Australian Families: A picture of change

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Paper presented at the Legal Aid NSW Child Representation Conference
26 May 2012
Plan of presentation

- Background to family forms
  - Trends in family-related transitions
- “Household family” forms
  - Diverse
  - Dynamic
- “Households” vs “families”
  - increasing complexity
Trends in family-related transitions: Relationships & having children
Proportion of men ever married by age and Census year

Sources: ABS (various years), Marriages and Divorces Australia, Catalogue No. 3310.0
Proportion of women ever married by age and Census year

Sources: ABS (various years), Marriages and Divorces Australia, Catalogue No. 3310.0
Women ever partnered: start of first couple relationship by year of birth

Based on HILDA 2001; Negotiating the Life Course, (ANU); and the Australian Life Course Survey (AIFS).
De facto couples as % of all people in couple relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS Marriages and Divorces Australia 1999 Catalogue No. 3310.0; Censuses
Men and women living with a partner: proportions married or cohabiting by age, 2006

Source: ABS 2006 Census
# Stability of cohabitation and marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year began living together</th>
<th>Cohabitation</th>
<th>Per cent separated within five years</th>
<th>Marriage</th>
<th>Year of marriage</th>
<th>Per cent divorced within five years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970-74</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-79</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-84</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>1987-88</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>1987-88</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-89</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>1989-90</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>1989-90</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-94</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>1994-95</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>1994-95</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: ABS (2000), Marriages and Divorces Australia 1999, Catalogue no. 3310.0; AIFS *Family Facts & Figures*
Outcomes of cohabitation within 5 years

Year beginning living together:
- 1970-74
- 1975-79
- 1980-84
- 1985-89
- 1990-94

Married
Separated

Source: 3 datasets combined: HILDA; Negotiating the Life Course, (ANU); and the Australian Life Course Survey (AIFS)
Proportion of women who were living with a partner by age, 1976-2006

Sources: the Censuses.
Note: For 1976, the figures refer to the proportion of men who were not married and few people were in a cohabiting relationship in 1976.
Having children
Age of new mothers

Sources: AIHW (various years), Mothers and babies Australia
Number of children ever born: women aged 40–44

Sources: ABS (2002), Births Australia 2001, Catalogue no. 3301.0; ABS 2006 Census
Proportion of children born outside marriage

Sources: Commonwealth Bureau of census and Statistics (various years). *Demography Bulletin*; ABS (various years). *Births Australia* (Catalogue no. 3301.0).
Related “household family” forms
ABS Households families

- 2+ persons, one of whom is 15+ yrs old:
  - Related by blood, marriage (registered/de facto), adoption, step or fostering
  - Entails presence of:
    - Couple relationship
    - Single-parent & child
    - Other blood relationships
  - Some households therefore contain more than one family

ABS (2005) Family, Household and Income Unit Variables, 2005, Cat. No. 1286.0
According to ABS definition, household families may be comprised of:

- Couples with/without co-resident children of any age
  - Heterosexual couples and gay/lesbian couples
- Grandparents caring for grandchildren
- Other related adults (excluding relatives beyond 1\textsuperscript{st} cousins)
Family types, 1976-2006

Note: “Other families” include one parent families with non-dependent children, adult siblings living together, etc.
Sources: ABS 2001 Year Book Australia, No 83 (Catalogue No. 1301.0);
ABS (2007). 2006 Census Tables: Australia, 20680-Family Composition - Australia
Families with a child aged 0-17 years in 2009–10 (2.7 million families)

- **Intact couple, 73%**
- **Lone mother, 15%**
- **Blended, 5%**
- **Step, 3%**
- **Lone father, 2%**
Same-sex families

- 23,000 same-sex couples in 2009-10
- Representing:
  - 0.36% of all families with or without children
  - 0.43% of couple families with or without children
- Most had no children in the household
Grandparent families: (with child 0–17 years old)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>23,000</td>
<td>0.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>0.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>0.61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Household families are marked by change

Diversity of events & their sequencing

- Partnering, births & deaths
- Growing up,
  - leaving the nest, perhaps returning for a time
- Parental separation
- Re-partnering?
  - Step; new children?

(Example next slide)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Type</th>
<th>Wave 3</th>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Source: Qu &amp; Weston (2011). Based on: Growing up in Australia: Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two biological, married parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>92.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two biological, cohabiting parents</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step-parent family</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sole mother</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sole father</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of observations</td>
<td>3,349</td>
<td>343</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Persons 30 – 50 years old: Number of live-in partners ever had by childhood experience of parental divorce

Based on HILDA wave 5 (2005) - new analysis
Households vs families

Example 1:
“Living Apart Together”
= 2 households but 1 family?
Partnering rate has fallen—
but is definition of “partnership” too narrow?
“Living apart together” (LAT)

Reimondos et al. (2011)
(based on HILDA survey, 2005)

“In intimate, ongoing relationship with someone with whom not living”

- 9% of all those 18+ yrs
- 24% of those who were neither married nor cohabiting

Of all LATs:
- 44% were 18–24 yrs (44%),
- 14% were 25–29 yrs & 14% were 30–34 yrs
- 6% were 30–34 yrs & 6% were 35–39 yrs
- 16% aged 45+ yrs

Typology of LAT (continued)

Reimondos et al. (2011):
Respondents = 18+ yrs in “HILDA” survey 2005

% who said they made definite decision to live apart

- 73% of “older, previously married group” (typically 45+ yrs)
- 67% of “single parents” typically 30 yr, with resident child
- 61% of young adults, previously cohabited with someone else (typically 25–34 yrs, never married)
- 48% of those aged 18–25 yrs

Reimondos et al. (2011): Respondents = 18+ yrs in “HILDA” survey 2005

% who intended to live together within next 3 years

- 32% of “older, previously married group” (typically 45+ yrs)
- 53% of “single parents” (typically 30 yr, with resident child)
- 79% of young adults, previously cohabited with someone else (typically 25–34 yrs, never married)
- 69% of those aged 18–25 yrs

Household vs families

Example 2:
Life course transitions
= 1 family but 2+ households?
Or neither/nor?
Households vs families

- Where household boundaries are crossed:
  - Couple parents and adult children
  - Grandparents and grandchildren
  - After parental separation
    - Children and one of their parents
    - Children with non-resident step-parents, step-siblings, half-siblings
Family identity:
Who’s in? Who’s out?

Example 1:
LAT & Cohabitation
Example: LAT & cohabitation

- Two households, sexual relationship
  - LAT?
  - Cohabiting?
  - Neither (other possible alternatives listed below (e.g. “going steady”))

- One household, sexual relationship
  - Marriage just a piece of paper?
  - Saving to marry?
  - Trial marriage?
  - Going steady?
  - No plans – see how things turn out?
  - In a “friendship with benefits”?

“Views may change, converging or diverging
Family identity:
Who’s in? Who’s out?

Example 2:
Where children’s parents have separated
After parental separation

- Variety of potential views
  - 1 family & 2 homes
  - 1 family & 1 home & Dad’s home
  - 1 family & 1 home & Mum’s home
  - 2 families & 2 homes
  - 2 families & 1 home
  - ? families; Mum’s home; Dad’s home
Children with “equal care time”
Another difficulty for “household family”
Proportion of children with “equal care time” by age of child

Each care time= 48–52% of nights p.a. with each parent

* These percentages are based on a small number of cases and should therefore be interpreted with caution.
Longitudinal study of separated families (LSSF)

- AIFS-based dataset
  - 10,000 parents who had:
    - registered in Child Support Agency (CSA) in 2007, and
    - separated after 1 July 2006
- Average interval between separation and interview = 15 months
- 7,030 parents re-interviewed 12 months later
Continuing sample= parents who were re-interviewed (12 months later).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eleven categories of care-time arrangements</th>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father never sees child</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father sees in daytime only</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87–99% with mother (1–13% father)</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66–86% with mother (14–34% father)</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53–65% with mother (35–47% father)</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48–52% with each parent (i.e., equal care time)</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–47% with mother (53–65% with father)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14–34% with mother (66–86% father)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–13% with mother (87–99% with father)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother sees child in daytime only</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother never sees child</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of respondents</td>
<td>5,273</td>
<td>5,273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stability of different care-time arrangements

- Equal time was the least likely of all arrangements to change in the 12 months.
- Where time was “shared” but unequal: greater time with mother was more stable than greater time with father.
- Change in shared care time tended to increase time with mother than with father.
Family identity:
Who’s in? Who’s out?

Example 3:
Where children’s parents have re-partnered
Many possible combinations
Many possible divergent views

…..and there may be step- & new children
Satisfaction with parent-child relationships
(Including step-relationships)
Parents: Satisfaction with parent-child relationship by age and gender

Per cent reported high satisfaction (ratings 9 or 10)

HILDA (2004)
Sons & daughters: Satisfaction with relationship with parents by age and gender

Per cent reported high satisfaction (ratings 9 or 10)

HILDA (2004)
Conclusions
Conclusions: Life transitions

- Increased diversity in timing & sequencing of transitions
- No clear script re life course that will be followed
  - Need to make conscious decisions,
  - But options will turn out to be more constrained for some people than others
- Concept of “life cycle” is therefore being increasingly replaced by “life course trajectories”
Conclusions: Family forms

- The different family forms would have always existed, but prevalence has changed.
- Some were hidden in the past.
- Now, social sanctions have weakened, but still apparent.
Conclusions: Boundary-crossing

- Families have always crossed household boundaries, but the boundaries have become blurred
  - Who’s in / who’s out no longer clear
  - Different potential members may have different ideas on this
  - Ideas may well change, diverging or converging
Conclusions: Boundary-crossing (continued)

- For much of 20th Century, step-relationships resulted from death of parent
  - Children would have only one step-parent – and this parent would be living with them
  - But some may not have seen this person as “family”.
- Now, children may have a resident step-parent and/or non-resident step-parent
  - Some may see one, both or neither as “family”
- Step-families are less stable the intact families, parents may re-partner
  - Children’s interpretation? Step-parent has been replaced? Step-parents have accumulated?
  - Neither – original step-parent is still “family” or never had step-parent?
Conclusions: Legal implications of fuzziness

- Used to be a common understanding of relationship status (called “marital status”):
  - Single, Married, Separated, Divorced, Widowed
- Diversity has brought fuzziness not only of boundaries, but also of timing
- Legal implications:
  - Need to establish criteria to define existence of relationship and
  - If it is seen as existing:
    - Need to attempt identification of when it began and when it ended
Example: Legal implications & “LAT”?  

Section 4AA: Establishing if persons have a relationship as a couple may include *any or all* of nine criteria:

- **the duration of the relationship**;
- the nature and extent of their common residence;
- **whether a sexual relationship exists**;
- the degree of financial dependence or interdependence, and any arrangements for financial support, between them;
- the ownership, use and acquisition of their property;
- **the degree of mutual commitment to a shared life**;
- whether the relationship is or was registered under a prescribed law of a State/Territory as a prescribed kind of relationship;
- **the care and support of children**;
- the reputation and public aspects of the relationship.
Conclusions: Separation & “clean break”?

- Rise in parental separation accompanied by changing understandings of fathers’ roles in intact and separated families
- In the past, parents remained at least *theoretically* connected by being parents of same child
  - In practice, “moving on” often implied that the non-resident parent had little if anything to do with the children and therefore, the other parent
- Today’s emphasis on both parents being involved in child’s life
  - *In practice*, no “clean break” from other parent (at least financially, if not in other ways)