



FAMILY LAW AND MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN IN AUSTRALIA

by Margaret Harrison

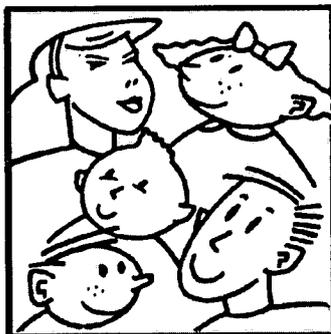


BACKGROUND

The laws that regulate marriage breakdown and the patterns of marriage and divorce in Australia have undergone considerable change over the past two decades.

The *Family Law Act* 1975 came into operation in January 1976, after a lengthy period of debate. It repealed the *Matrimonial Causes Act* 1961 which, like earlier state laws, had been largely based on fault, with spouses being seen as guilty or innocent of matrimonial wrongs such as adultery, cruelty and desertion. Divorce applicants had to prove that the other spouse had committed a matrimonial offence and that they themselves had not (or if they had, that this should be overlooked). Failure to prove one's case would result in a judge refusing to grant the divorce.

Under the old system, the allocation of fault affected such matters as custody, property and maintenance proceedings, and a 'guilty' spouse could be punished by being refused contact with his or her children, or losing a right to be financially supported by the other spouse. Many people divorcing during 1976 had been separated for lengthy periods of time and had been waiting for the simpler laws and procedure before applying for a divorce. In *Family Law Act*, 24,307 divorces were granted in 1975, just before the passage of the new Act to come into effect. This amounted to a rate of 7 divorces per 1,000 married women. In 1976, divorce numbers increased to 63,267 — a rate of 19 per 1,000 married women. This rapid jump prompted criticism that the introduction of no fault of marriage by encouraging marriage breakdown.



Under the new Act, divorce numbers increased to 63,267 in 1976, just before the passage of the new Act to come into effect. This amounted to a rate of 7 divorces per 1,000 married women. In 1976, divorce numbers increased to 63,267 — a rate of 19 per 1,000 married women. This rapid jump prompted criticism that the introduction of no fault of marriage by encouraging marriage breakdown.

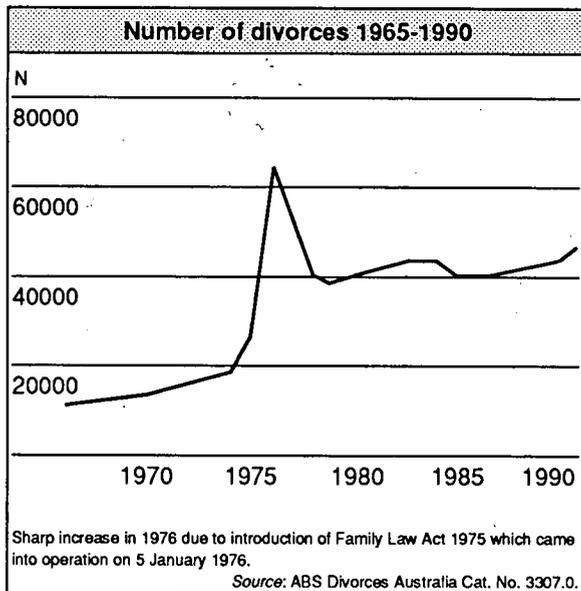


FACTS AND FIGURES

This section sets out the demographic features of marriage and separation since the 1970s. These statistics reveal interesting trends, but they cannot in themselves illustrate the extent of social change which preceded them in the years following the second world war — changes which carried over into the 1970s and led to the divorce law reform which followed. Marriage and baby booms in the 1950s and 1960s, increased questioning of society's values, the introduction of reliable and widely available contraception, an emphasis on individualism and secularism and increasing involvement of married women in the paid workforce have had major impacts on attitudes towards marriage and family, and on behaviour.

Information about the characteristics of divorcing couples is collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and published annually.

In 1991, 45,630 divorces were granted, representing a 7 per cent increase from the previous year. The graph on page two shows the numbers of divorces between 1965 and 1991. Note particularly the sudden rise in 1976 which is referred to above, and the flattening out during the remaining years of the 1970s, when annual divorce numbers averaged 40,000. They remained at similar levels during the 1980s, ranging between 39,258 in 1980 and 44,088 in 1982.



Over the same period the rate of marriage declined from 7.8 per thousand population in 1976, to 7.2 in 1986, to 6.6 in 1991. During that time social attitudes towards people who lived together without marrying (in de facto relationships) had become more accepting, and laws began to recognise them in several ways. Although the numbers of men and women living in de facto relationships are always difficult to measure reliably, in the 1986 Census 6 per cent of all couple-families identified themselves as being in marriage-like but informal relationships. As there were 3.6 million couple-families at that time, the number of de facto families amounted to more than 200,000.

Trends

Major characteristics of the divorce statistics over the past two decades reveal the following trends:

- an increasing proportion of divorces taking place within five years of marriage — in 1991 the relevant figure was 38 per cent of divorces, contrasted with 9 per cent in 1971 and 21 per cent in 1981;
- an increasing proportion of marriages involving a previously divorced spouse — in 1991, 16 per cent of marriages performed contained a divorced man and 15 per cent contained a divorced woman, contrasted with 7 per cent for both men and women marrying in 1971 and 9 per cent for those marrying in 1981;
- the continued trend for women to be the ones who initiate the separation and apply for divorce.

Children Involved

It has been estimated that about 18 per cent of all children will experience the divorce of their parents by the time they become adult.

Just more than half (54 per cent) the divorces granted in 1991 were to couples with dependent children, totalling 46,697 children. The average age of men at the time of divorce was 38.4 years and of women 35.5 years. The average duration of the marriages was 7.4 years between marriage and separation, and 10.3 years between marriage and divorce.

How many marriages will break down?

The prediction is that about one third of recent first marriages will end in divorce, and that the rate will be higher for second marriages (over 40 per cent).

We do not know the number of couples who separate but do not divorce, or whose de facto relationships come to an end, although disputes involving their children may be decided by the Family Court. Statistically, therefore, divorce figures provide the only record of relationship breakdown occurring in a particular year, and it shows only a portion of such breakdown.



LEGISLATION

Marriage and divorce are both regulated by the Commonwealth, which under the Australian Constitution has responsibility for 'marriage and divorce and matrimonial causes and in relation thereto parental rights and the custody and guardianship of infants'. The relevant legislation is respectively the *Marriage Act* and the *Family Law Act*.

The Commonwealth did not choose to make laws affecting divorce and related matters such as custody and maintenance until 1961 when the *Matrimonial Causes Act* came into operation and unified matrimonial law across the country. It was then replaced in 1975 by the *Family Law Act*.

The major characteristics of the *Family Law Act* 1975 are as follows:

- it defined irremediable breakdown as the sole ground for dissolution of marriage;
- it established the Family Court of Australia to hear disputes between married people and between the parents of dependent children;
- it provided the legal framework for resolving disputes involving children and financial matters;
- it introduced provisions for the protection of family members where there is domestic violence.



DIVORCE

Irretrievable breakdown of marriage is proved by the couple having lived separately for at least 12 months — the 'no fault' single ground for divorce — after which either spouse may initiate a divorce whether or not the other spouse is in agreement. Undoubtedly, many decisions to dissolve a marriage are made by one partner only.

With no fault divorce, the behaviour of either the husband or the wife is not considered: nobody is judged as being 'guilty'.

In most cases now, divorce proceedings are brief and virtually impossible to oppose, although a divorce will not be granted if the court is satisfied that there is a reasonable likelihood of the couple becoming reconciled.

Where there are no children under 18 years and the husband and wife agree, the divorce may be granted without either of them, or their lawyers, attending the court.

Where there are no children under 18 years and the husband and wife agree, joint applications for dissolution are allowed. In 1991, 16 per cent of divorces resulted from joint applications, 48 per cent from wives' applications and 36 per cent were begun by husbands.

Difficulties may occur in only two circumstances: first, where spouses are still living in the same house (or continue to do so for a portion of the 12 months); and, second, where there are repeated separations and reconciliations.

In the first of these instances, the court must be satisfied that the marriage has in fact ended, as proved by evidence that the couple is no longer sharing a common life and has not done so for the necessary 12-month period. Because of the possibility of fraud in such cases, the evidence of a third person is usually required before the court is satisfied that the separation is real and has lasted for at least 12 months.

In the second instance, when a couple has separated more than once, the Act provides that if they have reconciled for less than three months during the 12-month separation period, their divorce application may still continue. An additional short reconciliation that the court considers to be minor will also not prevent the application going ahead should they later decide to divorce.

Marriages are not legally dissolved on the day of the divorce hearing. On that occasion a *decree nisi* is granted, followed 28 days later by a *decree absolute*.

Once the decree absolute is granted the parties are free to remarry. The court may reduce the period of time between decree nisi and decree absolute if requested.

In divorces involving children aged less than 18 years the applicant must set out the proposed arrangements for the children in the divorce application form and be prepared to give evidence of the details of those arrangements at the hearing. Areas the judge is interested in include housing, supervision, education, child support and access. If there is concern that the arrangements are not proper in the circumstances, the court may refuse to make the decree nisi absolute.

Divorce is not possible if the marriage has lasted less than two years, except where the husband and wife have had counselling and considered reconciliation. A certificate must be filed with the divorce application to this effect.



NULLITY

In a very few instances a marriage may be declared a nullity. This means that something was so fundamentally wrong with the marriage that it is considered never to have occurred in law.

According to the *Marriage Act* nullity can occur when:

- either party is already married to someone else;
- the parties are within a prohibited relationship — that is, they are brother and sister, or a descendant or ancestor of each other;
- the marriage was performed by an unauthorised person who was known to be unauthorised by both parties;
- the consent of either spouse was invalid because it was obtained by duress or fraud, there was a mistake about the identity of one party or the nature of the ceremony, or one party was incapable of understanding the nature and effect of the marriage ceremony;
- either of the parties was less than the marriageable age at the time of the ceremony.

Marriageable age is 18 for males and 16 for females. This statutory age may be reduced (for one party only) to 16 years for males and 14 years for females where a judge or magistrate considers the circumstances are so exceptional and unusual as to justify such an order being made. Pregnancy is not considered an exceptional or unusual circumstance. Nullity applications are very rare, and only about 30 decrees are granted per year.



FAMILY COURT OF AUSTRALIA

As mentioned earlier, during the early 1970s there was increasing criticism about the provisions and procedures of the existing *Matrimonial Causes Act*. Under that Act the state Supreme Courts had federal power to grant divorces and resolve other matters relating to divorce. There were no facilities for counselling or other help for adults or children, and judges were rotated into the family law area as part of their usual judicial duties.

The emphasis on fault and the formal atmosphere of the Supreme Courts frightened many separating couples. At the same time, some spouses manufactured evidence of matrimonial offences, or came to an arrangement with the other spouse about their evidence, in an effort to avoid the various legal requirements.

When comprehensive reforms were proposed, great importance was placed on the need to establish a specialist family court, staffed by judges experienced in family law and supported by staff trained in behavioural sciences. Less complicated legislation, more informal courts and less frightening procedures were considered essential to reduce the distress of marriage breakdown.

The Family Court was established by the *Family Law Act* and opened its doors in January 1976. It is a federal court whose judges are selected on the basis of their training, experience and personality to deal with matters of family law. Legally qualified registrars are appointed to help resolve financial disputes before parties may take their disputes before a judge, and counselling is an important part of the system. Matters are heard initially by one judge; appeals are heard by three judges.

Western Australia established its own Family Court in 1976 as the *Family Law Act* permits, and that court has federal power under the Act and combines this with the exercise of state authority in matters such as adoption. The Family Court of Australia has 20 registries in capital cities and major provincial centres.

In the years since it came into operation there have been several changes in the composition of the Family Court of Australia and in the nature of its roles, with some Family Court judges now also dealing with matters such as bankruptcy, trade practices and income tax appeals.

The court has also gradually become more formal in its operation. In the early years it was closed to the

public, but now it is open. Originally neither judges nor barristers appearing before the court were wigged or gowned, but now, in contested cases, they are. Such increased formality is believed to give more status to the court and to proceedings, and anonymity to the judges who are less identifiable if wearing wigs.

In addition to the Family Court of Australia, courts of summary jurisdiction (called Magistrates Courts or Courts of Petty Sessions, depending on which state they are in) exercise limited power under the *Family Law Act*. These courts may hear and decide undefended matters involving children, defended property matters where the net value of the property is less than \$20,000, and (in limited circumstances) matters of child maintenance and domestic violence.

Divorces may be granted by the Family Court of Australia, the Family Court of Western Australia, the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory and the Magistrates Court of the Australian Capital Territory.



CHILDREN AND MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN

The *Family Law Act* provides that, unless a court order stipulates otherwise, each parent of children under the age of 18 years is a guardian of those children, and the parents have joint custody of them. This applies in the case of children of married and unmarried parents, and while the parents are living together as well as after separation.

Custody and guardianship



The Act defines 'custody' and 'guardianship'. A person granted custody has the right to have the daily care and control of the child and the right and responsibility to make decisions concerning that care and control. Guardianship is less clearly defined. The Act provides that a guardian has responsibility for the long-term welfare of the child; the guardian also has all the powers, rights and duties vested by law or custom, other than the custodial rights and responsibilities just referred to.

Access

Where children are living mainly with one parent the contact they have with their non-custodial parent, whether by way of visits, phone or letter contact, is referred to as access. Access is not defined in the *Family Law Act*.

Arrangements for children and the role of counselling

In most cases, arrangements for children are made between the parents themselves, with or without the help of lawyers. Usually no custody or other orders are sought, and, in their absence, it is only when the decree nisi is obtained and the arrangements for the children are scrutinised that the children's welfare is considered by the court.

Where there is a dispute over the custody, guardianship, access or welfare of children, there are a number of ways in which this may be resolved before or instead of a court making an order. Parents are encouraged (and in some situations required) to make use of the counselling service of the

Family Court. This may initially involve attending an information session at which the various impacts of separation on children are explained by court counsellors, who are psychologists or social workers by training. In addition, both parents and children are able to seek advice and information from the counselling service during later negotiations about the arrangements for the children.

Where proceedings involving children are underway, the court may order the relevant parties to attend a conference with a court counsellor to discuss the welfare of the children and try to resolve disputes. Such a conference is confidential, as whatever is said during the meeting cannot be used as evidence in any court proceedings which may take place later.

In contrast, reportable conferences may be ordered by the court. Their purpose is to provide information that is considered necessary before any order can be made. This may involve observing the children and assessing their relationship with others such as grandparents, teachers, friends, peers, and the new partner of either parent.

Obviously such information needs to be made available to the court and therefore the report will be used as evidence. In situations where a confidential conference is followed by a reportable conference, different counsellors are involved, so that their different roles are kept quite separate.

The *Family Law Act* provides that a court cannot make a final order in relation to custody, guardianship or access unless the parties have previously attended a conference with a court counsellor. The information provided by court counsellors

encourages parents to avoid court proceedings wherever possible: having matters decided by judges after a contested hearing is always seen as a last resort.

In addition to the conciliation counselling provided by the court counselling service, and the registrar's conferences in financial matters (see below), mediation and arbitration services are being introduced at several courts to encourage the settlement of disputes. In the case of mediation, an intermediary helps the parties to reach an agreement, which is frequently a workable compromise. Arbitration is more formal and is similar to court adjudication because the outcome is legally binding on the parties and is imposed by a third party. Family Court conciliation

counselling helps parents reach parenting agreement, and is consequently child-focused, while also helping to reduce the emotional distress of the parent.

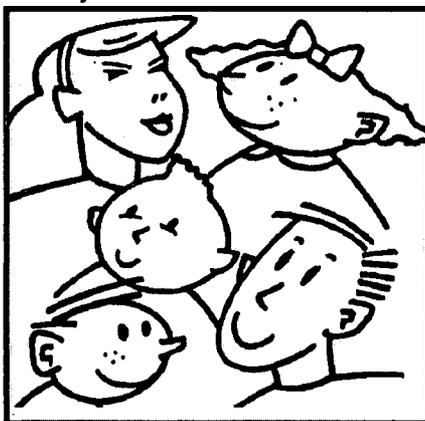
Approximately 5 per cent of divorces involving children result in a judge-made order relating to custody, access or (less frequently) guardianship. Another proportion are resolved before this stage is reached, and orders are drafted by the parties or (more commonly) their lawyers, and approved by the judge. These are called consent orders. Parents may also choose to finalise a child agreement which sets out the arrangements made. If registered with the court, this has the effect of an order.

Where a dispute over children cannot be settled by the parents or their lawyers or with the help of counsellors or others, it must be dealt with by the court. Although the judge in such a circumstance has considerable discretion, there are a number of factors set out in the *Family Law Act* which he or she must follow.

Court cases involving children

First, the court's main consideration must be the welfare of the child. Second, the court must consider the child's wishes and give them whatever weight it considers appropriate in the circumstances. It should also, where practicable, make an order that is the least likely to lead to further court proceedings.

In the proceedings themselves, Section 64 of the *Family Law Act* requires the court to take a number of matters into account. These are outlined on page six.



In cases involving children the court must take account of:

- the nature of the relationship the child has with each parent and other relevant people;
- the effect on the child of being separated from either parent or other person with whom he or she has been living;
- the desirability of, and the effect of, any change in the existing arrangements for the child's care;
- the attitude shown by each parent to the child and to the responsibilities and duties of parenthood;
- the capacity of each parent and other relevant people to provide adequately for the child's intellectual and emotional needs.
- the need to protect the child from abuse, ill treatment or exposure or subjection to behaviour which is psychologically damaging;
- any other fact or circumstance (including the education and upbringing of the child) that in the court's opinion needs to be taken into account for the welfare of the child.

Having heard all the evidence, the court may make a number of orders changing or keeping intact joint custody or guardianship, transferring either to a third party such as a grandparent, defining access periods, putting restrictions on access or even, in unusual circumstances, refusing access where this is seen as being in the child's best interests.

The *Family Law Act* allows a child to have his or her own separate legal representation where this is considered necessary — for example, where the interests of the parents and child appear to be different.



FINANCIAL DISPUTES

Under Australian family law, married couples may own property jointly or as individuals. There is no assumption that certain assets (such as the matrimonial home) must be owned equally, or that spouses have any entitlements to various assets because of their marriage. Property in this instance includes real estate, money in bank accounts, shares, furniture and cars.

If a dispute arises over who is entitled to what, the court has broad discretion over how it distributes property. All property may be divided, no matter what it was, how it was obtained, how it was used during the marriage, or in whose name it was registered.

This means that property owned before the marriage, or inherited by or given to one spouse may be 'put into the pot' for division.

Once all the property has been identified and valued, the issue of who contributed what must then be considered. 'Contribution' is clearly defined in the *Family Law Act* to include financial and non-financial input made directly or indirectly by (or on behalf of) a spouse in acquiring, maintaining or improving the property.

It also includes a spouse's contribution to the welfare of the family, including that of homemaker or parent. However, having defined 'contribution', the Act does not rank the importance of any form of input, and the court still has considerable discretion as to the significance of any particular contribution and how the property will be allocated.

Once the past contributions of the spouses have been considered, the second concern is whether the resulting outcome should be changed because it is unfair. This requires some assessment of the future needs of the spouses, based on existing circumstances. For example, if, after contributions and child support obligations are taken into account, the former wife and any children living with her still do not have adequate support, then property adjustments will be made.

The relevant issues at this stage include the financial commitments and responsibilities of each spouse, their income, property and financial resources, the duration of the marriage, and the preservation of a reasonable standard of living.

Registrar's conferences

A very small proportion (about 5 per cent) of disputes involving property are resolved by a judge. The *Family Law Act* provides that before final orders are made there must usually be a conference with a registrar of the court. The aim of the conference is to help the parties to arrange property matters themselves, with the help of an independent legally trained member of the court staff.

Spouses usually have their lawyers with them at these property conferences, but practices vary in different registries of the court. Matters discussed at such conferences cannot be treated as evidence in any later court hearing, but should a settlement occur (as it does in more than half the cases), it will usually be presented to the judge in the form of a consent order. A consent order is one that has the force of a court order, but has been agreed on by the spouses rather than being imposed by a judge.

Where the court is required to make an order in a property dispute, it must be 'just and equitable' and,

as far as possible, it should end the financial relationship between the spouses and prevent them continuing their dispute through the courts.

Spousal maintenance

In some limited circumstances a spouse may be required to provide continuing financial support for the other (whether male or female), although the marriage relationship has legally ended. An order for spousal maintenance can be made if it is considered 'proper', and if the paying spouse has the financial ability to pay and the receiving spouse is unable to support himself or herself adequately without that support. This inability should be due to the role of caring for a child of the marriage, or because employment is impossible because of age, physical or mental incapacity.

In fact, spousal maintenance is rarely payed because the potential payer has insufficient resources, and/or the property division provides both spouses with sufficient capital, and/or the payment of child support absorbs the payer's disposable income.

When a case is made out or an agreement reached, spousal maintenance may take the form of periodic payments (weekly, for example, or monthly), or a lump sum payment or series of payments, or support continuing until the occurrence of some event (the completion of a training course, for example, or the end of ill health). The amount of spousal maintenance will depend on the extent of the ability to pay and the need to do so, the length of the marriage and its impact on earning capacity, the payer's other support obligations, and the pre-separation standard of living.



CHILD SUPPORT

Child support — previously called child maintenance — is no longer decided upon by a court, but is now assessed and collected by a Commonwealth agency as part of the Child Support Scheme.

The Child Support Scheme was introduced in two stages between mid 1988 and late 1989 to reform several major weaknesses in the areas of assessment and collection of child maintenance payments. These weaknesses were: very few parents had orders; those parents who did have orders had them for only small amounts of money; orders were frequently ignored or payments were made irregularly.

Stage One of the Scheme, which came into operation in June 1988, established the Child Support Agency within the Taxation Office and allowed all existing and new orders to be registered and enforced through the Agency.

Stage Two of the Scheme, which became effective in October 1989, provides for the administrative assessment of child support according to a formula based on a percentage of taxable income and the number of children requiring support. Parents who separated before October 1989 are not allowed to have their obligations assessed under Stage Two, but they may obtain orders for child support and have these enforced by relying on the Stage One procedures. (For further information on Stage Two of the Scheme, see the article in *Family Matters* listed in References and Further Reading on page eight.)

Since the introduction of Stage Two of the Child Support Scheme, the courts have had no power to make child support orders for children whose parents separated or gave birth to a child after Stage Two began. However, there are still many families whose child support may be determined or varied by the courts, because they are ineligible for administrative assessment, or the maintenance is required urgently, or the children are over the age of 18 but are still financially dependent. In those cases the *Family Law Act* spells out the duty to maintain a child as being a primary duty of parents — more important than all other commitments other than those to support parents themselves and any other person for whom there is a maintenance duty.

In addition, where child support orders are made according to *Family Law Act* provisions, their registration with the Child Support Agency allows them to be enforced by that Agency, and the money will be paid to custodial parents by the Department of Social Security. Where possible, the money ordered will be automatically withheld from the payers's salary and forwarded to the Agency by the employer.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD ABUSE

The Family Court has power under the Act to prevent a spouse from entering or remaining in the matrimonial home or any particular part of it, or entering the other spouse's place of work. This is called an injunction.

Where an injunction for the personal protection of a spouse is not complied with, then the police may arrest the offender without a warrant and keep him or her for a maximum period of 24 hours (or 48 hours if a Sunday or public holiday intervenes) after which time the offender must be brought before a court.

There are similar provisions to protect children or their custodian or guardian. All states have their own domestic violence acts which include the making of orders for the protection of adults (regardless of their marital status) and children.

The *Family Law Act* was recently amended to require parties to proceedings who allege that a child is being abused or is at risk of abuse to notify the registrar who *must* then notify a state welfare authority of the allegation. Members of the court staff who suspect that a child has been abused or is at risk of abuse must report their suspicions to a child welfare authority. Where a member of the court staff has reasonable grounds for suspecting that a child is being ill-treated or subjected to psychological harm he or she *may* report this suspicion to the welfare authorities.

CONCLUSION

In November 1992, a major Report of a Parliamentary Inquiry into the *Family Law Act* was released. The Terms of Reference of the Committee included almost every major area of the Act, excluding marital dissolution itself. The Report included 120 recommendations which the Committee considered were necessary to improve the operation and interpretation of the Act. There are unlikely to be amendments in the short term, but ultimately many of the recommendations are expected to be considered by Parliament in some detail.



REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Australia, Joint Select Committee on Certain Aspects of the Operation and Interpretation of the Family Law Act (1992), *The Family Law Act 1975: Aspects of Its Operation and Interpretation*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (1992), *Social Indicators Australia No.5*, ABS, Canberra.
- Australian Law Reform Commission (1987), *Matrimonial Property*, Discussion Paper, Report No.37, AGPS, Canberra.
- Dickey, A. (1990), *Family Law*, Law Book Company, Melbourne.
- Evatt, E. (ed) (1991), *A Guide to Family Law* (second edition), Bay Books, Sydney.
- Family Law Council (1989), *Spousal Maintenance Discussion Paper*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Finlay, H. and Bailey-Harris, R. (1989), *Family Law in Australia*, (fourth edition), Butterworths, Sydney.
- Funder, K., Harrison, M. and Weston, R. (1993), *Settling Down: Pathways of Parents after Divorce*, Monograph No.13, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.
- Harrison, M. (1989), 'Child Support Scheme: Stage Two', *Family Matters*, No.25, December, pp.38-39.
- Harrison, M. (1990), 'A decade of family law', *Family Matters*, No.26, April, pp.46-51.
- Harrison, M., Snider, G. and Merlo, R. (1990), *Who Pays for the Children? A First Look at the Operation of Australia's New Child Support Scheme*, Monograph No.9, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.
- Harrison, M., Snider, G., Merlo, R. and Lucchesi, V. (1991), *Paying for the Children: Parent and Employer Experiences of Stage One of the Child Support Scheme*, Monograph No.10, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.
- McDonald, P. (ed) (1986) *Settling Up: Property and Income Distribution on Divorce in Australia*, Australian Institute of Family Studies and Prentice-Hall, Sydney.

The AIFS series *Australian Family Briefings* aims to answer common questions on family matters and point readers in the right direction for further information.

Titles in the series are:

- No.1 *Adoption Law in Australia*,
by Belinda Stonehouse, February 1992.
- No.2 *Family Law and Marriage Breakdown in Australia*,
by Margaret Harrison, February 1993.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies is a statutory research authority. Established for more than twelve years, it is Australia's main source of research and commentary on family trends and behaviour.

The Institute's Family Information Centre maintains a research library and public information service. If you would like more details about the Institute and its publications, write to:

Australian Institute of Family Studies, 300 Queen Street, Melbourne 3000 Victoria. Phone: (03) 608 6888.

Illustrations: Stephen Pascoe
Design: Orietta Graphics
Printing: Mylund Press

ISSN 1038-0507
ISBN 0 642 19035 6