



# A snapshot of how Australian Families spend their time

Social, economic and technological change has altered the way in which families spend time together. Important changes include increases in maternal employment, part-time employment and the number of people living alone. There have also been higher levels of geographic mobility, lower fertility rates and the development of affordable communication technology such as the mobile phone, email and the internet.

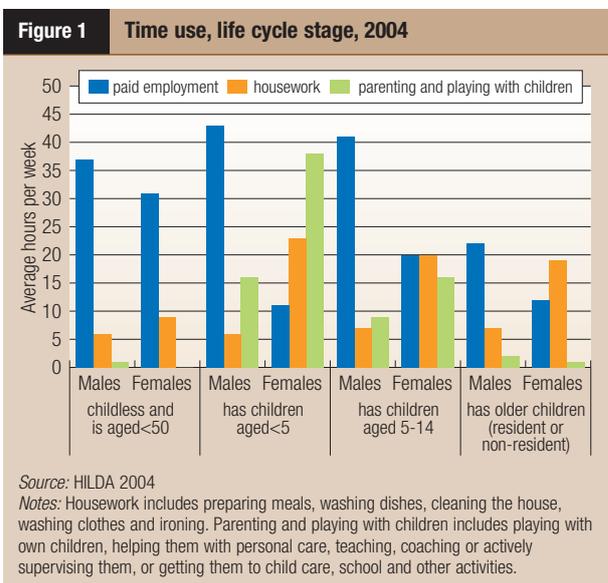
To support the 2007 National Families Week, the Australian Institute of Family Studies has prepared this Facts Sheet about the time that families spend together. The aim of the 2007 National Families Week is to encourage families to take the time to do things together that will improve their physical and emotional wellbeing.

The statistics presented in this Facts Sheet are derived from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, the Growing Up in Australia: Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997 Time Use Survey.

## Family time and life cycle stage

How time is spent varies greatly according to the stage of the lifecycle. Figure 1 shows the amount of time spent over a week in paid employment, doing household work, parenting and playing with children, for men and women in a number of different types of families. Categories reported in these analyses were those who are childless and aged less than 50 years, those with resident children aged less than 5 years, those with resident children aged 5-14 years and those who have children aged over 15 years. On average:

- Childless women aged less than 50 spend 31 hours in paid employment and 9 hours doing housework
- Mothers spend much less time in paid employment than childless women
- Mothers with a pre-school aged child are in paid employment for 11 hours and those with a child aged 5-14 years do 20 hours paid employment
- Mothers spend far more time doing housework than childless women. Mothers with a child under 5 spend 23 hours a week doing housework and those with a youngest child 5-14 years old spend 20 hours a week

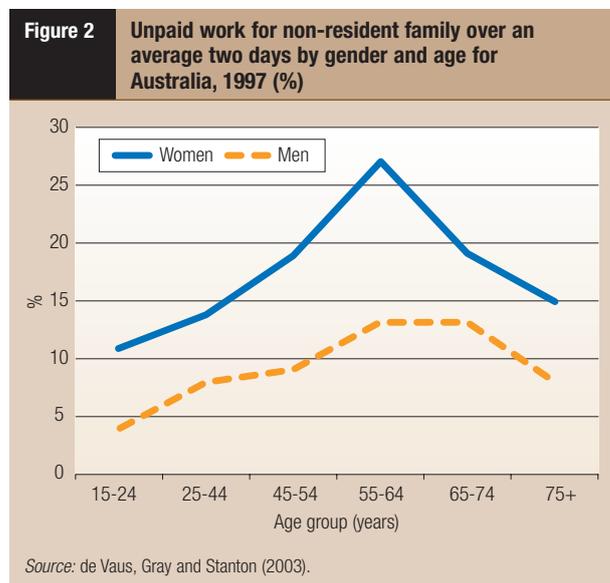


- Mothers with a child under 5 spend a very significant amount of time parenting and playing with children (38 hours a week). Those with a youngest child 5-14 years old spend 16 hours parenting
- Childless men aged less than 50 spend over 37 hours a week in paid employment and 6 hours doing housework
- Fathers with a child under five spend 43 hours in paid employment, 6 hours doing housework and 16 hours parenting and playing with children
- Time use patterns of parents of older children are markedly different. This in part reflects the age of these parents

## Unpaid work for non-resident family

Women are more likely than men to do unpaid work for non-resident family, that is, family who live elsewhere (Figure 2). Unpaid family work includes activities such as food and drink preparation and clean-up; laundry, ironing and clothes care; gardening; home maintenance; household management; child care; and adult personal care. This unpaid work is in addition to the unpaid family work done for resident family members, and includes helping elderly parents and grandchildren.

- For women, the likelihood of doing unpaid work for non-resident family increases with age, from 11% for those aged 15-24 years to a maximum of 27% for those aged 55-64 years
- 15% of women aged 75 years or more do unpaid work for non-resident family
- For men, the likelihood of doing unpaid work for non-resident family is highest for those aged 55-64 and 65-74 years (13%)





■ The economic value of this unpaid family work is considerable. Its annual value has been estimated to be \$800 per capita for females and \$484 per capita for males (1997 dollars). While its economic value is considerable it is also of great social significance.

### Feeling rushed or pressed for time

Always or often feeling rushed and pressed for time (time pressure) can be a source of stress for families. This section uses data from the 2004 HILDA survey on the extent to which people living in different types of families experience time pressure.

- Men and women with a dependent child in the family (41% of men and 51% of women) are more likely to experience time pressure than those without a dependent child (28% of men and 33% of women)
- Parents with children aged under 5 are the most likely to feel time pressure (48% of fathers and 58% of mothers)
- 44% of fathers and 52% of mothers with a youngest child 5-9 years old feel time pressure
- 43% of fathers and 50% of mothers with a youngest child 15-19 years old feel time pressure

### Children's time use

Growing Up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) provides a window into how young children spend their time. The statistics on children's time use were collected from Wave 1 of LSAC and were gathered in 2004, and are for time while the child is awake.

### Pre-school aged children's time with their parents

The amount of time that children spend with their mother decreases over the first few years of life.

Infants spend, on average:

- 7 hours 48 minutes with their mother and 2 hours 57 minutes with their father, on weekdays
- 7 hours 55 minutes with their mother and 5 hours 27 minutes with their father, on weekends

4 to 5 year olds spend, on average:

- 6 hours 50 minutes with their mother and 2 hours 48 minutes with their father, on weekdays
- 7 hours 54 minutes with their mother and 5 hours 59 minutes with their father, on weekends

Part of the reduction in time that mothers spend with their child is a result of increases in maternal employment and the almost universal participation of 4-5 years olds in some form of early education (child care, pre-school or school).

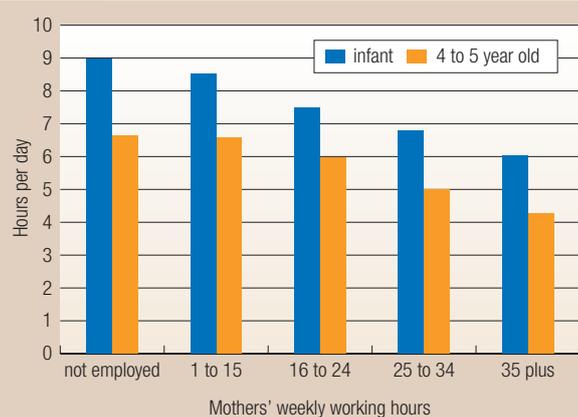
- 38% of mothers with an infant are employed
- 54% of mothers with a 4-5 year old are employed

For 4-5 year olds:

- 74% are in school or pre-school
- 22% attend child care (and not school or pre-school)

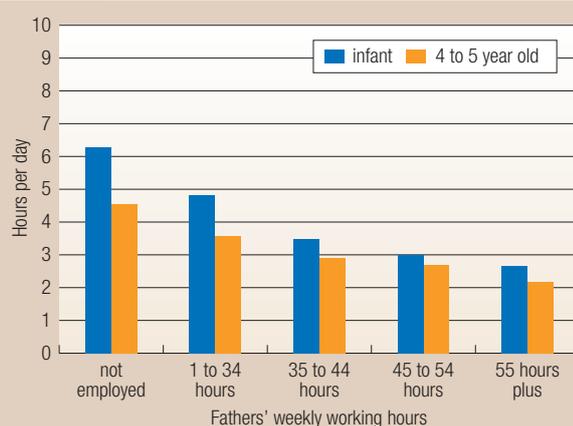
In contrast, the employment rates of fathers with an infant and those with a 4-5 year old are both over 90%.

**Figure 3** Time pre-school children spend with their mother on weekdays by age of child and mothers' working hours



Source: LSAC, Wave 1, 2004.

**Figure 4** Time pre-school children spend with their father on weekdays by age of child and fathers' working hours



Source: LSAC, Wave 1, 2004.

## The impact of parental employment on time with pre-school children

Figure 3 shows the amount of time pre-school aged children spend with their mother according to the mother's hours of work. Figure 4 shows the relationship for men between working hours and time spent with young children.

On weekdays:

- Not-employed mothers with an infant spend on average 8 hours 59 minutes with the child
- Mothers working short part-time hours spend only slightly less time with their infant (about half an hour per day)
- The time mothers spend with their infant decreases as the number of hours worked increases. Full-time employed mothers with an infant spend an average of 6 hours 1 minute with the infant—three hours per day less than non-working mothers
- Not-employed mothers with a 4-5 year old spend, on average, 6 hours 38 minutes per day with their child while the child is awake. Those working full-time spend 4 hours 17 minutes per day with their child

The time that parents spend with their young children on weekends does not vary much according to the number of hours worked by the parent.

## Children and family time

Four to five year old children share in a large range of activities with other family members.

Over a one week period:

- 45% were read to by a family member on 6 or 7 days, 30% were read to on 3 to 5 days, 21% on 1 or 2 days and 4% were not read to at all.
- 90% had participated in musical activities or dance with a family member
- 89% had spent some time with a family member while involved in everyday activities such as cooking or caring for pets
- 89% had played games outdoors or exercised with a family member

While children spend less time with their mother when their mother spends longer in paid employment, this does not necessarily mean that children of employed mothers have fewer opportunities to share activities with family members. Four to five year olds with an employed mother were as likely to be read to on 6 or 7 days a week by a family member as were children with not-employed mothers. The proportions read to every day are:

- 42% with not-employed mothers
- 50% with mothers working 1-24 hours a week
- 47% with mothers working 25-34 hours
- 42% with mothers working full time (35 hours or more)

Time together is not just about doing things and going places. The quality of relationships and interactions is crucial to the health and development of children. Mothers are more likely than fathers to report often

experiencing warm relationships with their pre-school aged child. The following shows the percentage saying they always or almost always:

- Expressed affection physically
  - with their infant: mothers 85% and fathers 65%
  - with their 4-5 year old: mothers 80% and fathers 52%
- Had warm encounters with their child
  - with their infant: mothers 51% and fathers 26%
  - with their 4-5 year old: mothers 40% and fathers 20%
- Enjoyed listening to or doing things with their child
  - with their infant: mothers 60% and fathers 43%
  - with their 4-5 year old: mothers 44% and fathers 28%

## Contact with extended family

Families with young children often have contact with their extended family. Parents had frequent contact with other family members, whether by seeing them directly, phoning or emailing them. Amongst mothers of 4-5 year olds:

- 28% were in touch with their own parents every day and 52% at least every week
- those who had siblings were often in contact with them (11% every day and 43% at least once a week)
- they were much less likely to be in touch with their in-laws (8% every day and 40% at least every week)

Amongst the 4-5 year old children:

- of those who have grandparents, 12% see them every day, 45% at least every week, 18% at least every month, 22% less often than monthly and only 3% have no contact with them
- of those who have uncles or aunts, 5% see them every day, 30% at least every week, 31% monthly, 32% less often than once a month and only 2% have no contact with them

## Conclusion

The time that families spend together is crucial. While people often express a concern that modern life is resulting in families spending less time together than in the past, this snapshot suggests that the picture is much more complex. Although many parents of young children experience time pressure, families are spending a lot of time together and most have substantial contact with extended family networks. Most children do a wide range of activities with their family, including reading books, playing outside and participating in musical activities. The challenge for society is to ensure that families continue to be able to spend time together, especially as the patterns of labour force participation of men and women continue to change.

## References

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de Vaus, D., Gray, M. and Stanton, D. (2003), "Measuring the value of unpaid household, caring and voluntary work of older Australians", *Research Paper 34*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

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