours reading (Figure 18.8). In contrast, those in their twenties and thirties spent less than half an hour a day reading. Until men reached retirement age, men and women spent about the same amount of time each day reading but after retirement men spent more time than women reading.

It is not certain why older people read more. Part of the reason may be that they have more unstructured time. It is not clear whether people read more as they grow older or whether the higher levels of reading among today’s older people simply reflects a higher level of reading in that age cohort. There is no certain way of knowing whether today’s younger people will carry their current levels of reading through into later life.
Does TV dominate our leisure time?
The lower level of reading among younger people is not simply because they spent more time watching TV and videos. Indeed, the younger age groups watched less TV than the older groups (Figure 18.9). The age groups that read the most also watched the most TV. Men and women aged 65 and over watched about 3.7 hours of TV a day. TV watching was at its lowest when men and women were aged 35-44 but the time devoted to TV steadily increased from the mid-forties onwards (Figure 18.9). In most age groups, men spent a little more time than women watching TV. Women with dependent children spent the least time of all life stage groups watching TV followed by younger people who lived on their own.

Are men really obsessed with sport?
In the 1997 Time Use Survey men spent considerably more time per day playing sport than did women. Overall, women spent 23 minutes a day playing sport while men spent 37 minutes a day – 60 per cent more time per day than women. The gender gap in time spent playing sport was greatest among young people aged 15-24 (26 minutes for women compared with 52 for men) and when they were aged 65-74 (27 minutes women and 49 minutes for men). In most other age groups men spent about 10 minutes a day more playing sport than similarly aged women (Figure 18.10). The gender differences in the time spent playing sport persisted at all life and family type stages.

Does anyone have any spare time?
On average men had 37 minutes free time a day compared with women who had half an hour a day of free time. The amount of free time people have depends on their age, gender and their family stage (Figure 18.11). Young people living on their own have the most free time – males have an hour a day and females have three quarters of an hour free each day. Lone older people and older couples (aged 65 or more) have the next greatest amount of free time. Parents with dependent children have the least free time – around 25 minutes a day. Perhaps surprisingly, lone parents with dependent children had about the same amount of free time each day as did couple parents with dependent children.

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**Figure 18.9** Hours per day watching TV/videos by gender and age (primary and secondary activities)

**Figure 18.10** Minutes per day spent on sport by gender and family type (primary and secondary activities)

*Source: 1997 Time Use Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997e).*

*Note: Lone father estimates are unreliable because of the small number of cases.*
Who does voluntary work?

**How much is voluntary work worth?**

By its very nature voluntary work is unpaid work. It is instructive, in this context, to estimate the financial value of the unpaid voluntary work in the Australian population. Using an average pay rate of $13.73 per hour and the amount of time devoted to voluntary work in the 1997 Time Use Survey, the total value of voluntary work in Australia in 1997 is estimated to be $9.4 billion per annum.5

These estimates do not include all the unpaid work that people did in the wider community – if the value of work such as caring for adults and others outside of the family is added to the value of voluntary work as defined in the ABS time-use classification, the annual value of voluntary work increases to $10.8 billion per annum.6

In 1997 the per capita value of voluntary work as classified by the ABS Time Use Survey was $669 per year – $685 by women and $652 by men.6

The amount of time spent on voluntary work by men and women and thus its dollar value differs at different points in the life course (Table 18.9). For women, the peak ages for voluntary work were from 45 to 74. The per capita value of the voluntary work of these female volunteers varied from $3,779 to $4,634 per year. Although the oldest women aged over 75 had a relatively low volunteering rate (11.6 per cent), the annual value of the voluntary work of these older women was the highest for any age group of women or men ($5,759).

Among men, the peak ages for voluntary work were from 55 to over 75. These men tended to do less voluntary work per person than did similarly aged women. Nevertheless, these older male volunteers contributed between $3,000 to $5,500 per annum through their unpaid voluntary work (Table 18.9). The level of male voluntary work increased immediately after the normal retirement age of 65. The annual per capita value of contributions of these men was $5,681 per annum in unpaid work.

**Do people have any time for their family?**

One way of thinking about time-use is to distinguish between time directed to family members and to people beyond the family. To what extent is...
time allocation family focused? The following results indicate the proportion of people’s time that is directed to family members in their home, family members beyond their home and to non family members. The time spent in paid employment and on personal care (sleeping eating etc) is excluded from these calculations.

Table 18.10 shows that, in the 1997 Time Use Survey, the bulk of time was spent on activities that people construed as being for themselves. Overall, respondents in the Time Use Survey indicated that:

- 14.4 per cent of their time was spent on activities for other members of their household.
- Just under 1 per cent of time (above and beyond the time on personal care and employment) was spent on activities for family members living in other households.
- 3.8 per cent of time was directed to non family members.

Women spent a greater proportion of their time than men on other members of their own household and family members overall:

- 18.5 per cent of the time of women compared to just 9.3 per cent of the time of men was for other members of the household.
- Women spent almost twice as much time as men on members of their family living elsewhere;
- Overall, women spent twice as much of their time on family members than did men (19.7 per cent compared with 10 per cent).
- Excluding the time in paid work, men and women devoted about the same proportion of their time to non family members such as friends and other community members.

Apart from the time people spent on activities for themselves, women spent over five times more time on other family members than they directed to non family members such as friends, neighbours and the wider community (19.7 per cent compared with 3.7 per cent of their time). In contrast, (excluding employment) men spent just two and half times more time on family members than on non family members (10 per cent compared with 4 per cent).

The amount of time a person spent on activities for themselves varied across the life course (Table 18.11). Doing things for oneself took up the smallest proportion of the time of parents with dependent children. For these parents, about three quarters of their time was spent on activities they said were for themselves. This compares with figures between 85 to 95 per cent for younger and older people without children.

Among those with dependent children there were clear differences in the amount of time that mothers and fathers spent on self-related activities. Partnered women with dependent children spent 69 per cent of their time for self-related activities compared with comparable fathers who spent 82 per cent of their time in this way. Lone mothers with dependent children spent 74 per cent of their time on self-related activities compared with lone fathers who spent 90 per cent of their non work time in this way.

The amount of time directed to other family members was also closely tied to family type and life stage. People with dependent children spent about 20 per cent of their time (excluding employment and personal care) doing things for other household members. Partnered mothers of dependent children spent twice the share of their time doing things for others in the household than did similar fathers (27 per cent of time compared with 13 per cent).

Young and older couples without children spent about 10 per cent of their time doing things directly for their partner.

Regardless of stage in the life course, only a relatively small proportion of time was devoted to doing things for people outside of the family (Table 18.10). Young lone people spent the largest share of

### Table 18.11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Couple only &lt;35 %</th>
<th>Lone person &lt;35 %</th>
<th>Couple, dependent children</th>
<th>Lone parent, dependent children</th>
<th>Couple, non dependent children only</th>
<th>Lone parent non dependent children only</th>
<th>Couple only &gt;64 %</th>
<th>Lone person &gt;64 %</th>
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<td>Self</td>
<td>84.8</td>
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<td>Non family</td>
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<td>15.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
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their time doing things for non family members (6.3 per cent) but the typical share of time spent in this way was closer to 3 per cent. Younger people spent more time doing things for non family members than did older people. Those over 65 spent just 2.5 per cent of their time doing things for people beyond their family.

Across the life course, and in different family types, very little time was spent on activities for family members living elsewhere. Virtually all the family-directed time was for household family members rather than those in other households.

**Does marriage make a difference to time-use?**

Differences in the domestic division of labour within married and cohabiting couples were discussed in Chapter 10. This section, therefore, focuses on the question of whether the time-use of women is only different to that of men when they are partnered.

**Do women just use time differently when they have a partner?**

Gender differences in time-use are often attributed to the impact of marriage on time-use. Marriage, especially when combined with children, is seen to be responsible for the gendered division of labour within the home. Bittman (1995a) for example, argues that on marriage men typically transfer the indoor housework to their wife.

If the gendered patterns of time-use found among couples is due simply to living as a couple then there should no gender differences (or at least much smaller differences) in time-use among single people. Put more simply, what happens to the time-use of a man when he has no wife or partner to do things for him? Table 18.12 reports the gender gaps in the time-use of lone men and women from the 1997 Time Use Survey and compares these with partnered men and women (without children).

**Is it only partnered women who do more domestic work?**

As far as time spent on domestic work is concerned, the gender gap was much larger among partnered men and women than it was among lone men and women. This pattern held across all age groups. For example:

- Among those aged 15-24, the gender gap in time devoted to domestic tasks was twice as large among partnered people (women did 55 minutes a day more than men) than among lone men and women (women did 27 minutes more per day).
- The gap was even larger among those aged 25-44 where partnered women did 71 minutes a day more domestic work than did partnered men, while lone women did just 12 minutes a day more than lone men.

These patterns suggest that at least two things are contributing to gender gaps in the time spent on domestic work. The first is that partnered women take over some of the domestic work, or at least take on the extra domestic work involved in being a couple. However, the fact that lone women did more domestic work than lone men also suggests women put more time than men into domestic work regardless of whether they had a partner.

| Table 18.12 Gender gap (minutes per day) in time on various activities—lone persons and couple only (female vs male) (primary and secondary activities) |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                    | Age group      |                |                |                |
|                    | 15-24          | 25-44          | 45-64          | >64            |
| Personal care      | Lone person    | -24.3<sup>a</sup> | 34.1          | 41.7          | 6.2            |
|                    | Couple only    | 6.5            | 30.2          | 13.9          | -3.7           |
| Employment         | Lone person    | -23.4          | -59.6          | -109.5        | -21.8          |
|                    | Couple only    | -61.1          | -111.4         | -142.8        | -17.2          |
| Domestic work      | Lone person    | 26.6           | 12.0           | 53.3          | 18.8           |
|                    | Couple only    | 55.3           | 71.0           | 112.4         | 80.7           |
| Purchasing         | Lone person    | 22.7           | 18.6           | 13.5          | -2.0           |
|                    | Couple only    | 9.5            | 28.0           | 15.9          | -3.7           |
| Voluntary work     | Lone person    | 4.9            | -5.2           | 11.1          | -6.3           |
|                    | Couple only    | -2.7           | 2.1            | 2.1           | 2.7            |
| Social & community participation | Lone person | 29.6 | 1.6 | 4.2 | 3.9 |
|                    | Couple only    | 25.0           | 8.5            | 9.8           | 1.1            |
| Recreation         | Lone person    | -46.8          | 22.9           | -25.3         | 59.2           |
|                    | Couple only    | 25.4           | -2.7           | 19.5          | -31.4          |


<sup>a</sup> Positive values mean that women did more; negative values mean women did less.
Do women relinquish leisure when they have a partner?
The gender gap in leisure and recreation was very different between lone and partnered people and differed across age groups. Among younger people lone women spent about three quarters of an hour per day less than similarly aged men spent on leisure and recreation activities. Partnered women of the same age spent almost half an hour more than partnered men on these activities. A similar pattern applied for those aged 45-64.

However, among those aged 25-44, lone women spent 23 minutes more per day than lone men on recreation activities. Partnered women in this age group spent about the same amount of time as men on recreation and leisure. Older lone women spent an hour more each day on recreation activities than did lone men, while partnered older women spent half an hour less than partnered older men.

Employment
Regardless of their age and whether or not they were living alone or with a partner (but without children), women consistently spent less time than men on paid employment. However, these gender differences were much more substantial among partnered than lone women. For example:

- Lone women aged 15-24 without children spent 23 minutes a day less than men on paid employment; partnered women in the same age group spent an hour a day less than comparable partnered men.
- Lone women aged 25-44 without children spent an hour a day less in employment than comparable lone men; partnered women of the same age and without children spent almost two hours a day less on employment than comparable men.

As far as employment and domestic work were concerned there were more pronounced gender gaps in the time devoted to domestic work and paid employment among partnered people than lone people. However, regardless of whether they were partnered or living alone, women without children spent more time than men on domestic work and less on paid employment. However, the gender gap was much greater between partnered men and women than among lone men and women. This pattern of results suggests that gender differences in time allocation are partly linked to a redistribution of tasks when people partner. However, the fact that some gender differences in time-use exist among lone men and women suggests that the differences in time-use cannot simply be attributed to men transferring their indoor housework to their wife.

Endnotes
1 Since these estimates are based on time spent on both primary and secondary activities these estimates of the value of the work performed are greater than the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates which are based on primary activities alone (ABS 2000j).
2 The lower total value of the unpaid work of older men is partly because they do less on a per capita basis but it is mainly because there are fewer older men than older women in the older population.
3 These estimates are based on valuations of time spent on domestic activities as indicated in the 1997 Time Use Survey. For details of the methodology used in estimating these figures see de Vaus, Gray and Stanton (2003).
4 However, it should be borne in mind that on average, men who work full time work more hours per week than women who work full time. If it had been possible to take account of these differences, the gender gap between men and women working full time may have been less but it is unlikely that it would have disappeared.
5 This estimate is different from that provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics because the ABS estimates are based on the 1992 coding of voluntary work, and because ABS estimates do not include secondary time-use. For details of the methodology employed for this estimate see de Vaus, Gray and Stanton (2003).
6 Since many people do not participate in any volunteer work, the per capita value of voluntary work of actual volunteers will be much higher than this figure.
7 Of course employment time can be construed as being for other members of the household so the exclusion of employment from these figures can underestimate the proportion of time committed to activities that are to some extent for the benefit of other family members.
Gender differences in time-use are especially pronounced regarding the amount of time spent on domestic work and child care (women do much more) and paid employment (men do much more).

Even when men and women have the same level of paid work, women spend considerably more time on domestic work and child care.

When the amount of time spent on paid employment, child care and domestic work are combined, women, on average, spend an extra hour per day on this set of activities.

This gender difference in total time spent on this set of three activities is especially pronounced among those with dependent children where couple mothers spend two hours a day more than couple fathers.

A great deal of time is spent by both men and women on unpaid work. Women undertake much more unpaid work than men in all age groups.

Nationally, the annual net value of the unpaid work of women per year in 1997 was $225 billion dollars while that of men is $111 billion.

Among women aged 25-44 the annual per capita value of their unpaid work in 1997 was $45,917. Similarly aged men contributed almost $20,000 per annum per capita.

Older people contribute a considerable amount to the nation through their unpaid work. In 1997, each woman aged 65-74 undertook an average of $24,192 worth of unpaid work. Similarly aged men undertook $18,357 worth of unpaid work in 1997.

The gender gap in domestic work is greatest among men and women aged 25-64. Among younger and older men and women the gender gap in the time devoted to domestic work is much less but still indicates that women in all age groups do more domestic work than men.

In terms of the domestic work undertaken, there is a very clear gender segregation. Most of the domestic work of women is inside work while less than half of the domestic work undertaken by men is inside work.

Older people spend much more time per day reading than do younger people.

The age groups that spend a lot of time reading also spend a lot of time watching TV.

In all age groups and family types, men spend considerably more time per day playing sport.

In all age groups and all family types, men have more free time on average each day than do women.

Both men and women contribute substantially to the community through the time they contribute through voluntary work. Across most age groups men and women make a similar level of contribution through voluntary work.

Participation in voluntary work peaks for men and women aged 55-64. In 1997, those who did voluntary work in this age group each undertook work valued at approximately $3,700 per annum.

Apart from time spent on employment, personal care and other activities undertaken for personal benefit, the bulk of time spent by both men and women was undertaken for family members living with them. Relatively little time was spent on activities directed towards family members outside the household.

Women spent twice as much of their time than men directed to family members.

Gender gaps in time-use are greatest between partnered men and women (without children) than between lone men and women. However, in all age groups, lone women spent more time than lone men on domestic tasks and less time than lone men on paid employment.
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A key part of family wellbeing is the capacity to provide for the family's financial needs and workforce participation is a major way of achieving this. However, working has other functions within families. Workforce participation can provide a sense of meaning and status for family members and can play an important part in the way family labour is shared and in the development of power relationships within families. The loss of work can have important consequences for the identity of family members and the ensuing poverty can affect family stability and functioning.

The place of work within family systems is forever changing – both historically and over the family life course. Historically, families were once the site of production, but economic changes that were part of industrialisation moved much of the economic activity out of the home and into the public domain. The separation of work from home had important implications for roles of men and women, as women focused on domestic work in the home while men had primary responsibility for economic roles in the public world of work.

In more recent times, however, women have been able to move more into the public arena of paid work. Increasingly, this has highlighted the tensions between the domestic work in the home and the economic activities in the paid workforce. The balancing of these two domains has increasingly become an area in which public policy has become involved. Thus the provision of publicly subsidised, work-related child care, industrial changes to ensure maternity leave, and various family friendly work practices have been introduced to better balance work and family responsibilities.

This chapter covers three main issues regarding the links between families and employment. First, it examines the extent to which men and women in different family types have paid employment and the extent to which this has changed in recent decades. Second, much of the discussion regarding work and family has been framed around how families balance work and family commitments. Accordingly, this chapter explores how men and women seem to combine these two domains of their life. Finally, there has been increasing concern about the way paid employment is distributed unequally between families. Some families have multiple jobs and little time for anything else, while other families are jobless and have little money. This chapter will explore the extent of the polarisation of work between families.

Which parents are employed?
In 2002, 92.4 per cent of partnered fathers with dependent children were participating in the labour force – 82.7 per cent were employed full time, 6.5 per cent were employed part time and 3.3 per cent were unemployed but seeking work. Far fewer partnered mothers with dependent children were in the labour force. Two thirds (65.5 per cent) of those with dependent children were in the labour force – 25.5 per cent of partnered women with dependent children were employed full time, 37.4 per cent part time and 2.6 per cent were unemployed. The lower participation rate of mothers and the lower full time employment of couple mothers in particular reflects the greater responsibilities of mothers for the care of dependent children. Despite the considerable increase in the availability of child care, many mothers continue to withdraw from the labour force to care for dependent children.

Are lone parents employed as often as couple parents?
The workforce participation of lone parents with dependent children is lower than that of couple parents – especially so for lone fathers where about 20 per cent fewer lone fathers than couple fathers are in the labour force. However, the participation rate of lone fathers is considerably higher than that of lone mothers. Lone mothers with dependent children have a participation rate of 54 per cent – about 10 per cent lower than their partnered counterparts (Table 19.1).

While the fact that lone mothers are more likely than couple mothers to have exclusive responsibility for child care might be expected to be responsible for the lower workforce participation of lone mothers, it seems that this is not the reason. Research using the 1996 census data, shows that the presence of children has a similar impact on the probability of employment of lone and couple mothers (Gray, Qu, de Vaus and Millward, 2002). The lower participation of lone mothers is partly because lone mothers have different characteristics (for example, education) to couple mothers and that these make it more difficult for lone mothers to gain employment.

Does the age of children affect the workforce participation of lone and couple parents?
How many parents of pre-schoolers are employed?
When the youngest child in the family is still a pre-schooler, very few mothers work full time. In 2002, just 15 per cent of couple mothers with pre-schoolers worked full time. However, a third (34 per cent)
of couple mothers with pre-schoolers worked part time at this stage, which means that, overall, half of couple mothers had at least some employment when their youngest child was aged 0-4 years old (Figure 19.1). Among mothers with pre-schoolers, workforce participation varies depending on the age of the pre-schooler. Patterns of child care use indicate that far fewer mothers are employed when their child is younger than one or even two years old, while more of those with a four year old will be employed (Figure 16.2 and Table 16.11).

Lone mothers were less likely to be employed either full time or part time at this stage. Just 9 per cent of lone mothers were employed full time and 21 per cent part time – a total of 30 per cent in some form of employment (Figure 19.1).

Couple fathers were very likely to be employed when they had such young children with 84 per cent being employed full time and a further 6 per cent part time. When children were this age, the traditional male breadwinner model of employment was the most common – fathers were at their highest employment levels and mothers were at their lowest employment levels than at any other stage after they had children (Figure 19.1).

Not surprisingly, lone fathers with pre-schoolers had a much lower employment rate than couple fathers, with 51 per cent employed full time and a further 4 per cent employed part time – just a little over half the employment rate of couple fathers. Perhaps a little more surprising is the much higher rate of employment of lone fathers with pre-schoolers compared with that of lone mothers. While 55 per cent of such lone fathers are employed, just 30 per cent of lone mothers are employed. Furthermore, lone fathers were mainly employed full time (51 per cent) while lone mothers were mainly employed part time.

The reason for the different rates of employment of lone fathers and lone mothers with pre-schoolers is not clear from these data.

Employment rates of mothers with pre-schoolers have changed in recent years. The 34 per cent of couple mothers with pre-schoolers who worked part time in 2002 was a substantial increase on the 24.5 per cent employed part time in 1986. In 1986, 62.8 per cent of couple mothers with pre-schoolers were not employed – a considerably higher figure than the 2002 figure of 51.3 per cent.

Similarly, more lone mothers were employed in 2002 than in 1986. In 1986, 21.8 per cent of those with pre-schoolers were working (11.8 per cent full time and 10 per cent part time) (ABS 1986b). By 2002, the employment rate of lone mothers with a pre-schooler had increased to 30 per cent (9.2 per cent were employed full time and 28.8 per cent were employed part time) (ABS 2003d).

Do mothers return to work when children go to school?

Employment of couple mothers increases as their pre-school children grow older. As indicated in Table 16.11 and Figure 16.2, usage of child care indicates that mothers increase their workforce participation steadily once their youngest child turns one year old. The sharpest increases in workforce participation occur when the youngest child turns one or two years old. Taken overall, mothers with pre-school children have lower employment rates than those whose youngest child is at primary school. In 2002, of mothers whose youngest child was at primary school, 26 per cent worked full time and 41 per cent worked part time. This means that of these mothers, 67 per cent were employed compared with 48.7 per cent of those with pre-schoolers (Figure 19.1).

Employment rates for lone mothers also increased when their youngest was at primary school but not at the same rate as for couple mothers. Full time employment increased to 16 per cent and part time employment to 32 per cent – giving a 50 per cent employment rate. While the employment gap among couple and lone mothers with pre-schoolers was 10 percentage points the employment gap when their youngest was at primary school stretched to 17 per cent.

Most couple fathers whose youngest child was at primary school were employed – 83 per cent full time and 6 per cent part time. However, this stage saw some changes among lone fathers. Their full time employment rate declined to 40 per cent and part time employment increased to 18 per cent, giving a total employment rate of 58 per cent which was very similar to that for lone fathers with pre-schoolers. In other words, for lone fathers, children moving to primary school is not associated with an increase in employment levels. However, compared with lone fathers of pre-schoolers, lone fathers whose youngest child is at primary school are more likely to work part time and less likely to work full time (Figure 19.1).

Employment rates of lone and couple mothers whose youngest child was aged 5-9 changed between 1986 and 2002. In 1986, 58.5 per cent of

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couple mothers were employed (23.5 per cent full time and 35 per cent part time). By 2002, the percentage of employed couple mothers with a child aged 5-9 had increased to 67.1 per cent (25.8 per cent were employed full time and 41.3 per cent were employed part time).

Among lone mothers similar changes occurred. In 1986, 41.5 per cent of lone mothers whose youngest child was aged between 5 and 9 were employed (23.1 per cent were employed full time and 18.4 per cent were employed part time). By 2002, this employment rate had increased to 48.8 per cent with 16.1 per cent being employed full time and 32.7 per cent being employed part time (ABS 1986b, 2003d). Among lone mothers similar changes occurred. In 1986, 41.5 per cent of lone mothers whose youngest child was aged between 5 and 9 were employed (23.1 per cent were employed full time and 18.4 per cent were employed part time). By 2002, this employment rate had increased to 48.8 per cent with 16.1 per cent being employed full time and 32.7 per cent being employed part time (ABS 1986b, 2003d).

Do mothers return to work as their children grow older (ages 10-14)?
When the youngest child is aged 10-14 (and therefore many will be at secondary school) the full time employment rate of couple mothers lifts further to 34 per cent with part time employment remaining stable. This means that at this life stage three quarters (76 per cent) of couple mothers were employed (Figure 19.1).

The full time employment rates of lone mothers also increased to 27 per cent but partly at the expense of part time employment which fell to 29 per cent giving a total employment rate for lone mothers at this stage of the family life cycle of 56 per cent – well below that of couple mothers.

Employment of couple fathers remained consistently high but that of lone fathers changed somewhat. Full time employment of lone fathers increased to 54 per cent but part time employment fell to 12 per cent giving an overall employment rate for these lone fathers of 67 per cent (Figure 19.1).

These 2002 levels of employment of mothers whose youngest child was aged 10-14 are somewhat different from those in earlier years. In 1986, 52.9 per cent of lone mothers whose youngest child was aged 10-14 were employed – 36.9 per cent were employed full time and 16 per cent were employed part time. By 2002, 56.1 per cent of these lone mothers were employed - 27.2 per cent were employed full time and 28.9 per cent were employed part time.

Over the same period, the employment of couple mothers whose youngest child was aged 10-14 increased from 62.7 per cent in 1986 to 75.6 per cent in 2002. Full time employment increased from 30.7 per cent in 1986 to 33.8 per cent in 2002; part time employment increased from 32 per cent in 1986 to 41.8 per cent (ABS 1986b, 2003d).
Dependent students aged 15-24

Once the youngest dependent child in the family reaches the 15-24 year old age band, employment changes continue – most sharply among lone parents.

The employment rate of couple mothers remained at 75 per cent but consisted of more fully employed and fewer part time employed women. In 2002, full time employment jumped from 34 per cent among those whose children are aged 10-14 to 41 per cent among those whose dependent children are aged 15-24. Conversely, part time employment fell from 42 per cent to 34 per cent.

Employment jumped sharply for lone mothers with these older children. Full time employment jumps from 27 per cent where the youngest child was aged 10-14 to 46 per cent when the youngest dependent child is aged 15-25. As children move into the 15-24 year old age group, part time employment of lone mothers declined from 29 per cent to 24 per cent. Overall, the employment rate of these lone mothers with these older children increased to 70 per cent and included a much greater proportion of full time employed lone mothers. Comparable changes occurred among lone fathers at this life stage giving them an employment rate of 84 per cent – somewhat higher than comparable lone mothers.

Apart from noting the increasing employment rate of lone parents and couple mothers as the youngest child grows older, there are three points to highlight from the above discussion. First, as the youngest child grows older the employed parents seem to move from part time to full time employment. Second, regardless of the age of the youngest child, lone fathers have a substantially higher rate of employment than lone mothers. Third, there is a substantial employment rate gap (of approximately 20 percentage points) between couple mothers and lone mothers when the youngest child is aged under 15. This gap narrows sharply to just 5 per cent among lone and couple mothers when the youngest dependent child is a dependent student aged 15-24. One of the reasons for this will be that any disincentive effects of the income support system should disappear when a lone mother’s youngest child reaches the age of 16, since the lone mother is no longer eligible for the Parenting Payment (single). One would also expect that once children reach this age, lone mothers will be more easily able to combine work with their child rearing responsibilities.

Is employment of lone and couple mothers increasing?

The employment patterns of parents with dependent children have changed in a number of ways over the last two decades.

The first change is that since 1983 the rate of employment of both lone and couple mothers has increased while the rate of employment among fathers has declined marginally. In particular:

- Among partnered mothers of dependent children the percentage without employment has fallen from 57.9 per cent in 1983 to 37.1 per cent in 2002 – a 36 per cent decline.
- Among lone mothers the percentage without employment has fallen from 67.9 per cent in 1983 to 52.2 per cent in 2002 – a 23 per cent decline.
- For couple fathers the percentage without employment has fluctuated but was 10.5 per cent in both 1983 and 10.8 per cent 2002.
- Among lone fathers the percentage not working has increased marginally from 28.7 per cent in 1983 to 32 per cent in 2002.

One factor behind the decline in the proportion of mothers who were not employed has been changes in the economic cycle. The early 1980s was a time of high unemployment. Until the early 1990s there was a period of sustained growth followed by a recession in the early 1990s, after which there has been a further period of sustained growth.

An additional factor that has enabled the employment growth for mothers has been the growth in part time work which enables mothers more easily to balance work and family commitments.

The second major change has been the growth in part time employment. The story of employment over the last two decades of the 20th century has partly been the story of the growth in part time work. In understanding the way in which families manage employment it is important to include the role of part time work (Renda, 2003).

Among parents with dependent children, part time employment is very much a female pattern. Both couple and lone mothers had much higher rates of part time employment than lone or couple fathers. The highest rates were among couple mothers. In 2002:

- Over a third of couple mothers (37.4 per cent) had part time employment.
- Over a quarter (26.7 per cent) of lone mothers were employed part time.
- 11.4 per cent of lone fathers were employed part time.
- 6.5 per cent of couple fathers were employed part time.

The growth in part time employment has been especially evident among mothers with dependent children (Figures 19.2 and 19.3). Between 1983 and 2002, part time employment increased from:
• 22.3 per cent of all couple mothers with dependent children to 37.4 per cent – a 63 per cent increase.
• 11.8 per cent of all lone mothers to 26.7 per cent – a growth of 126 per cent.
• 4.7 per cent of all lone fathers to 11.4 per cent – a growth of 142 per cent.
• 2.4 per cent of all couple fathers to 6.5 per cent – a growth of 70 per cent.

While the proportional growth in part time employment is greatest among fathers, this is a growth from a very low base of part time employment. Nevertheless, it does represent an important change in the nature of work of some fathers. The main growth in part time employment is among mothers with dependent children. Although the percentage growth in part time employment has been lower among couple mothers than for the other groups it is still large in proportionate terms (63 per cent growth) and in absolute terms – 14.1 percentage points. However, the growth in part time employment of lone mothers is even more marked – 142 per cent in proportionate terms and 14.9 per cent in absolute terms.

There are a number of possible reasons for this growth in part time employment. These are discussed at length in Gray, Qu, Renda and de Vaus (2003) and include:
• Changes to the income support system which have reduced some of the disincentives for part time employment by lone parents.
• Labour market changes. Economic restructuring over this period has meant that the main growth in jobs in the new economy has been in the area of part time employment.
• Preferences of parents for part time work. The changes in income support and the changing labour market may have enabled some parents to more easily put their preferences into practice.

The third major change in employment patterns for parents, especially mothers, has been in the area of full time employment (Figures 19.2 and

**Figure 19.2** Employment status of couple parents with dependent children, 1983-2002

**Figure 19.3** Employment status of lone parents with dependent children, 1983-2002
Changes in levels of full time employment have been very different among different groups of parents.

- Among couple mothers full time employment has risen substantially from 18.3 per cent in 1983 to 25.6 per cent in 2002 – a 39 per cent rise.
- Among lone mothers the rate of full time employment has been basically stable. In 1983, 20.3 per cent of lone mothers with dependent children were employed full time. After an increase to 28.7 per cent in 1988, full time employment of lone mothers has stabilised at 21 per cent in 2002.
- Full time employment among couple fathers has declined a little from 86.7 per cent in 1983 to 82.6 per cent in 2002.
- Full time employment has declined among lone fathers from 66.6 per cent in 1983 to 56.4 per cent in 2002 – an 18 per cent decline.

The reasons for these different patterns in full time employment are not certain. Some of the change may be due to the lack of full time job growth but other factors are needed to explain the different patterns among the different groups of parents. These factors are considered more fully in Gray, Qu, Renda and de Vaus (2003).

How much employment do mothers want?

Many factors affect the work status of parents. The nature of the labour market, income support systems, family characteristics and a person’s employability all play a part. Overlaying all these factors are the work preferences of mothers and fathers (Hakim, 2000; Glezer and Wolcott, 1999). The type of work arrangements that parents want will play a part in their workforce participation and the hours they work. While it will not always be possible for parents to realise their preferences, these preferences will nevertheless be part of the mix of factors that determine employment outcomes. This section provides some insight into the preferred work arrangements of mothers with children aged under 18. The information is drawn from the 2001 HILDA survey (FaCS 2002a).

Are employed mothers happy with their hours of work?

Of employed women with children under the age of 18:

- Over half (56 per cent) were happy with their weekly number of work hours.
- A quarter wanted to work fewer hours.
- 18 per cent wanted to work more hours.

Satisfaction with the current hours of work depended very much on current hours of work. Many of those working full time wanted to work fewer hours while many of those working just a few hours wanted more work. Of mothers with under 18 year old children still at home:

- Half (49 per cent) of those who worked full time wanted to work fewer hours while half were happy with their current full time work commitments.
- Just 3 per cent of those who worked between one to 15 hours wanted to work fewer hours while 42 per cent wanted to work more hours. Over half were happy working between one to 15 hours a week.

The preference of mothers to reduce their hours of employment was relatively consistent regardless of the age of the mother’s youngest child. Of employed mothers whose youngest child was a preschooler, 21 per cent wanted to work fewer hours; of those whose youngest was at primary school a quarter wanted fewer hours of employment; while 29 per cent of those whose youngest was of secondary school age wanted fewer hours of work.

The main reason why women with older children were a little more inclined to want to work fewer hours is that they worked more hours than those with younger children. Of employed women, those whose youngest child was a preschooler, worked, on average, 24.4 hours a week; those whose youngest child was at primary school worked, on average, 28.2 hours a week; and those whose youngest child was of secondary school age worked, on average, 32.3 hours a week.

Table 19.2 shows that the key factor driving the desire of employed mothers to have fewer or more hours of work was not the age of her children but her current hours of work. Regardless of the age of her children, many of the mothers with relatively few hours of work wanted to work more hours. Regardless of the age of the children, about half of the mothers working full time wanted to work fewer hours.

What is happening to employment among older men and women?

Labour force participation rates of older men in Australia are, by OECD standards, average. For men aged 55-64, the rates in 2001 were 60.6 per cent which meant that Australia was ranked 16 out of 30 OECD countries. Among Australian women aged 55-64 the participation rate in 2001 was 36.9 per cent, which gave an Australian ranking of 13 out of 30 OECD countries (OECD 2003).

However, Australian men and women withdraw from the labour force at a relatively early age. In 1999, the mean retirement age for men was 59.7 years and for women in the labour force it was 61.3 years. By OECD standards this represents early
labour force withdrawal. Only two OECD countries (France and Italy) for which data were available, had earlier (only marginally) average retirement ages for men (OECD 2001). The average age at which men retire is a little lower than their intended retirement age – at least as indicated by the 2001 HILDA survey. In this survey the average employed male intended to retire at the age of 62.3 years. The average intended retirement age for employed women was 60 years (FaCS 2002a).

Is employment declining for older men but increasing for older women?
The labour force participation of older Australian men has been declining steadily for many years. In 1911, 93 per cent of men aged 55-59, 86 per cent of those aged 60-64 and 55 per cent of men aged 64 or over were still in the workforce (Hugo 2001). The decline in workforce participation of older workers has continued in more recent decades – certainly since at least the late 1970s. The 1980s and 1990s saw substantial economic restructuring meant that the disappearance of certain occupations and the need for particular skills particularly affected the employment of older men. Furthermore, this restructuring led to substantial downsizing which, in many workplaces, was disproportionately directed at older workers.

- For men in their late fifties (aged 55-59) this has meant a decline in labour force participation from 82 per cent in 1979 to 69 per cent in 2002 – a decline of 12 percentage points.
- Among men aged 60-64 the decline in participation between 1979-2002 has been from 54.4 per cent to 47.9 per cent.
- However, among those aged 65 and over the participation rate has remained steady at about 10 per cent (Table 19.3).

The participation rate of older women has shown an opposite trend to that of men and has increased in each age group.

- Of women aged 55-59 the participation rate has increased from 27.8 per cent in 1979 to 49.3 per cent in 2002 – a 77 per cent increase.
- Among women aged 60-64 the participation rate has almost doubled from 12.8 per cent in 1979 to 23.2 per cent in 2002 (Table 19.3).

Although the labour force participation of older men has declined, this has been more than compensated for by the increased labour force participation of older women (Table 19.3). The net effect of this is that, in 1980, 55.6 per cent of all people aged 55-59 participated in the labour force and 31.6 per cent of those aged 60-64 participated in the labour force. By 2002, these participation rates had increased to 62.2 per cent among the 55-59 year olds and 36.7 per cent among the 60-64 year olds (ABS Labour Force Australia, various years).

Are older workers part time workers?
An increasing proportion of older workers are working part time. This is partly because older workers are choosing this as a method of gradually withdrawing from the workforce. The higher rate of part time work of older workers is also because of the increasing feminisation of the older workforce. Because women across all age groups have higher rates of part time employment, the feminisation of the older workforce has produced an older workforce with a greater proportion of part time workers.

One way in which older workers make the transition to retirement is to gradually withdraw from the workforce. This movement to part time work appears to begin well before the normal retirement age. Figure 19.4 shows the rising proportion of part time work for older workers.
time work as workers get nearer retirement age. Among both male and female workers, the proportion of workers who work part time begins to increase from the mid fifties and steadily rises in each age group thereafter.

Of employed men aged 45-54, 9 per cent worked part time in 2002. This increases to 14 per cent among those in their late fifties and then increases sharply to 24 per cent of workers in their early sixties. Of those who continued to work after the age of 65, 45 per cent were employed part time. The patterns are similar for female workers except that the absolute levels of part time work are higher in each age group.

There is also evidence that moving to part time work is becoming a more common arrangement among older workers. In October 1991, 26 per cent of workers aged 55 and over worked part time. By October 2001 this had increased to 34 per cent – a 30 per cent increase in just ten years (ABS 2002k).

How evenly are jobs shared between families?

Are jobless families growing?

Gregory (1999) reported substantial increases between 1979 and 1998 in the number of dependent children living in families in which no parent had a job. The percentage of jobless families with dependent children depends considerably on the business cycle. The sharpest increases in jobless families with dependent children were between 1979 and 1983. Family joblessness declined again during the 1980s only to rise again in the recession of the early 1990s (Figure 19.5).

Since 1983, the growth in the proportion of jobless families with dependent children appears to be largely confined to lone parent families (except for the fluctuation in the early 1990s). Indeed, the overall growth in the proportion of children in families without any job is substantially due to the growth in lone parent families overall during the period.

Have job poor couples increased?

Couples with dependent children but which have either no job or one part time job between them, can be thought of as job poor couples (Renda, 2003; Burbidge and Sheehan 2001; Dawkins, Gregg and Scutella 2001).

Among couples with dependants there has been little change in the percentage of job poor families since 1983 (Figure 19.6).

In 2002, 7.2 per cent of all couples with dependents were those in which neither partner was employed. A further 4.2 per cent had just one part time job between the couple. This means that in 2002, 11.4 per cent of couple families with dependent children were job poor.

These 2002 figures are very similar to those that have persisted from the early 1980s. In 1983, 10.9 per cent of these couples had either no job or one part time job – a level that has remained stable thereafter.
Has the percentage of job poor lone parents increased?

After high levels of joblessness in the early to mid 1980s when around 63 per cent of lone parents had no job, the level of joblessness among lone parent families with dependent children declined to around 50 per cent from 1990 to 2002 (Figure 19.7). The decline in lone parent joblessness has been partly mirrored by an increase in part time employment among lone parents. In 1983, 11 per cent of lone parents had part time employment – by 2002 this had more than doubled to 25 per cent.

Have overall levels of jobless families with dependents increased?

While joblessness and job poverty have not increased in either couple families or lone parent families since 1983, joblessness and job poverty have nevertheless increased since 1983.

- In 1983, 19.5 per cent of all families with dependent children had either no employed parent or one part time employed parent. By 2002, this had increased to 25.8 per cent – a 32 per cent increase in work poor families.
- Most of this increase in job poverty is driven by an increase in families with one part time employed person rather than in families with no jobs.

This growth in job poor families is because there are more lone parent families and these families have always had much higher levels of joblessness than couple parent families. While only about 11 per cent of couples with dependents are job poor families, approximately 75 per cent of lone parent families have either no job or a part time job. The growth in lone parent families, therefore, has brought with it an overall increase in job poor families.

Are dual job couples becoming more common?

In 2002, 22 per cent of all couples with dependent children had two full time jobs between them. This is a slight decline since the mid to late 1990s when 24 per cent of couples with dependent children had two full time jobs. However, the 22 per cent figure in 2002 is an increase from the 17 per cent of two full time job couples back in 1983.

In addition to couples with dependent children who had two full time jobs, there was an additional 35 per cent of families in 2002 that had a full time job plus a part time job. Much of this increase has been driven by the growth in part time jobs that mothers took up over this period. The growth in couples with one and a half jobs from 1983 to 2002 is substantial – from 23 per cent to 35 per cent of couples. This increase in couples with 1.5 jobs means that in 2002, 57 per cent of all couples with dependent children were two income families.
Are one job couple families disappearing?

Since 1983 there has been a sharp decline in the number of single job couples (or couples with two part time jobs) from 49 per cent of all couples with dependent children in 1983 to 32 per cent in 2002 (Figure 19.6). Most of this decline occurred in the 1980s. From the early 1990s onwards the decline in single job couples stabilised. Most of the decline in one job couples appears to have been compensated for by the growth of dual earner couples that share either 1.5 or two full time jobs between them. In other words, the decline in one job families is substantially due to the increase in multiple job couples rather than any increase in jobless couples.

Are men still the breadwinners?

Part of the answer to this question is simple. In an increasing number of couple families both partners are contributing to the family income. In these families men are certainly not the sole breadwinners – even if they are predominantly the main income earner. Even in those families in which a man might be the main breadwinner at a particular point, his relative contribution will vary at different points of the family life course. There is also an increasing number of mother-headed lone parent families and this means that these lone parent families are headed by a female breadwinner.

But what is the picture among couple families in which there is just one income earner? How many of these families are male breadwinner families and how many are female breadwinner families?

Among couples in which one partner is not employed there are two possibilities regarding the employment of the other partner. They can be employed or not employed.

When female partners are not employed, the traditional male breadwinner pattern is for the male partner to be working. Is this still the case?

To what extent has the traditional pattern been reversed? When men are not employed is their female partner employed? Is there any evidence of an increase in the single income couple in which the female is the breadwinner?

Male breadwinner couples: Figure 19.8 shows that in 1981, of partnered men whose partner was not employed, 91 per cent were themselves employed, that is, they were the traditional male breadwinner. By 2002, just 81 per cent of partnered males with a not employed partner were themselves employed – 19 per cent were also not employed.

Female breadwinner couples: At the same time there has been a rise in partnered women who are the sole breadwinner, that is, their partner is not employed. In 1981, 19.6 per cent of women with a non employed partner were themselves employed. By 2002 this percentage had increased to 34 per cent. That is, of partnered women with a not employed partner a third were the breadwinner in the couple (Figure 19.8).

While the percentage of breadwinner partnered women has increased, it has been more common for employed partnered women also to have an employed partner. Indeed, it is the growth in two income couples that has been one of the most notable changes in employment patterns among couples since 1983. In 1983, 45 per cent of couple mothers with employed partners were themselves employed. Since then this percentage has increased steadily so that by 2002, 66 per cent of women with an employed partner were employed themselves (see Renda, 2003).

How many young children live in jobless families?

So far the statistics have examined how many families with dependent children have no jobs, half a job, one job or two jobs. However, this does not indicate how many children live in such families.
Nor does it give any indication of whether children living in jobless families are very young or older.

The 2001 Census (Table 19.4) indicated that in 2001, of all dependent children:

- 17.9 per cent (799,069) lived in a family with no employed parent. 7.3 per cent (332,371) lived in a couple family and 10.6 per cent (466,798) lived in a lone parent family.
- 45.3 per cent (1,990,731) lived in a couple family in which both parents were employed.
- 36.8 per cent (1,619,210) lived in a family with one employed parent. Almost 28 per cent (1,222,114) were living in a couple family with only one employed parent and 9 per cent (397,096) lived in a one parent family in which that parent was employed.

While the proportion of children in jobless couple families was similar across all age groups of children (mainly around 7 per cent of all children in each age group), the proportion of children in jobless lone parent families was higher among younger than older children (Table 19.4).

A much smaller proportion of young children than older children lived in dual worker couple families. Of all children aged 0-4, 37 per cent lived in couple families in which both parents were employed. This percentage increases to 45 per cent among those of primary school age (5-12) and increases again to over 50 per cent among teenagers.

Only a small proportion of children aged 0-4 live in a one parent family in which the parent was employed (4.5 per cent or 50,310 children). However, of teenagers, close to 13 per cent (152,289) lived in a one parent family in which the parent was employed.

If we focus just on children living in lone parent families, half lived in a jobless family (Table 19.4). The chances of such a child living in a jobless family depends very much on the age of the child.

In 2001, of children in lone parent families aged 0-4, 71.7 per cent lived with their parent who was not employed. This figure fell to 55.9 per cent among children aged 5-12 and dropped to about a third among dependent children aged 15-24 who lived in lone parent households.

The situation is very different for children in couple families where 9.1 per cent of children in couple families lived in a jobless household in 2001. More than half (56 per cent) the children in couple families had two employed parents. The chances of a child in a couple family having two employed parents increases as they grow older. Of pre-schoolers, 43.8 per cent had two employed parents in 2001; 57.3 per cent of those aged 5-12 had two employed parents while almost two thirds of teenagers in couple families had two employed parents.

**Do people still disapprove of working mothers?**

In general, attitudes still tend towards the traditional views that the primary role of a mother is to look after her children rather than to pursue her employment or career. According to the 2001 HILDA survey:

- Over three quarters (78.1 per cent) of respondents agreed that being a mother was more important than a career for a woman.
- Less than a half (44.9 per cent) agreed that a working mother can have just as good relationship with her children as a mother who does not work (Table 19.8).

However, there appears to be less agreement with the traditional division of responsibilities and aptitudes of mothers and fathers. The HILDA survey found that:

- Almost two-thirds (65.4 per cent) agreed that children do just as well if their mother works and their father looks after the children (only 9 per cent disagreed).

### Table 19.4 Employment status of parents of children by age group of child and family type, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of child</th>
<th>0-4</th>
<th>5-12</th>
<th>13-14</th>
<th>15-19</th>
<th>20-24</th>
<th>All dependent children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Couple parents</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither parent employed</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both parents employed</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only one parent employed</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lone parent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>10.6</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>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Only a little over a third (38.5 per cent) agreed that it is better if the mother looks after the children and the father works.
• Only a little over a third (38.1 per cent) agreed that a mother should not work if she does not need the money (Table 19.5).

Are men more disapproving than women?
Men and women hold different views on some of these matters. On some matters women hold less traditional views to those of men. For example, women were more likely than men to say that a working mother can have just as good a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work (51.5 per cent of women agree compared with 37.5 per cent of men). Women were also more likely than men to say that children do just as well if mother works and the father looks after the children.

However, on other matters men and women appear to be largely in agreement. Similar percentages of men and women agree that being a mother is more important than a career for women, and that a mother should not work if the money is not needed. Men and women also held reasonably similar views about whether it was better for mothers to provide the child care while fathers worked (Table 19.5).

Is the older generation the most disapproving?
Even where men and women held different views about working mothers the differences between men and women were relatively small. Age group differences in attitudes about the role of working mothers were much more substantial. Older people aged 60 and over were much more likely than those in their twenties, to say that being a mother is much more important than a career for a woman (around 90 per cent compared with 70 per cent). Similarly, over 70 per cent those aged 60 or more said that it was better if the mother cares for the children and fathers work. In contrast, just 22.7 per cent of those in their twenties and 26.4 per cent of those in their thirties subscribed to this traditional view about the best role for mothers and fathers (Table 19.5).

Reinforcing this difference between age groups is the observation that just over a half of older people agreed that children do just as well if the mother works and the father looks after the children, while almost 70 per cent of those in their twenties and thirties felt this way. Of the oldest group, 62.9 per cent believed that a mother should not work if she does not need the money while less than 30 per cent of those aged under 40 saw financial reasons as the only justification for working. The younger age groups were more willing to accept that there are good non financial reasons that justify a mother working.

The more traditional values of older people towards working women could be due to people becoming more conservative as they grow older. However, it is much more likely that it reflects the different eras in which the older and younger people have developed their views. It is likely that over time we will see a greater consensus among the generations regarding the role of working mothers as today’s younger people become the older generation of the future.

Is approval of working mothers increasing?
Evans and Kelley have been tracking changes in attitudes to working mothers since 1984 using regular national surveys (Evans and Kelley, 2002b). They present evidence of an increasing level of approval of married women and mothers working. Table 19.6 reports some of their findings. This table shows that:

• Approval of married women working even if their husband can support them (that is, where there is not an economic necessity) has increased from 62 per cent approval in the mid 1980s to 82 per cent in 2001.
• There is an increasing rejection of the view that a married woman should not attach much importance to her career (51 per cent in 1984 to 65 per cent in 2001).

### Table 19.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes about working mothers by gender and age, 2001</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All %</td>
<td>Men %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a mother is more important than a career for a woman (AGREE)</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>75.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mother shouldn’t work if the money is not needed (AGREE)</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s better if mother cares and father works (AGREE)</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children do just as well if mother works &amp; father cares (AGREE)</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>60.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working mother can have just as good relationship as a mother who does not work (AGREE)</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a).
Note: Agreement was measured on a 7 point scale with 7 indicating strongest agreement. Respondents giving a score of 5, 6 or 7 were regarded as agreeing with the statement.
• There is an increasing rejection of the view that family life suffers if the woman has a full time job (28 per cent rejected this view in 1984 compared with 41 per cent in 2001).

• There is increasing agreement that a working mother can establish just as good a relationship with her children as a non working mother (50 per cent in 1984 and 60 per cent in 2001).^2^

However, there has been very little recent change in what people consider to be the appropriate activity for mothers when their children are pre-schoolers, at school and grown up. In each of the relevant International Social Science Surveys in Australia from 1989 to 2001, close to 70 per cent of respondents said that the ideal activity for the mother of a pre-schooler is to be a housewife. Around 30 per cent thought that the mother ideally should work part time and barely anyone (around 3-4 per cent) thought that full time work was the ideal for the mother of a pre-schooler.

Once children are at school the view of over 70 per cent is that the ideal is for the mother of school aged children to work part time. Of the remainder, about half (15 per cent) said the mother should ideally be a housewife and the other 15 per cent said she ideally should work full time. These views have remained unchanged since 1989.

Once children have grown up the majority view is that mothers should ideally work full time. Around 60 per cent think she should work full time and a third think she should work part time. Once her husband retires, however, the common view was that she should revert to being a full time housewife. In 2001, 79 per cent of survey respondents believed that the ideal for a woman whose husband had retired was to be a full time housewife (Evans, and Kelley 2002b).

How do families balance work and family? Does working help parenting?

The debate about achieving a balance between work and family life mainly emphasises the difficulty that parents have balancing the competing demands of work and home. While these difficulties are very real and will be explored shortly, it is worth first noting that work can have benefits for family life and parenting.

Responses in the HILDA survey provide a mixed picture (Table 19.7). Around 70 per cent of employed fathers and mothers felt that combining work and family benefited them as a person by making them feel more rounded, more competent and giving them more variety in life. Presumably, where work benefits the parent this can have indirect benefits for aspects of their parenting.

However, there was less agreement about the direct positive effects of working on parenting (Table 19.7). While close to two thirds of employed mothers and fathers felt that work makes them better appreciate the time they spend with their children:

• Less than half (47.6 per cent) felt that their working had a positive effect on their children (52 per cent of mothers felt this way).

Table 19.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pro working mother attitudes, 1984-2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROVE married women earning money, even if husband can support her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do NOT believe that a woman should devote nearly all her time to her family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REJECT the view that a married woman should not attach much importance to a career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REJECT view that family life suffers if the women has a full time job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGREE that a working mother can establish just as warm a relationship with her children as a mother that does not work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Evans and Kelley, 2002b.

Table 19.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent agreeing</th>
<th>Male %</th>
<th>Female %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having both work and family responsibilities makes me more rounded person</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>68.0**</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having both work and family responsibilities gives life more variety</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>79.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing both work and family makes me feel competent</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>72.9**</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work has positive effect on my children</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>51.5***</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work helps me better appreciate my time with children</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working makes me a better parent</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>37.5***</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a).
Note: Respondents were defined as agreeing with the statement if they scored their agreement as 5,6,7 on a 7 point scale.
** Difference between males and females is statistically significant at the .01 level.
*** Difference between males and females is statistically significant at the .001 level.
• 43 per cent felt that working made them a better parent. Even fewer mothers than fathers (37.5 per cent compared with 47 per cent) felt that working made them a better parent.

**Do work and family commitments conflict?**

Another way of thinking about the effects of work on parenting is to explore the extent to which employed parents feel that working interferes with good parenting. On most measures “only” a minority felt that work interfered with effective parenting. According to the 2001 HILDA survey (Table 19.8):

• 28 per cent of parents (32 per cent of fathers and 24 per cent of mothers) felt that their employment made their time with their family less enjoyable and more pressured.
• 43 per cent worried about what their children were up to while they were at work.
• Work requirements made 44 per cent of parents feel that they missed out on family activities in which they would like to participate.
• 40 per cent of parents (45 per cent of fathers and 36 per cent of mothers) said that work left them with insufficient energy to parent as they would like.
• 52 per cent felt that work meant that they missed out on some of the rewarding aspects of being a parent.

An important point to note is that employed fathers were more likely than employed mothers to comment on these negative aspects of working. For example:

• 52 per cent of fathers compared with 35 per cent of mothers felt that job requirements made them miss out on family activities in which they would like to participate.
• 59 per cent of fathers compared to a quarter of mothers felt that their job requirements made their family time less enjoyable and more pressured (Table 19.8).

The pattern of men being more likely than women to report that work interferes with their home life is consistent with earlier studies such as the Australian Family Life Course Survey in 1996 (Glezer and Wolcott, 1999).

**Does part time employment reduce work-family conflict for mothers?**

One of the reasons why work interferes more with the father’s ability to parent is that he mainly works full time whereas many mothers work part time. In general, mothers who worked part time reported much less conflict between their work and family commitments.

Information from the HILDA survey shows that on most measures of work and family conflict, full time employed women were much more likely than part time employed women to experience work-family conflict. Furthermore, full time employed women experienced very similar degrees of work-family conflict as experienced by full time employed men.

For many women, the way to contain the conflict between work and family roles was to reduce the level of workforce participation. Compared to full time employed women, those employed part time were less likely to say that:

• Work made them miss on family activities in which they would prefer to participate (27 per cent of part timers compared with 47 per cent of full timers).
• Job requirements made their family time less enjoyable and more pressured (18 per cent compared with 33 per cent).
• They worried about what the children were doing while they (that is, the mother) were at work (39 per cent compared with 48 per cent).

**Table 19.8 Perceived conflict between work and family commitments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent agreeing</th>
<th>Fathers %</th>
<th>Mothers %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family responsibilities make me turn down work activities and opportunities I’d like to take on</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>31.6***</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family responsibilities make work time less enjoyable and more pressured</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>22.8**</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job requirements make me miss family activities I’d prefer to participate in</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>34.9***</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job requirements make my family time less enjoyable and more pressured</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>24.1***</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I worry about what goes on with children while I’m at work</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>43.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working leaves me with little energy to be parent I’d like to be</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>36.0***</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working makes me miss on some of rewarding aspects of being a parent</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>41.7***</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a).

Note: Respondents were defined as agreeing with the statement if they scored the the statement as 5,6,7 on a 7 point scale

** Difference between mothers and fathers is statistically significant at the .01 level

*** Difference between mothers and fathers is statistically significant at the .001 level
• Work left them with little energy to be the type of parent they wanted to be (29 per cent compared with 47 per cent).
• Working made them miss out on some of the rewarding aspects of being a parent (34 per cent compared with 54 per cent).

Do people work from home?
Working from home, for at least some of the time, is an option that is open to people in certain types of employment. Home based work is much more common among people in management and professional jobs as well as those in advanced clerical and services occupations (ABS 2002k).

In 2002, about one in five employed people worked some hours at home and 11 per cent (980,300) worked mainly from home (ABS 2001i). The reasons given for working at home do not, in the main, mention family reasons. Only 4 per cent of all home workers gave child care or family reasons as the reason for working from home.

However, there is some evidence that working from home is a strategy that some women adopt for combining work and family commitments (ABS 2001i). For example, of home based workers:
• 49 per cent were women (compared to 44 per cent in the workforce at large).
• Of women who worked mainly from home, 45 per cent had children under the age of 15 – substantially higher than the 30 per cent of employed women who had children under the age of 15.
• Women with children under the age of 15 were twice as likely than those with no such children to work from home. Of women with children under 15, 12.8 per cent worked mainly from home compared with 6.6 per cent of those without children of this age.

How time stressed are parents?
Women report more time stress than do men. Of women, 39 per cent report being often or always rushed compared with 32 per cent of men. However, the level of time stress among both women and men depends very much on their stage in the family-life cycle (Figure 19.9).

Gender differences in time stress are particularly pronounced among families with children (Figure 19.9). In the 1997 Time Use Survey, mothers with dependent children reported very high degrees of time stress. Of partnered women with dependent children, 55 per cent said they were often or always rushed. This percentage was higher than for men or women at any other life stage (Figure 19.9).

Are lone parents more time stressed than couple parents?
Lone mothers of dependent children report slightly lower levels of time stress than partnered mothers – 49 per cent were often or always rushed. Partnered mothers with non dependent children displayed the next highest levels of stress.

The fact that partnered parents reported higher levels of time stress than lone parents is noteworthy. It might be expected that lone parents would be more stretched for time since one parent is required to take on the tasks that are shared by two parents in couple families. The higher level of time stress among partnered parents probably stems from a number of sources. One source of the greater time stress among parents in couple families is the higher level of workforce participation by those in couple families. Of parents in couple families with dependent children, 38 per cent cited balancing work and family commitments as a key source of their time stress. This compares with 30 per cent of those in lone parent families who identified work-family balance as the source of their stress.

Figure 19.9  Per cent feeling often or always rushed by family stage and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family type</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couple only &lt;35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone person &lt;35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple dep children</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent dep children</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple only 35-64</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple non dep children only</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent only</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple only &gt;64</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone person &gt;64</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other reasons for the different degrees of time stress of lone parent and partnered parents may reflect the additional time demands that flow from having a partner. These include finding time to spend with one’s partner, the additional work generated by a partner, maintaining larger family networks and the fact that couple families have more children on average than lone parent families.

Is time stress due to employment?
The main reasons given for time stress relate to work and family demands. More than half (52 per cent) of those who reported high levels of time stress identified work-family balance as a key source of time stress. Thirty per cent cited work demands as the source of time stress while a quarter pointed to family demands as a key factor.

As indicated earlier, mothers with dependent children are especially likely to report being highly time stressed. Part of the reason for this is the pressure of combining work with family commitments. Figure 19.10 shows that two thirds of partnered women who worked full time and had dependent children were highly time stressed. Working part time did not seem to reduce substantially the levels of time stress since 61 per cent of partnered women who worked part time and had dependent children were time stressed. Working part time did not seem to reduce substantially the levels of time stress since 61 per cent of partnered women who worked part time and had dependent children were time stressed. Those not in the labour force reported much lower levels of time stress than those in paid work, but nevertheless, 43 per cent of these mothers still reported high levels of time stress. It is notable in Figure 19.10 that partnered fathers of dependent children reported substantially less time stress than the mothers – even when labour force participation was similar. Of the full time employed parents, 14 per cent more mothers than fathers were highly time stressed; among the part time employed, 33 per cent more mothers were time stressed, and among the not employed 16 per cent more mothers were time stressed.

Time stressed women were considerably more likely to attribute being rushed to the demands of their family (31 per cent) than to the demands of work (14 per cent). Time stressed men, on the other hand, were much more likely to cite the demands of work (31 per cent) than their family demands as the source of time stress (14 per cent) (Table 19.9).

How friendly are workplaces to family needs?
What access do working parents have to family friendly work practices?
In an attempt to enable both men and women to achieve a better balance between work and family roles, there have been attempts to encourage family friendly workplaces. The annual Work and Family Awards are one example of this but other examples include some industrial reforms that enable family friendly work practices. At the same time, other industrial changes have the potential to make it more difficult for families to combine work and family commitments. In some cases, workplace deregulation may lead to requirements for people to work hours that are incompatible with family needs.

Gray and Tudball (2002) use information from the 1995 AWIRS survey of 1896 workplaces to explore how many employees (19,155 employees participated in the survey) have access to four family friendly work arrangements. These arrangements were:

- Control over start and finish times (hours flexibility).
- Access to a telephone for family reasons.
- Availability of permanent part time employment; and
- Type of leave used for the care of a sick family member.

The availability of these arrangements are reported in Table 19.10.
The Work Arrangements Survey in 2001 (ABS 2001) explored the working arrangements of employed men and women and compared the arrangements of parents with children under the age of 12 with those of other workers. As far as fathers were concerned, work arrangements were very similar regardless of whether they had younger children. However, mothers with younger children had quite different work arrangements than fathers with young children, and to many women who did not have young children. In particular, the survey found that compared to fathers of young children, mothers with young children:

- Had less access to rostered days off (90 per cent compared with 75 per cent had no access).
- Were more likely to have fixed start and finish times (68 per cent compared with 59 per cent).
- Could not choose when leave was taken (21 per cent compared with 13 per cent had no choice).
- Did not have leave entitlements associated with the job (39 per cent compared with 19 per cent had no leave entitlements).

The main reason why employed mothers with younger children lack access to certain work arrangements that could make it easier to balance work and family responsibilities, is the much higher rate of casual work among mothers of young children. While casual and part time work may relieve mothers of some time pressures, these jobs also are more likely to lack a number of family friendly work arrangements.

Is access to family friendly arrangements a matter of where you work?

In considering access to family friendly work arrangements, an important issue is whether access to these arrangements depends mainly on where a person works, or whether it depends on the type of work the employee performs. Gray and Tudball (2002) argue, on the basis of economic theory, that employers will offer family friendly arrangements depending on the value of the employee to the workplace. They argue that family friendly arrangements will be available to those employees that employers most want to keep or attract.

There is evidence that many workplaces are more family friendly for some employees than for others. That is, certain types of employees are given access to family friendly arrangements while others are denied these options.

Figure 19.11 demonstrates very considerable variation within workplaces in the access to certain family friendly work practices. For example, Figure 19.11 (a) shows that, in only about 6 per cent of workplaces, did 100 per cent of employees have access to flexible start and finish times at work (value of 1 on bottom axis). In 6 per cent of workplaces only 20 per cent of employees had access to flexible start and beginning times (bottom axis value of 0.2).

There was much more general access to a telephone for family purposes. Sixteen per cent of workplaces made a telephone available to all workers and a further 26 per cent made a phone available to 90 per cent of employees.

There was very considerable variation within workplaces in access to particular types of leave to help look after a sick family member (Figure 19.11 (d)).

Who can access family friendly work arrangements?

The analysis of Gray and Tudball highlights that the following characteristics of employees are important in determining access to family friendly work practices.

The most important factor affecting whether or not an employee had flexible start and finish times for work was their occupation. Managers and administrators, followed by professionals, had much more control than others over start and finish times. Blue collar workers, especially plant and machinery operators, drivers, tradespeople and labourers had the least flexibility in when they started and finished work. Women did not have better access than men and those with younger children had no greater access to flexible times than those with older children or no children at all. Part time employees had less access to flexible times. As the proportion of female workers in a workplace increased, flexible starting and finish times became less common.

Similar factors affected whether or not employees had access to a telephone for family matters. White collar workers, especially managers and professionals had better access in their workplace to phones than did blue collar employees. Similarly, those with higher education and those with older...
dependent children had better access to telephones for family purposes. Women had similar access to men but part time employees had less access than full time workers.

On the other hand, professionals, paraprofessionals, clerical and tradespersons had relatively poor access to part time work – especially compared to salespeople, plant and machinery operators, drivers, labourers and managers. Women had greater access than men to part time work but the age of children made no difference to whether an employee had access to part time work.

Taken overall, the evidence from the Gray and Tudball analysis of the AWIRS95 survey shows that the type of job that a person holds is much more important than where a person works in determining their access to family friendly work arrangements. With the exception of part time work, gender made no difference to this access and the age of children made virtually no difference. It appears that the need for family friendly workplace arrangements is less important in determining access to family friendly work practices than is the level and type of work a person performs. This pattern is consistent with the argument that these practices will be offered by employers to attract and keep what they see to be the more difficult or expensive to attract and replace employees.

Even where workplaces have arrangements that could help workers manage their family commitments, informal pressures can discourage workers from taking advantage of these arrangements. In

![Figure 19.11](source)

**Table 19.11** Family friendliness of workplaces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male %</th>
<th>Female %</th>
<th>All %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males taking family leave NOT seen as less committed</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>69.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees taking family leave NOT seen as less committed</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>69.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time employees NOT seen as less committed</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>62.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In current job can use:**

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paid maternity leave</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid maternity leave</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental leave</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>65.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special leave for caring for family members in current job</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>75.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent part time work</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>68.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home based work</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible start and finish times</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a).
In some workplaces, the use of family leave or accepting part-time work can be seen as signs of insufficient commitment to the workplace. However, the HILDA survey showed that in 2001 this was not the typical situation. Almost 70 per cent of employed respondents felt that taking family leave was not regarded in their workplace as a sign of lower work commitment. This, of course, means that there are up to 30 per cent that felt there may be some ambivalence about people who take family leave. Even with part-time work, the majority (63 per cent) did not feel that this was interpreted in the workplace as indicating a lower level of work commitment.

Perhaps surprisingly, female employees were more likely than men to feel that family leave and part-time work was not viewed in their workplace as a sign of lower work commitment (Table 19.11).

The research by Gray and Tudball reported above, indicated that family friendly work arrangements were unevenly available within workplaces. This research showed that the type of work people did was more important in terms of accessing these arrangements than the particular workplace in which they lived. The HILDA survey reinforces this picture by showing that access to family friendly work arrangements varies considerably according to the type of occupation in which a person works (Table 19.12).

While those in different occupations held similar perceptions of the way in which the taking of family leave and part-time work was regarded in their workplace, there were substantial occupational differences in the access to family friendly work arrangements. In general, those from white collar occupations – especially the higher status jobs, had better access to family friendly work arrangements than those in blue collar jobs. For example:

- Over 60 per cent of women in management and professional occupations had access to paid maternity leave compared to around a third of those in the lower occupations (production and transport, elementary clerical and sales, labouring).
- Women in managerial, professional and associate professional occupational categories had a relatively high access to unpaid maternity leave (80 per cent or higher) while only about half of those in the lower level blue collar jobs could get unpaid maternity leave.
- Parental leave was more available to those in white collar occupations (around 70 per cent or higher) than in blue collar jobs (around 50 per cent).
- Home based work was more available to workers in managerial, professional, associate professional and advanced clerical and sales occupations.
• In general, workers in white collar occupations had greater flexibility than blue collar workers regarding the times when they commenced work or when they went home (Table 19.12). Some family friendly work arrangements were more available to full time workers than part time workers. While part time work is frequently used by mothers as a means of balancing work and family responsibilities, part time work is also less family friendly in some respects. The advantages afforded to full time workers were evident in a variety of work conditions including:

• 60 per cent of full time employed women had access to paid maternity leave compared to just 36 per cent of part time employed women.

84 per cent of full time employed women could access unpaid maternity leave compared to 69 per cent of part time employed women.

• Parental leave was available to 70 per cent of full time workers but only 56 per cent of part time workers.

• Special family leave was available to 79 per cent of full timers and 68 per cent of part timers.

• Full time workers were more likely than part time workers to routinely spend some of their working week working from home (Table 19.13).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In current job can use</th>
<th>Full time</th>
<th>Part time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paid maternity leave (women only)</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>36.4***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid maternity (women only)</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>69.0***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental leave</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>55.9***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special leave for caring for family members in current job</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>68.4***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent part time work</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>79.8***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home based work</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>24.3***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any usual working hours at home</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>22.6***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible start and finish times</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>61.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a).

*** Difference between full time and part time workers is significant at .001 level.

Endnotes
1 This figure from the ISSSA survey is considerably higher than the comparable percentage from the HILDA survey in 2001 (62 per cent). This discrepancy is disturbing. ISSSA used a 5 point scale for responses while HILDA used a 7 point scale and this may account for some difference. I am inclined to rely more on the HILDA figure for the simple reason that it is likely to have a better sample than the ISSSA survey due to higher response rates, and much larger sample size.

2 The discrepancy between the figure of 60 per cent in the ISSSA survey in 2001 and the 45 per cent figure HILDA survey in 2001 to a very similar question is disturbing. Possible reasons for this discrepancy have been canvassed in a previous endnote. While the level of agreement recorded in the ISSSA survey may need to be treated cautiously, there is no reason to question the trend observed in Table 19.6 since it is based on the same question and comparable sample over time.

3 It is debatable whether fixed start and finish times are an advantage or a disadvantage to parents. While fixed times may provide less flexibility they also provide more predictability and assist with organising aspects of families including child care. However, inflexible times may make things very difficult when family matters make it difficult to get to work on time or require a parent to leave work at an irregular time.

Highlights
• Most fathers (92.4 per cent) who have dependent children in the home are employed as are two thirds of couple mothers with dependent children.

• Couple mothers with dependent children have a higher employment rate than lone mothers with dependent children.

• Lone fathers have a considerably higher employment rate than lone mothers.

• When children are pre-schoolers, employment rates of fathers are at their highest level and those of mothers are at their lowest level.

• Full time employment of mothers with pre-school children is relatively unusual – just 15 per cent of mothers with a pre-school child are employed full time.

• Employment levels, especially part time employment, of couple mothers with pre-schoolers have increased from 37.2 per cent in 1986 to 48.7 per cent in 2002.

• Employment rates of lone mothers have also increased over this period from 20.8 per cent in 1986 to 30 per cent in 2002.
• When a couple or lone mother’s youngest child begins school, employment rates increase substantially. For couple mothers they increase from 49 per cent to 67 per cent and for lone mothers from 30 per cent to 49 per cent.

• Since the mid 1980s the employment rate of mothers whose youngest child is aged 5–9 has increased from 58.5 per cent in 1986 to 67.1 per cent in 2002.

• Among lone mothers whose youngest child is aged 5–9, the employment rate over the same period has increased from 41.5 per cent to 49 per cent.

• Most of the increase in employment among lone mothers since the early 1980s has been in part time work with little change in the percentage employed full time.

• In contrast, both part time and full time employment of couple mothers has increased steadily over this same period.

• Among couple mothers and lone mothers and lone fathers there is a consistent and steady increase in workforce participation as children grow older.

• Of employed mothers with children under the age of 18, just over half are happy with their hours of work; a quarter want to work fewer hours and 18 per cent want to work more hours.

• Half the mothers with full time work wanted to reduce their hours to part time work and 42 per cent of employed mothers with less than 15 hours work wanted more work.

• These preferences of mothers to change their work hours in these ways held, regardless of the age of their youngest child.

• Among older men and women (aged 55 and over) the employment levels of men have been steadily declining while those of older women have been steadily increasing since at least 1979.

• In 2002 just 69 per cent of men aged 55–59 were employed (down from 82 per cent in 1979) and 49 per cent of similarly aged women were employed (up from 27.8 per cent in 1979).

• The percentage of older men and women who are employed part time increases steadily as they grow older. Part time employment seems to be a common part of the transition from work to retirement.

• Since 1982 there has been very little change in the percentage of jobless couple families with dependent children. Rather than joblessness growing in couple families, there has been a steady decline in single earner couple families with dependent children and a steady growth in the percentage with two jobs.

• Over the same period there has been a decline in the percentage of lone parent jobless families and an increase in the percentage with a part time job.

• Lone parent families with dependent children have a much higher rate of joblessness than do couple families. The main factor driving any growth in jobless families with dependents has been the growth in the proportion of lone parent families.

• Since 1981 there has been a decline in the percentage of traditional male breadwinner couple families (employed male and not employed female) and a rise in female breadwinner families (employed female and not employed male).

• There is still evidence of the view in much of the community that for women, children should be a more important priority than employment. These views were especially evident among older age groups.

• There was evidence of many parents, especially mothers, finding it difficult to combine their work and family commitments.

• For mothers, part time employment went some way towards reducing the conflicts and producing a better work-family balance. However, many fathers and mothers who worked full time found it difficult to achieve a workable balance.

• About 11 per cent of employed people do some work from home but family reasons are not often the main reason for working from home. Nevertheless, women with children were considerably more likely than those without children to work mainly from home.

• Both mothers and fathers report quite high levels of time stress. At all life stages women reported greater time stress than men and these gender differences were particularly pronounced among parents with children.

• Couple mothers with dependent children reported the highest level of time stress followed by lone mothers with dependent children, followed by couple mothers with non dependent children.

• Many workplaces have practices that can assist parents with their family responsibilities. However, there was evidence that access to these practices depends substantially on the level that parents occupy in a workplace and the type of job they have rather than simply whether or not they have family responsibilities.

• While many mothers choose part time or casual employment as a way of combining their work and family responsibilities, these part time and casual jobs often provide poorer access to family friendly work practices. This means that the benefit of part time work can be at least partly eroded by the poorer conditions in these jobs.
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