Uniting Families Report 2024

Insights into the diversity of families raising children and young people.

UNSW SYDNEY

SPRC UNSW Social Policy Research Centre

Uniting

Uniting NSW.ACT and UNSW acknowledge Australia's First People as the original and ongoing custodians of the lands and waters on which we live and work.

We recognise the continuing sovereignty of Australia's First Peoples and their right to self-determination.

We act on our responsibility to co-create a national dialogue of truth that proudly embraces First Peoples' history, culture and rights, for present and future generations.

We pay our respects to all Elders – past, present and emerging – and to all First Peoples and communities.

Acknowledgements

This report was developed by the UNSW Social Policy Research Centre in partnership with Uniting NSW.ACT. The work was led by Dr Yuvisthi Naidoo, Dr Megan Blaxland, Dr Melissa Wong and Professor Ilan Katz from the Social Policy Research Centre, and Dr Tom McClean and Valancy Hicking from Uniting NSW.ACT. We acknowledge the expert input of other contributors from SPRC, Uniting NSW.ACT and external advisors.

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Foreword

I am proud to present the inaugural Uniting Families Report, a collaboration between Uniting NSW.ACT and the University of New South Wales Social Policy Research Centre.

Together, we recognise the importance of exploring the unique needs of families to inform innovative change and support improved outcomes for all families across Australia.

The Uniting Families Report 2024 presents findings based on insights available in two important datasets. It marks the beginning of an ambitious 10-year project.

As we embark on this important endeavour, our aims are clear: to examine the reality of family life in Australia, to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the diversity within our communities, and to explore what it means to raise children and young people. Uniting is pleased to be leading this initiative which we hope will inform and influence wider understanding and drive better reform.

The traditional image of the nuclear family, consisting of a mother, father and two children, permeates our cultural understanding of family life. This report responds to the need for a more nuanced view, challenging current conventions and celebrating the real diversity of ways people create family when raising children.

Over the coming years, we will contribute to and enhance national discourse on family understanding by looking at a broader range of datasets and at issues that cannot be examined through existing data alone. Examples include the lived experience of First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse, and LGBTQIA+ families, of families in regional areas, and those caring for adults as well as children.

As one of Australia's largest community service providers, Uniting has more than 100 years of firsthand experience with the diversity and complexities of caregiving and kinship. We celebrate the richness and love within each of the families we support.

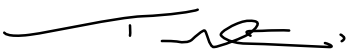
The findings of this report will contribute directly to innovation, reflection and change in our own practice across the hundreds of services and programs Uniting provides.

The valuable research within this project will support our 10-year strategic plan to 'create a better future for more people, communities and regions in need by disrupting entrenched disadvantage'.

We will also share this information with the aim of improving the policies and systems that affect the people we support. Ignoring different family structures has real-world consequences, and these often fall most heavily on families already struggling with vulnerability or disadvantage.

Greater attention to family diversity in Australia is essential for promoting inclusion, equity and wellbeing in our society. It enables us to challenge stereotypes, advocate for inclusive policies, and build more compassionate and supportive communities.

I invite you to take time to explore the inaugural Families Report. We hope this becomes a foundation for better understanding of the dynamics and needs of Australian families, and improving the ways they are supported.



Tracey Burton
Chief Executive Officer
Uniting NSW.ACT

Our research partnership

The Uniting Families Report is the first produced as part of an ongoing partnership between Uniting NSW.ACT and the UNSW Social Policy and Research Centre. Together, we intend to collaborate over the coming decade to report annually on families in Australia.

Each of our organisations brings unique expertise to this partnership. However, we share a desire to disrupt disadvantage and create meaningful change for children and young people, and the families raising them.

This report marks the start of a series that will document and celebrate the experience of family life in contemporary Australia.

SPRC **UNSW** Social Policy Research Centre

Uniting

Uniting NSW.ACT

Uniting NSW.ACT is the social service and advocacy arm of the Synod of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT. Uniting provides high quality services to support people experiencing disadvantage at all stages of life, including early learning and services for vulnerable and at-risk children and families, disability services, homelessness and youth services, aged care and other services for older people.

Across its work, Uniting is committed to addressing the conditions that hold disadvantage in place. Specifically, Uniting strives to ensure that all children develop well and are ready for school; that fewer children enter out-of-home care; and that those young people who do end up in long-term care make a successful transition to independence as capable and functioning adults after they leave the family home.

Families are critical social institutions in all these areas. Understanding their diversity, dynamics and circumstances is vital to achieving Uniting's vision of a society that is more inclusive, connected and just.

The Social Policy and Research Centre

SPRC has operated for more than 40 years as a specialist research organisation within the University of New South Wales.

It is at the forefront of research generating real change for individuals and communities in Australia and internationally, producing and disseminating robust research findings for a wide audience.

Led by Dr Yuvisthi Naidoo and Dr Megan Blaxland, the research team has extensive expertise in working with large national datasets and conducting qualitative research with vulnerable groups. Their research on families is varied, including areas such as relationship dynamics, care roles, child protection, economic and other resources, living standards and wellbeing over the life course.

Introduction

The Uniting Families Report 2024 is the first in a 10-year series of annual reports that seeks to explore the realities of family life in Australia, especially the families in which children and young people are being raised.

In this first year, the Uniting Families Report has uncovered a richness in family types that are raising children and young people. **While 69% of Australian children lived in couple parent families, more than 30% lived in single parent families, step and/or blended families, multigenerational, foster and other kin families.** For example, within one family home there may live a couple with their own children, a grandparent and possibly a stepchild to one of those parents.

The Uniting Families Report highlights the many variations in experiences of these families in relation to health, finances, housing, education and community.

The implication of painting this complete picture of family diversity and how they live their lives in our community is clear. **Where policymakers and practitioners fail to design systems, laws and services without the full range of family experiences in mind, some individuals won't get the support they need to thrive.**

The key findings of the Uniting Families Report show that those not in couple parent families are more likely to experience cost of living pressures, greater caring responsibilities other than raising children, ill-health, disability, more unstable housing and hardship. **This indicates that there is work to do to ensure that conditions and opportunities are equal for all families.**

It is our ambition that the Uniting Families Report will form the basis for 10 years of research and insights into family life that can help bridge that gap.

The Uniting Families Report also uncovers areas of hope. Despite the obvious challenges that many families face, **the resilience and care within families is clear.** When adults are asked to rate their satisfaction with their relationship with their children and how well the children in a household get along with each other, there is very little difference amongst all family types.

Each year, we will focus our exploration on an important topic of the time. This year, we have analysed Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) and Census data to provide insights into the diversity of families in Australia and how their experiences differ according to their family type.

Our goal is to gather information that can guide our mission at Uniting to disrupt entrenched disadvantage.

We hope the Uniting Families Report inspires others to think more deeply, debate, research and discuss the needs and strengths of all families. Through sharing these insights, we will continue to advocate for better policies and practice that will disrupt disadvantage.

Australian families are diverse

Australian families come in many forms:

7 in 10
of children live in couple parent families (69%)

3 in 50
live in multigenerational families (6%)

1 in 10
live in sole parent families (11%)

1 in 10
live in step and/or blended families (12%)

1% live in foster families or families made up of other kin

This diversity does not fit neatly into categories. Almost 1 in 5 couple parent families are also step and/or blended families, multigenerational families or foster and other kin families.

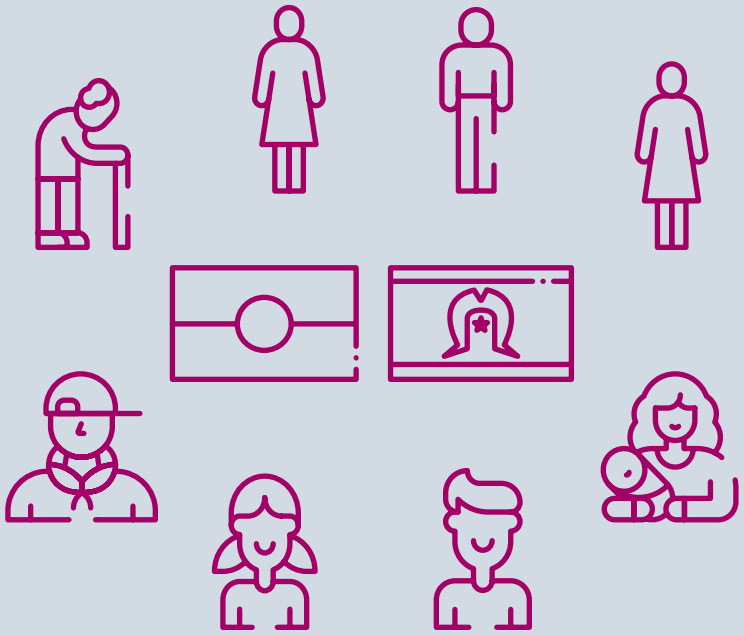
Most laws and practices are based on the assumption that families are couple parent families. Other family types are treated as anomalies, when they are recognised at all. In fact, one in every three Australian children lives in a family which does not conform to this assumption.

For example, some welfare programs review household incomes to determine access to supports. These programs effectively assume that an increase in resources will help all families to more or less the same extent, regardless of the number of people in the household or the complexity of caring roles they may hold.

We need to better understand First Nations families and kinship relationships

1 in 3

First Nations families are couple parent families



First Nations families are more likely to be multigenerational, step and/or blended, sole parents, or foster and other kin families than non-First Nations families.

This confirms what First Nations communities and organisations have been saying for many years, and could assist in the development of programs of support and service for First Nations families. It also highlights the necessity of self-determination for First Nations peoples in the development of programs and services because of their deep knowledge of their own ways of 'doing family'.

For example, the child protection system currently over-assesses risk to First Nations children because we do not properly understand First Nations family structures or the child rearing practices that happen within them. Assessment tools, often developed in other countries, do not recognise the care provided by kinship networks, and mistakenly over-identify risks (such as from large families living in a single household).

Even the datasets that we rely on for an understanding of families can be biased in ways that may not be obvious. For example, most focus on a single household to understand the care network and resources available to a family. The focus on a single household or on a limited number of blood relations does not accurately measure or represent the rich care provided by kinship networks and relationships within First Nations families.

Uniting is currently reviewing our own casework tools in our early intervention and intensive family preservation services. As part of this, we are looking at culturally sensitive ways of assessing strengths and risks in First Nations families.

“Family is very important to all of us. We have grown as a family learning to build relationships with the different versions of each other and we appreciate each other as we grow together.”

Family type affects wealth and ability to manage economic pressures

The average total net wealth of couple parent families is around 1.3 times higher than for any other family type.

One in five sole parent families have needed to ask friends and family for financial assistance.

Approximately 10% of couple parent families say they couldn't raise $4,000 in an emergency. In all other families, this number is greater than 20%.

The cost of living crisis in Australia is impacting families unequally. The financial buffer required to survive financial ups and downs is not available to many families, making them vulnerable to things like rising prices and economic downturns.

At $720,340, the average total net wealth of couple parent families is around 1.3 times higher than for any other family type. The average total net wealth of foster and other kin families is around $530,000; for multigenerational families around $470,000; sole parent families around $345,000; and the lowest for step and/or blended families at around $340,000.

Policies to ease the burden of increased cost of living which do not take account of family structures can have the effect of benefiting families in surprising and unequal ways. For example, tax cuts can benefit all members of a family by increasing the take-home pay of wage earners, and household-based payments like energy rebates can help households reduce costs. Our results show that couple parent families are, on average, financially better off and less likely to have children or be caring for others with health conditions or disability than other family types. This means the benefit of these payments is likely to be lower for those living in the families who, on average, need it most, because they have more dependants and are more likely to be struggling financially to start with.

Earning capacity is linked to education, and adults in couple parent families are more likely to have completed some type of tertiary qualification through to a Bachelor's degree. Over half of all couple parents (51%) hold a Bachelor's degree or higher, compared to most other family types where this is less than one third.

The number of children in a family is related to the family type

About half of all step and/or blended families and foster and other kin families have three or more children.

About half of all sole parent families have just one child or young person in their home.

Government services and programs may not make enough allowance for variations in the size of families, with the result that service supports are spread across more people in the families needing the most help.

For example, some early intervention and intensive child and family support programs have requirements for how much time caseworkers can spend with a family and cap the additional hours of support that can be given to families with more children. Uniting is concerned that these caps, which are essentially a way of managing limited funding, may hinder access to and quality of services for children in larger families (families which, as we have seen, are more likely to be struggling in other ways).

Some families are more likely to rent and face housing insecurity

Sole parent families and step and/or blended parent families are more likely to be renting and facing housing insecurity.

Some family types are more likely to be affected by the current rental crisis and lack of affordable housing supply than others. The experience of having insecure housing is more familiar to sole parent and step and/or blended families.

- Three times the proportion of sole parents families rent compared to couple parent families.
- Two times the proportion of step and/or blended parent families and foster or other kin families rent their homes compared with couple parent families.

Understanding which family types are most in need of private and public rental and supported or affordable housing can assist policymakers and providers to focus on the kinds of housing to build and adapt.

Construction of new dwellings for rent can perpetuate disadvantage if they're not adapted to the needs of the families that will use them. When houses and apartments are built on the assumption they'll be occupied by couple parent families, it makes it harder to find somewhere appropriate to live if you are in a different family type. This affects social and affordable housing stock, as well as the private market.

The inability to find somewhere appropriate to live can sometimes be a barrier to achieving other service outcomes, like family preservations and restorations in the child protection system. Services required to consider the appropriateness of housing often include overcrowding as a risk. These assessments unnecessarily bias against large families such as step and/or blended and foster and other kin families, as most modern dwellings will not have more than three to four bedrooms.

“Togetherness, care, warmth is what family means to me. We can count on each other and are a close family due to all the travelling we have had to do.”

Multigenerational families use the most informal care for young children

Multigenerational families have the highest use of informal care (74%) for children before they start school. Step and/or blended families (35%) have the lowest.

This finding highlights the strength of multigenerational families in helping adults balance multiple competing demands such as workforce participation and the cost of care. Other family types are less able to draw on these resources to cope.

However, informal care arrangements may mean that children miss out on the developmental support available through quality early learning. Families, too, may miss out on the social connection that the community of an early learning centre can offer.

At Uniting, we are exploring alternative ways for children to access the benefits of quality early learning in a variety of ways that may be more suitable to a range of families. Developmental support, school readiness and social contact can also be provided in programs like supported playgroups. These can be an essential part of the ecosystem of early learning opportunities that meet the needs of all families.

Young adults are not all in work or school

Young adults who don't live in couple parent families are less likely to be participating in work or study.

The rate of non-participation in work or study for young people when compared to those in couple parent families is almost:

2x higher in sole parent families

2x higher in step and/or blended families

3x higher for those in foster and other kin families

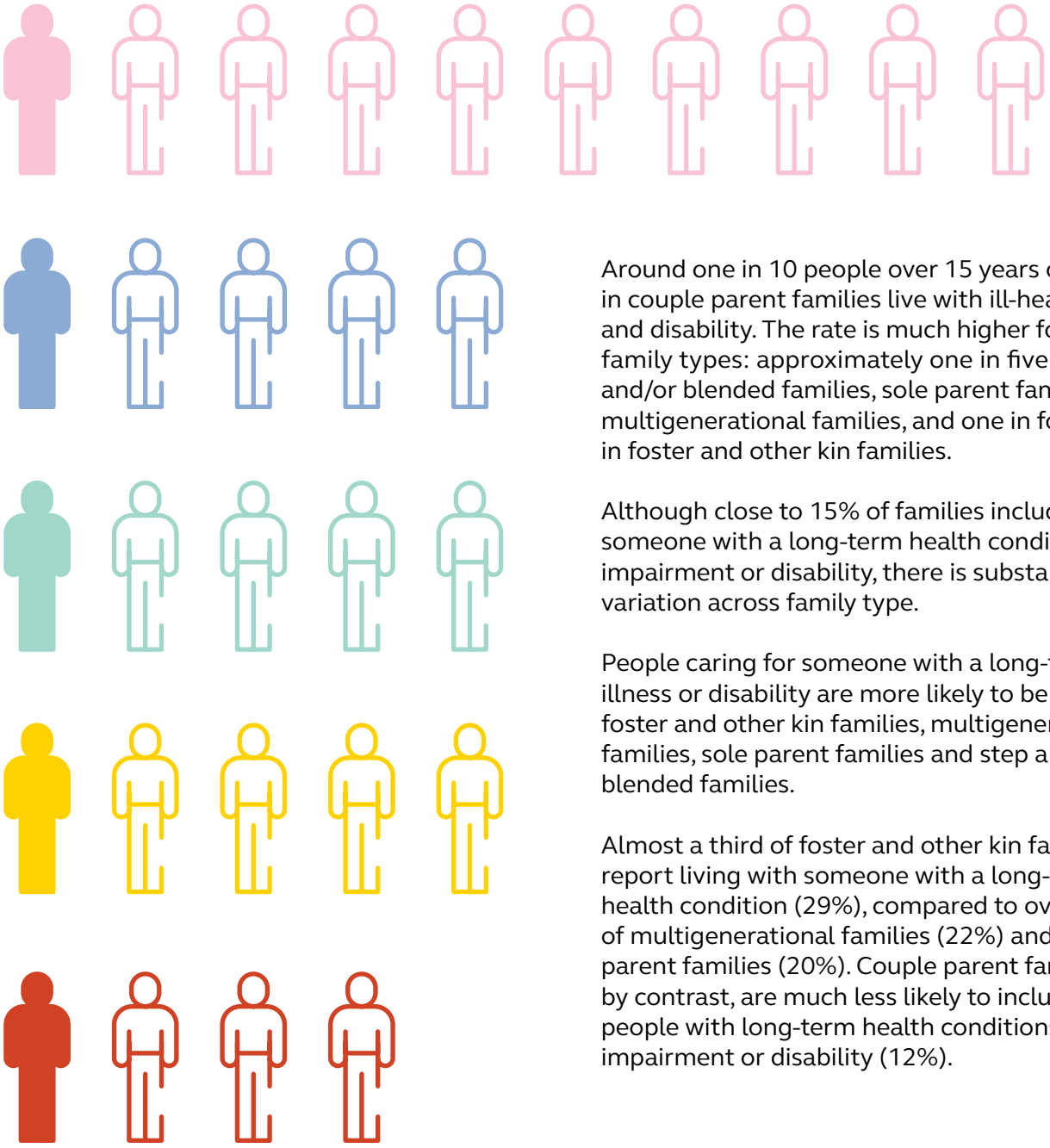
Most young people (aged 18 to 24) are either working, studying or a combination of both. Fewer than 10% of young people in couple parent families are in neither work nor study. In sole parent and step and/or blended families the rate is closer to 20%, and more than 30% of young people in foster and other kin families are not working or studying.

This tells us that young people in some families may need more support than others to find and keep work or to successfully participate in study. That young people who live in foster and other kin care arrangements have three times lower rates of employment and work suggests that they should be a priority population, which Uniting has advocated for many years.

Uniting's innovative Extended Care program addressed this challenge and provided evidence that with personalised support and coaching from age 15, young people leaving care can make a successful transition to independence.

The NSW Government is not currently funding these kinds of supports and the risk to young people leaving care is apparent in these findings. Employers and educational institutions can also play a significant role by giving young people leaving care priority access and support.

Ill-health and disability are not evenly distributed across families



Around one in 10 people over 15 years old in couple parent families live with ill-health and disability. The rate is much higher for other family types: approximately one in five in step and/or blended families, sole parent families and multigenerational families, and one in four in foster and other kin families.

Although close to 15% of families include someone with a long-term health condition, impairment or disability, there is substantial variation across family type.

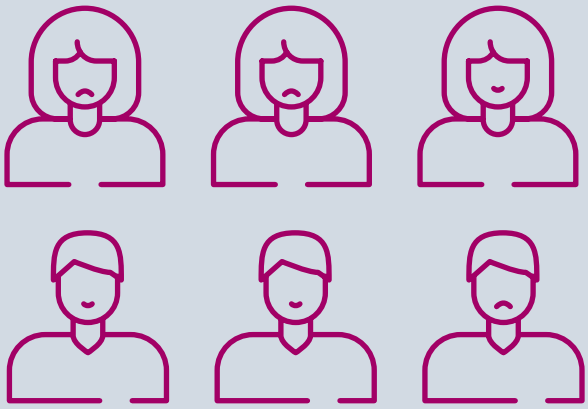
People caring for someone with a long-term illness or disability are more likely to be in foster and other kin families, multigenerational families, sole parent families and step and/or blended families.

Almost a third of foster and other kin families report living with someone with a long-term health condition (29%), compared to over a fifth of multigenerational families (22%) and sole parent families (20%). Couple parent families, by contrast, are much less likely to include people with long-term health conditions, impairment or disability (12%).

Family category key

- Couple parent family
- Sole parent family
- Step and/or blended family
- Multigenerational family
- Foster and Other kin family

Women are still doing more parenting and child rearing than men



Two thirds of women say they do more than their fair share of parenting and child rearing while a similar percentage of men report that they do their fair share.

A gendered pattern of care work amongst men and women is consistent across all family types except sole parents.

Women in sole parent families are the least satisfied with how child rearing tasks are shared.

When asked about parenting or child rearing, men felt they do their fair share and are highly satisfied with their contribution to housework and child rearing. Nearly two thirds of women (65%) report that they do more than their fair share, while a similar percentage of men instead report that they do just their fair share, not more or less than they should (66%).

This pattern is consistent across all family types except for sole parent families, with over three quarters (75%) of women reporting that the responsibility of looking after children predominantly lies with them. Likewise, over half of men in sole parent families (53%) report that they are doing more than their fair share.

The unpaid work of families is not evenly distributed between men and women, and this is not a surprising finding. However, it does have implications for many other findings in this report and for the policy implications of those findings. For example, when recognising the additional barriers women with children face to participate in the workforce or community activities it is essential to note that single mothers face additional barriers, compounded by financial and housing stress and the greater likelihood that they are caring for those with ill health or disability.

The design and funding of early intervention services including early learning to support families must consider sole parents and acknowledge the particular pressures on women in sole parent families. Services and supports must be flexible and provide a level of support to meet the real-world needs of diverse family types.

“Family gives us love, support, understanding and is a common thread that binds us. As we navigate the complexities of life, the family remains our source of joy and we are loved for who we are.”

The Uniting Families Report.

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Glossary

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACLD	The Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset
AIFS	Australian Institute of Family Studies
HILDA	Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia
LGA	Local Government Area
LGBTQIA+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, transgender, queer (or sometimes questioning), intersex, asexual, and others
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RSE	Relative standard error
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas

Chapter 1

Why do families matter?

Families are important. They have been a central pillar of society throughout human history. We rely on families to raise children, care for each other, and build connections and belonging. Whether it is love, belonging, conflict or grief, families are important to our sense of self, our relationships and our opportunities.

Vitally, the families in which we grow up play an influential role in setting up our futures. They not only provide for our immediate wellbeing but also establish conditions for our success into adulthood and the impact our lives will have on our society.

Yet our public conversations about families are too often narrowly focused on the idea of the 'nuclear family'. They assume that families in Australia conform to the most common family type in Western European societies: heterosexual couples living in the same household and raising their own children. It is rare for the more complex and diverse webs of relationships which are common in First Nations communities or communities from other parts of the world to be given any more than a passing acknowledgement.

When these limited understandings are used in public debate and inform policy development, we risk creating services and systems that fail to meet the varying needs of the very families we set out to support. Instead, we risk failing to uncover or address the vulnerabilities and disadvantages faced by many children, families and communities. With this limited view of families, we also miss the richness and strengths that emerge from understanding family diversity.

Too often, the evidence we collect about families to use in policy and service development also focuses on one or two types of family. We know that families in Australia are much more diverse than is considered in public debate and public policy.

This report is a first step towards challenging the notion that all family experiences are the same.

What to expect from the Uniting Families Report

This report series will examine how families practice and experience one of their most important roles, as the primary environment in which adults raise and care for children.

To explore the many facets of family, we will publish this report each year for the next 10 years. We aim to offer an alternative way of approaching and exploring the experiences of families. Our goal is that it will help change how we think about and discuss the many different experiences, strengths and needs of families.

We expect to achieve two things each year with this report. We will describe and analyse broad trends across Australia, and we expect to examine a consistent set of dimensions of family life in each report. We will do this by using existing datasets purposely developed and updated annually to support this kind of analysis, such as the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey. This first report is the foundation from which to build future conversations. We intend to include new family-based surveys in the future as they become available.

We look forward to offering new insights on the many aspects of family life by applying innovative analytical techniques to the available datasets, and by combining them in original ways.

We recognise, however, that simplifying assumptions are deeply embedded in our public datasets. Sometimes the data we need is not collected or is no longer current, and sometimes we will be interested in elements of family life that simply cannot be examined in this way. For this reason, from the second year on we will also focus in each report on a specific aspect of family life and employ a diverse range of qualitative research methods alongside analysis of existing quantitative data. These investigations will change from year to year as we build our understanding of those aspects of family life that are not sufficiently researched elsewhere and examine new and emerging issues for families.

What do we mean by family?

In Australia and internationally, there is increasing recognition of the diversity of families in which children grow up. Although most children live with couple parents, and most often parents are biologically related to them (Australian Institute of Family Studies [AIFS], 2023a), parents are more likely to be in a de facto relationship than they were a few generations ago, or to be couples of the same sex (Qu and Baxter, 2023).

Many children live with one parent, in step and/or blended families, with grandparents or other relatives in multigenerational families, or with extended kin (AIFS, 2023a). New ideas such as 'families of choice' and 'intimate relationships' seek to recognise families beyond a narrow idea of parent/child relationships within marriage (Edwards and Gillies, 2012). Today, the term 'families' can include sole parents, coparents, LGBTQIA+ parents, grandparents, adult siblings, unrelated adults and people 'living together apart'.

Families are also a social institution around which public support and services are organised and delivered, particularly for children and young people. For example, the Family Tax Benefit scheme supports around 2.55 million children in Australia through payments to children's primary carers (Stewart et al., 2023). Government policies adapt and change, often to better reflect modern understandings of family. Between 2008 and 2009 for instance, the Australian Government changed several laws to include same-sex couples, including making family income support available to same-sex parents (Neilson, 2012).

A recent study by the AIFS explored how Australians understand the idea of family. When thinking about their family, 41% of respondents include people who are not relatives, also considering close friends or people they had chosen as their family (Budinski and Gahan, 2023). This research shows our changing views over time, with older people more likely to focus on blood relatives compared to younger people. At the same time, children continue to hold a special place for most of us in our understanding of family, with 85% of people saying children were part of their family, a higher percentage than any other type of family member (Budinski and Gahan, 2023).

As the idea of family has grown, so too have debates around how to define family. Some have argued that everyone should be considered to be a member of a family, even an adult living alone (de Singly, 2021:16). Others maintain that the idea of family continues to mean something distinct, both in communities and in policy settings (Dermott and Fowler, 2020).

In this report we celebrate 'family' as an idea with meaning for families themselves, as well as for policy, practice and service delivery. We also seek to show that we need new ways of collecting and reporting information to better reflect families as they exist in Australia today.

Defining family through practice

In recent decades, attempts to define family have focused on family:

- as a noun – which involves deciding who is counted in a family
- as a verb – 'doing family' or family practices (Dermott and Fowler, 2020).

To define families as a noun involves putting boundaries around who is and is not in a family, regardless of their role or actions. Consider an aunty who takes care of her nieces and nephews after school every day but does not live with them – some definitions of family would include her because she is related to the children, others would not because she is not living in the household.

Agreeing upon a set of family relationships can be difficult; Dermott and Fowler (2020:6) even argue that creating criteria for "in/out membership" of families "will necessarily fail" to accommodate all types of relationships.

A focus on 'doing family' or family practices moves past questions of family membership to focus on key actions and behaviours within families. These practices are thought of as familial, both by families themselves and by society more broadly. In this way they move beyond the idea of family as relatives but stop short of the idea of 'families of choice', or every individual being their own family.

Dermott and Fowler have refined David Morgan's (1996) concept of family practices, arguing that to be familial, family practices must be:

- *Enacted*: "family is created and sustained through action", not grand gestures but everyday activities (Dermott and Fowler, 2020:6);
- *Displayed*: "the meaning of one's actions has to be both conveyed to and understood by relevant others if those actions are to be effective as constituting 'family' practices." (Dermott and Fowler, 2020:6); and
- *Recognised*: wider society regards practices as familial (Dermott and Fowler, 2020).

For the Uniting Families Report, we focus on raising children as a practice that is enacted, displayed and recognised as a key element of family life (Dermott and Fowler, 2020). **That is, we define a family as children and young people, and the people who are raising them.**

We acknowledge that people 'do family' for many other reasons as well. However, we have chosen this as our focus in recognition of the central place that children and young people hold in families for most Australians, the essential role of families in raising children, and the importance of families for public policies and programs that support children as they grow up.

As we show, 'family as a verb' allows for a more fluid definition of family that includes a range of family types across Australia including children in foster and kin care, separated and blended families, and families that include multiple generations.

It also allows us to recognise that the ways family is practised are not the same for everyone. There are important differences between families due to location, cultural background, the presence of disability or ill health in the family, and more. For example, young people tend to live longer with their families if they are female, live in capital cities, are not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, are from Asian, Middle Eastern, African or Southern and Eastern European backgrounds, or have a disability (Budinski, et al., 2023).

This report will explore and describe the diversity of families like these and how they practice family throughout Australia.

Families also include young people

Our definition of family includes children from birth to 17 years of age and young people from 18 to 24 years of age. This is because Australians reach legal maturity at 18 years, and current practice in community services tends to move young people into adult services when they are 25 years old. We are also acknowledging the importance of family for many young people, who now live with their families well after finishing high school (Budinski et al., 2023). In 2021, nearly three in four 19-year-olds lived with their parents, decreasing to one in four at 25 years.

These age categories are different to the approach used by the ABS (1995). The ABS defines children as under 15 and only includes dependent students between the ages of 15 and 24 years if they are in study but not if they are in full time employment, and non-dependent children of any age if they are not parents themselves.

We have removed these extra criteria to include all children and young people up to the age of 24 regardless of their employment or educational status. In our analysis, young people under the age of 24 with children of their own are treated as parents of their own family or as part of a multigenerational family if they continue to reside with older generations.

Analysing the datasets

This first report is based on two nationally representative datasets: the ABS Census 2021 and the HILDA Survey 2022.[1] These surveys provide valuable insights into the lives of Australian families.[2]

The ABS Census is a comprehensive survey of the Australian population. It collects demographic, social and economic data about individuals, families and households for all citizens, permanent residents and visitors present on Census night (10 August 2021). The Census provides a detailed snapshot on household composition and changes in family structures over time. It is one of the most accurate descriptions of household composition presently available, although Uniting has heard from their staff and families that many First Nations families avoid or under-report the presence of extended kin in their homes on Census night.

HILDA is a household-based social and economic panel study following a nationally representative sample of more than 17,000 individuals across 7,700 households every year since 2001 (Summerfield et al., 2023). Annual information is collected on demographic and family relationships for all household members. Personal information from those aged 15 years and over is collected on income and wealth, housing, employment and education. An extra self-completion survey collects more information on work-life balance, parenting, social and community participation, general health and wellbeing (Watson and Wooden, 2012).

Both datasets have their limitations. The Census is only conducted every five years and the breadth of variables do not capture the complexities of family life. Moreover, only the relationship of household members to the reference person who completed the survey on Census night is captured, and not the nature of all relationships within the household. In HILDA, data is not collected on children aged under 15 years, and there is limited data on gender and sexual identity.

However, both datasets provide the capacity to identify the diversity of families and, within HILDA, the capacity to explore a range of dimensions relating to the practices and behaviours in family life and raising children.

In this report, Census 2021 demographic and social data is drawn upon to describe the diversity of families. Data from HILDA 2022 is used to report on the various aspects of families, including characteristics, circumstances and daily life. A series of ABS population benchmark weights are applied to the survey data to allow the 'in scope' sample estimates to be nationally representative (see Appendix C for technical details). Over time, the longitudinal nature of HILDA will allow us to track changing family formations and dynamics over the life course of individuals. All data provided within graphics across the report is available in table format (see Appendix D).

1 See Appendix A for a detailed description of potential datasets reviewed. For example, surveys such as the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, and its partner studies of First Nations children and youth, no longer include young children, as the young children originally recruited have reached adulthood.

2 Note: In-text figures have been rounded to the nearest % unless they are under 1%. Tables and charts depict data to one decimal point.

Limitations of our approach

Not all aspects of family practices are covered in the available datasets. Some features of families, when defined using family practices, are difficult to identify and examine when using population-level quantitative data.

In attempting to do so, it has become clear to us why most research on family practices is qualitative (Morgan, 2011). We have found that despite these challenges, quantitative research on families, as presented in this report, provides important insights on the diversity of families, and differences in economic and social circumstances and in the daily practice of family life.

One particularly challenging issue is the relationship between 'family' and 'household'. The concept of family when understood through family practices is not the same as a household. Family members may live across and between dwellings, sometimes even remotely, for example with family members living in other parts of the country, in jail or even overseas (Morgan, 2011). Sometimes family members move often, such as children who move regularly between their parents' homes after divorce.

While it would be our preference to focus entirely on this more fluid notion of family, the household is the central organising unit for data on family relationships both in the Census and HILDA. For this reason, the construction and analysis of family types that follows is based on the relationship between members at the household level (see Appendix B for details on the complex methodology used to construct the family types).

In future reports, we hope to explore the ways family extends beyond households and many other aspects of family life.

Finally, a focus on the family practice of raising children and young people necessarily means the report does not address other practices and relationships that are important in families – especially intimacy and care between adults. This includes care between adult children and their parents, and relationships among adults in families of choice. A focus on children and young people does not mean we do not value other family relationships or wish to diminish the value they hold for others. We merely have not chosen them as the focus of this report, given the data limitations we face.

Despite these limitations, this report presents the experiences of a broad diversity of families.

Chapter 2

Families are diverse.

Families in Australia are much more diverse than is routinely acknowledged in public conversation and policy. Many children are raised in ways that are not captured by simple definitions of couple or sole parent families.

We have developed a typology to include a wide range of different family types that are involved in raising children and young people to better reflect and understand the diversity of Australian families:

- Couple parent (including biological and/or adopted children and young people)
- Sole parent (including biological and/or adopted)
- Step and/or blended
- Multigenerational
- Foster family
- Other kin involved in raising children or young people who are not part of a biological, adopted, step and/or blended or foster parent relationship.

Families come in many forms

While most children grow up with couple parents, many also live with a sole parent, or with multiple generations that include parents and grandparents. Our analysis of the HILDA data shows that nearly one third of children and young people are not being raised in simple couple parent families.[3]

In fact, the second-most-common family type in Australia today is step and/or blended families and a significant proportion of people live in multigenerational families. Increasingly, children are being raised by parents in a same-sex relationship. The changing age profile of children and young people across family types suggests that family compositions change as children grow older and as parents separate and/or re-partner. Biological parents are not the only adults who raise children; many others, such as stepparents, foster carers, kin carers, extended family, plus other adults bring up children.

Family characteristics vary in other ways as well. The number of children and young people vary by family type, with sole parents generally having fewer children and step and/or blended families having more, possibly as a natural outcome of re-partnering, blending families and having more children. The same applies to foster and other kin families as adults adopt care duties for multiple children. The patterns in family types by cultural background, especially for First Nations peoples, show the importance of culture for how we form and maintain families.

3 As noted above, the HILDA data report step and/or blended families as the second-most-common group. This is different from the ABS Census which places sole parent households as the second-most-common form of family. This is because the ABS and HILDA determine relationships in different ways. In HILDA we are able to determine the relationships between all household members, enabling us to assign and understand family types more accurately. In the ABS Census, relationships are only determined based on the relationships to the household reference person. In HILDA, couple parent households and step and/or blended families are not mutually exclusive as in the Census.

How family structures are evolving

Data from the Australian Census confirms that a diverse range of families are an important and consistent part of Australian life. Nearly two thirds (60%), or 14.3 million people, either live in families with children and young people under 25 years of age[4], or are children or young people themselves.

An additional 9.7 million people, or 41% of the population, live in households without children or young people. Of course, many of those who do not live with children can play a major role in children's and young people's lives. In this report, however, we focus on those who live with and raise children and young people (covered in the first six rows of Table 2.1).

The diversity and evolution of family types used in this report and as identified in the Census over the last decade from 2011 to 2021 is presented in Table 2.1. It shows the proportion of individuals classified according to their predominant relationship within the household in relation to the main person completing the Census for the household. Note that the proportions in Table 2.1 total more than 100% as individuals can be categorised as being part of more than one family type. For example, a step and/or blended family may also be included as a couple parent family with children.

Census data shows that close to half of the population lives with children and young people in a couple parent family, falling very slightly from 50% in 2011 to 48% in 2021. Sole parent families are another significant family type, with 1 in 10 Australians living in these households (11% in 2011, 10% in 2021).

However, many households include other family relationships with children and young people. Although these groups represent smaller proportions of the Australian population, they have consistently provided care, education and protection over the past decade. This includes more than 1 million people belonging to step and/or blended families, accounting for 4% of the Australian population. Some children and young people (2% of Australians) live with parents and grandparents, which is an increase from 1% in 2011.

Many families are also raising foster children. The 2021 Census identified around 20,000 foster children, which has increased by 24% in the last decade (16,023 in 2011 to 19,952 in 2021). Foster children accounted for 0.1% of the population in 2021. Finally, some children and young people live with adults who are not their parents. Most often, these adults raise them as part of kinship care, grandparent care or, we assume, other informal care arrangements. The approximately 160,000 children and young people in other kin family constitute 0.7% of the population.

A review of Census data over 10 years shows that there has been little change between family groups over time. Although there have been some small changes, the balance between different family types has changed very little, which suggests that these are fairly stable groupings.

4 As noted above, both the ABS Census and HILDA rely on households when describing family relationships.

Table 2.1 Proportion of individuals classified by relationship in the household, Census 2011 to 2021[5]

Relationships	2011		2016		2021	
	Population (N)	(%)	Population (N)	(%)	Population (N)	(%)
Couple parent family	9,998,576	49.7	10,638,990	48.7	11,547,515	48.1
Sole parent family	2,127,567	10.6	2,227,911	10.2	2,442,381	10.2
Step and/or blended family	1,075,496	5.4	1,052,832	4.8	1,281,239	5.3
Multigenerational family	219,129	1.1	459,303	2.1	496,959	2.1
Foster family	16,023	0.1	18,002	0.1	19,952	0.1
Other kin family (raising other children or young adults that are not part of a parent-child relationship)	157,481	0.8	166,262	0.8	157,815	0.7
Couple without children	4,258,902	21.2	4,546,100	20.8	5,222,763	21.8
Lone person	2,434,788	12.1	2,673,135	12.2	3,133,031	13.1
Other unrelated or related (with no children or young adults)[6]	1,138,515	5.7	1,322,800	6.1	1,375,306	5.7
Total population	20,098,116		21,826,737		24,003,357	

Note: Total population numbers exclude visitors (from within and outside Australia), persons in non-private dwellings and persons in migratory, offshore or shipping SA1s.
Note: Categories overlap, so table sums to greater than 100%.

The nationwide vote to endorse marriage equality for same-sex couples in 2017 was a significant milestone. Perhaps as a result, more people identified themselves as being in a same-sex relationship after this vote than ever before in the Census. In fact, the number doubled from 70,000 in 2011 to 164,000 in 2021, as outlined in Table 2.2.

Although the majority of these adults are in couple relationships without children, increasingly they are raising children and young people. The number of adults in a same-sex relationship within a couple parent family increased from 11% in 2011 to 16% in 2021. Same-sex couples belonging to step and/or blended families comprised 5%, while 1% were part of multigenerational families.

5 These population numbers have been derived using different relationship variables from the Census TableBuilder (including family composition, family blending, relationships between families, and the person's relationship to the reference person in the household). Groups are not mutually exclusive and overlap (refer to Appendix C for details on what is included and not included in these family types).

Table 2.2 Proportion of individuals in same-sex couple relationships, Census 2011 to 2021[6]

Relationships	2011		2016		2021	
	Population (N)	(%)	Population (N)	(%)	Population (N)	(%)
Couple parent family	7,957	11.4	13,430	14.0	26,593	16.2
Step and/or blended family	4,155	6.0	5,226	5.4	8918	5.4
Multigenerational family	335	0.5	717	0.7	1,901	1.2
Couple without children	57,052	82.1	76,647	79.8	127,201	77.3
Total (% of population)	69,499	0.3	96,020	0.4	164,613	0.7

Data from HILDA paints a similar picture to the Census.[6] Table 2.3 shows the proportion of individuals classified according to their relationships within the household as identified in HILDA for 2022. The first five family types include at least one child (under the age of 18) or young person (between the ages of 18 and 24) classified as a child or student.[7]

Similar to Table 2.1, these family types overlap as people can be part of more than one family type, so the summed percentages exceed 100%. While over 40% live in households without children or young people (couples only, lone person and other related or unrelated people), the majority belong to families with children and young people. Close to half (47%) live in couple parent families and around 1 in 10 in sole parent families (9%).

Analysis of HILDA data for other family types also shows higher proportions in step and/or blended, multigenerational and foster families, because these include identifying relationships amongst all members in the household; a calculation that is not possible with Census data.

Hence 8% of people belong to step and/or blended families, while 4% are multigenerational families with children and young people living with parents and/or grandparents. Foster families account for 0.4% of the population (weighted), higher than estimated in the Census as the Census analysis could only count foster children, not the adults who live with them. Other kin family providing kinship care, grandparent care or other forms of informal care to children and young people make up 0.3% of the population.

The remainder of the report focuses only on families raising children and young people, the first six rows of Table 2.3 based on HILDA Wave 22 data.

6 The Census uses relationship information between persons to the household reference person amongst couples to indicate whether a family is identifiable as a same-sex couple family.

7 As in Table 2.1, family types in Table 2.3 are overlapping. So, for example, couple parent families can include both step and/or blended families and foster children, or a multigenerational family can include a sole parent family.

Table 2.3 Proportion of individuals classified by relationship in the household, HILDA, 2022[8]

Family type	Sample (n)	(%)
Couple parent family	9,985	46.6
Sole parent family	1,969	9.0
Step and/or blended family	2,155	7.7
Multigenerational family	575	3.4
Foster family	98	0.4
Other kin family (raising other children or young people that are not part of a parent-child relationship)	97	0.3†
Couple without children	5,748	24.7
Lone person	3,593	17.3
Other unrelated or related (with no children or young adults)	411	2.4
All	24,631	

Weight: Cross-sectional enumerated person population weights, HILDA Wave 22.
Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error– cautious estimate.
Note: Categories overlap, so table sums to greater than 100%.

Exploring family complexity

Family relationships can be highly complex and some families contain multiple family types. In this section, we explore the many ways in which families are composed of to better understand the nuances of family diversity in Australia.

We can consider some family types as subcategories of others, or as overlapping groups of relationships. For example, many step and/or blended families are also couple parent families, just a particular type created through step and/or blended family relationships. Some multigenerational families include sole parents or couple parents. As noted in Table 2.3, some individuals are allocated to more than one family type if these best describe the web of relationships between members of the household.

To better understand the complexity of family relationships and the diversity of family types, consider the families on the following pages.

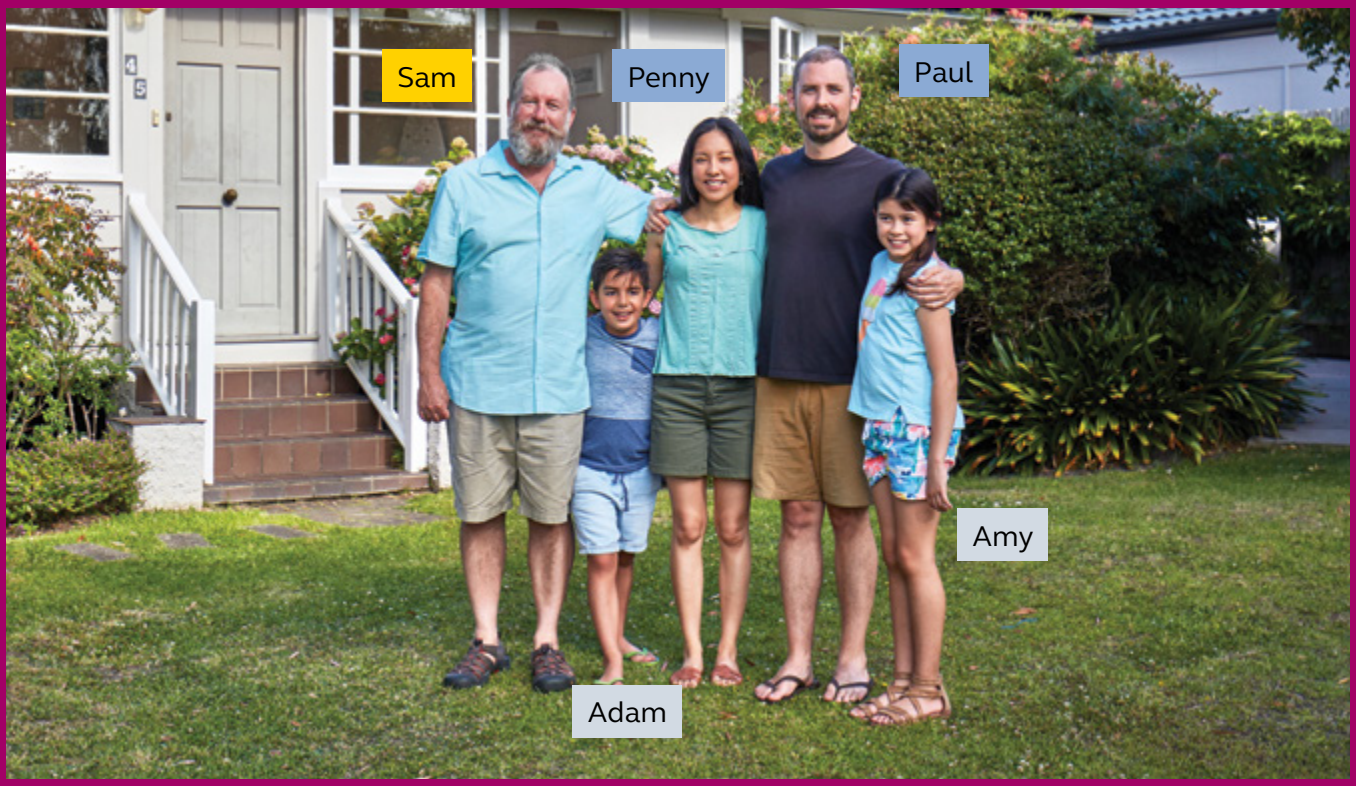
*Scenarios have been adapted from anonymous data in the HILDA survey. Names have been added, and some minor details have been changed.

8 Appendix B outlines the methodology to assign individuals to family types.

The Jones Family*

Paul, aged 31, is in a relationship with Penny aged 30. Paul has a parent Sam, aged 54, that lives with Paul and Penny. Paul and Penny have a child Adam who is aged 4. However, Penny has a child from a previous relationship, Amy, aged 9 years old and also living in the household. Hence, Amy and Adam are half siblings, Amy is a stepchild to Paul and a step grandchild to Sam. The relationships between all five household members would identify them collectively as a couple family, a step and/or blended family and, with grandpa Sam residing in the household, as a multigenerational family.

Couple parent family | Step and/or blended family | Multigenerational family

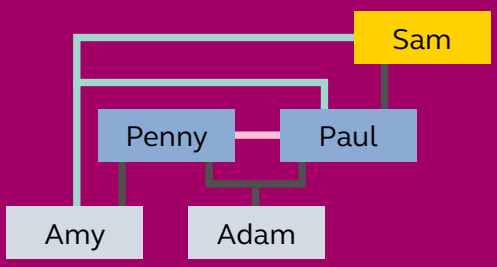


Relationship Key:

Senior | Adult | Dependant

Step | Couple | Biological | Foster/Other Kin

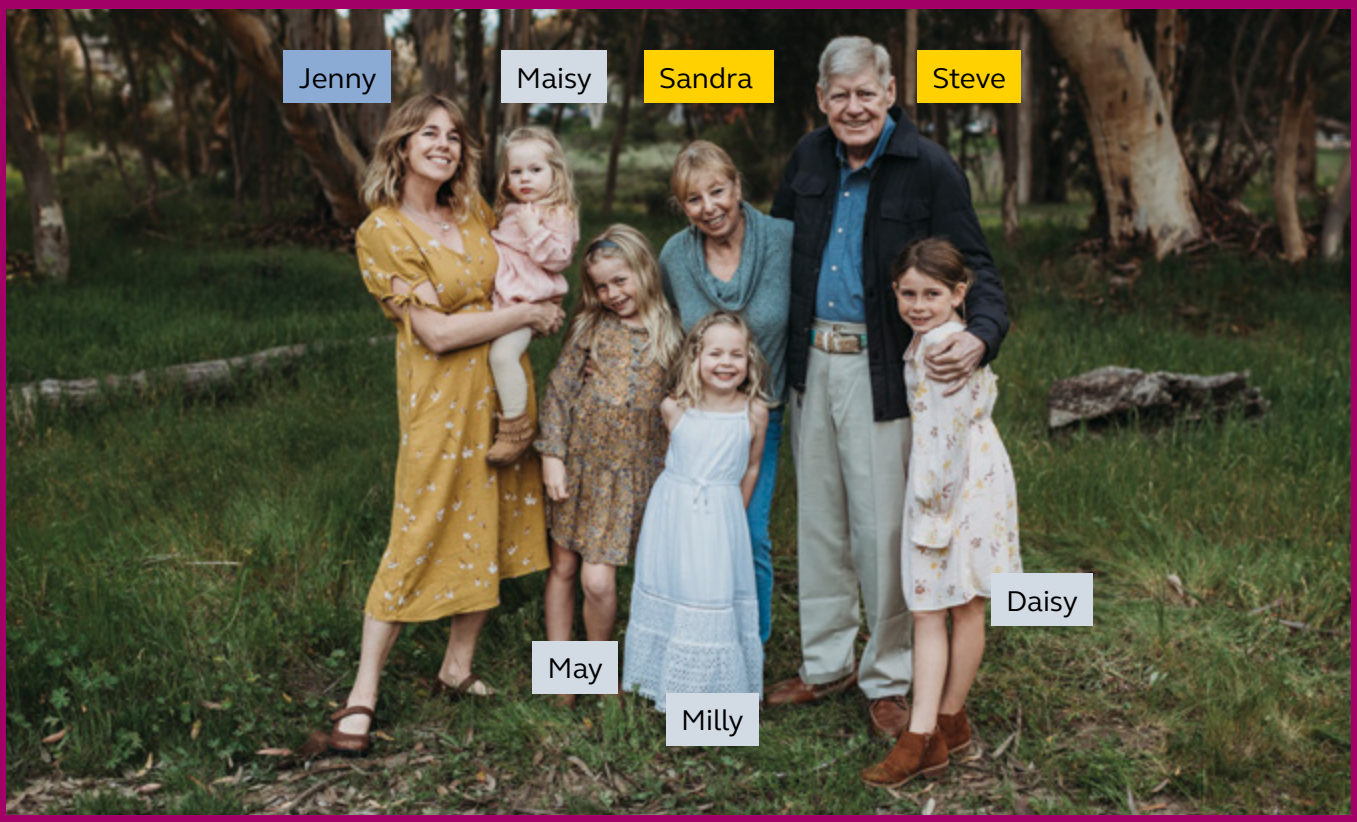
Family Map:



The Grenfell Family*

Jenny is aged 33 and resides with her mother Sandra, aged 60, and her stepfather Steve, aged 67. Jenny has a child Daisy, aged 8, and has three foster children: May aged 9, Milly aged 5 and Maisy aged 2. In this case, Jenny is the sole parent to all four children, Daisy, May, Milly and Maisy. However, Sandra is a grandmother to all four grandchildren, while Steve is step grandfather to the children. This household is simultaneously a sole parent, multigenerational, step and/or blended and foster family. We considered them to be a multigenerational family.

Sole parent | Step and/or blended family | Foster/Other kin | Multigenerational family

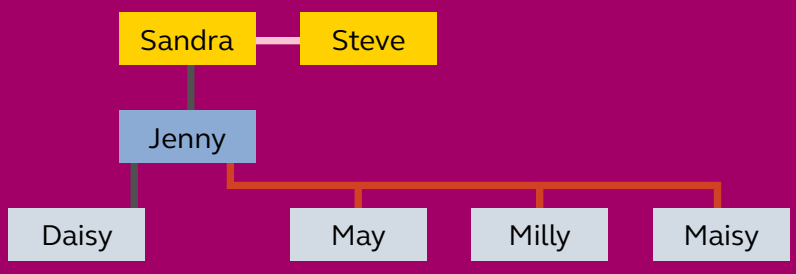


Relationship Key:

Senior | Adult | Dependant

Step | Couple | Biological | Foster/Other Kin

Family Map:



The Nguyen Family*

Ming, aged 54, is in a relationship with Mei, also aged 54 years. Ming and Mei live with Ming's sibling, Yìchén, who is 44 and residing there with their partner, Yvette, aged 42. Yìchén or Yvette have children of their own: Nellie, aged 13 and Nick, aged 7. In addition, within the same household also reside two other young relatives of either Ming and Mei (the relationship is unspecified) – Ethan and Emily, who are siblings aged 14 and 16 years respectively. This family is simultaneously a couple parent family, a multigenerational family, or other kin family because of the relationship between the adults and Ethan and Emily.
We identify them as an other kin family.

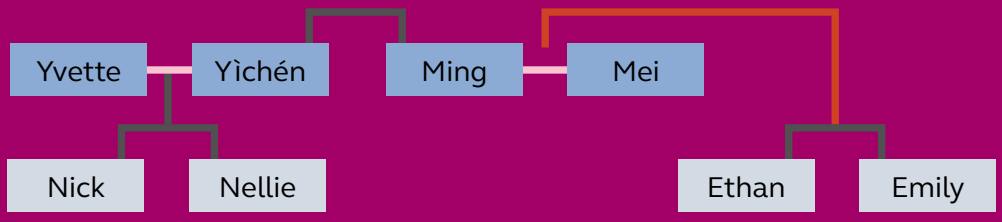
Couple parent family | Multigenerational family | Foster/Other kin

Relationship Key:

Senior | Adult | Dependant

Step | Couple | Biological | Foster/Other Kin

Family Map:



*Scenarios have been adapted from anonymous data in the HILDA survey.
Names have been added, and some minor details have been changed.

Exploring these multiple relationships provides a picture of the complexity in how family members relate to each other. It starts to show how flexible our policy and service systems need to be if they are going to adequately provide for the wide array of families living in Australia. In Table 2.4, we see the overlaps between family types. It shows the proportion of individuals identified as belonging to a specific family type (by column) but who are also part of other family types within the household (by row).

For example, 83% of couple parent families live in households that contain two parents with their biological/adopted children. However, 13% of couple parent families are in fact step and/or blended families with either a stepparent, stepchild or stepsibling. Also, 5% of couple parent families are multigenerational families that include a grandparent living in the household.

For sole parent families, 71% live alone with their biological/adopted children and no other relationships present in the household. But nearly 20% are also step and/or blended families, for example a sole parent raising a stepchild and a biological child. In the case of multigenerational families, 63% include couple parent families, 34% contain sole parent families and 21% are also step and/or blended families.

Table 2.4 Percentage of each family type (columns) that overlap with other family types (rows)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Other kin family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster family
Couple parent family	83.1	0.0	17.9	76.3	62.5	51.9
Sole parent family	0.0	70.8	16.5	23.2	34.4	44.3
Other kin family	0.11	0.5	85.0	1.2	3.9	11.4
Step and/or blended family	12.6	19.9	33.7	88.9	21.2	37.0
Multigenerational family	4.6	13.2	47.3	9.5	94.3	28.0
Foster family	0.4	1.8	15.0	1.8	3.0	100.0
Couple without children	0.0	0.0	19.1	0.0	1.2	0.0
Lone person	0.0	0.0	8.7	0.1	0.4	1.9
Other	0.0	0.0	10.8	0.1	0.4	0.0

Note: Relative standard errors are not presented here as the estimates for foster and other kin families will be unstable, however these families are nevertheless important in understanding the diversity of family relationships.

Note: Columns sum to more than 100% because individuals' families could be categorised as more than one family type.

Family category key

- Couple parent family
- Sole parent family
- Step and/or blended family
- Multigenerational family
- Foster family
- Other kin family

Family types used in this report

Assigning individuals to specific family types makes comparisons more straightforward. It ensures that in the analysis that follows, less common family types such as multigenerational, foster and other kin families are made visible. As pointed out earlier, identifying and exploring the various aspects of family life unique to these family types is important to ensure that we appropriately account for varying needs in policy and program delivery to work towards countering vulnerability and disadvantage.

For this reason, in Figure 2.1, all children and young people and the families that they belong to have been allocated one and only one of these family types. To ensure that less common family types are appropriately visible, any person living in a smaller family type is classed as being part of that smaller family type, even if they can also be categorised as part of a larger group.

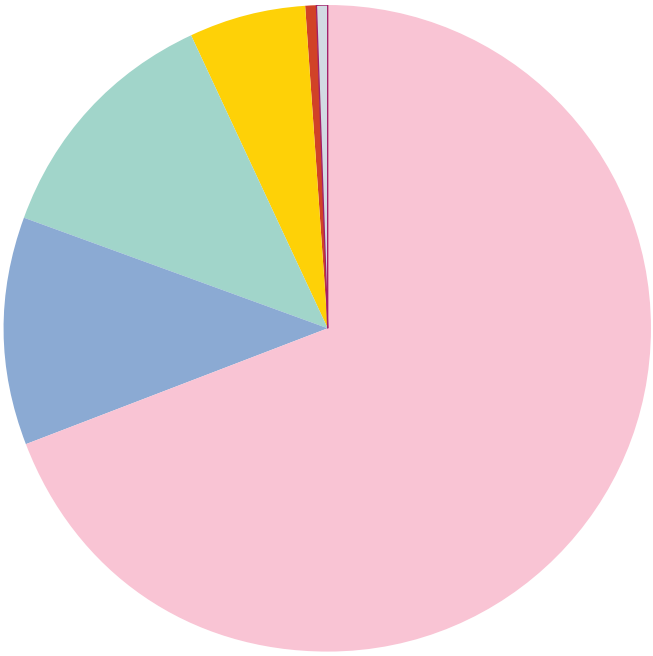
When each individual is assigned to just one family type, we find that:

- 69% live in couple parent families
- 11% live in sole parent families
- 12% live in step and/or blended families
- 6% live in multigenerational families
- 1% live in foster families or families made up of other kin.

For example, if a foster parent has a biological child and a foster child, all family members are categorised as being part of a foster family. Specifically, priority is given respectively to foster families, multigenerational and then step and/or blended families taken from the sample of couple parent, sole parent or other kin relationships.

From here on, all data draws upon HILDA 2022 and only relates to children and young people and the people who are raising them. That is, the 56% of the 'in scope' population who are families with children and young people and the subject of this report (refer to Appendix B, Table B.1).

Figure 2.1 Proportion of individuals in each family type, 2022/HILDA family types, 2022



Note: For underlying data see Table D.1.

People in couple parent families (that are exclusively biological and/or adopted) account for more than 69% of all those in families with children and young people. Just over 11% are in sole parent families that are also exclusively biological and/or adopted. As distinct from the Census results however, Figure 2.1 illustrates that as of 2022, step and/or blended families that include at least a step and/or blended relationship between siblings and parents is the second-most-common family type in contemporary Australia at more than 12%.

Moreover, nearly 6% of people live in families that are multigenerational, inclusive of parents, grandparents and children within a household. Although the proportions of foster and other kin families are not comparatively high, the equivalent population estimates indicate that there are over 155,000 people currently identified as being part of these families, with kin families raising children and/or young people outside a parent-child relationship.[9] To ensure the statistical reliability of estimates going forward, these two categories have been combined in the remainder of the report.

9 Appendix C describes the application of ABS population benchmark weights to HILDA data to produce nationally representative estimates.

Children and young people in families

Although most children and young people live in couple parent families, nearly a third live in other family configurations. When we examine the age of children in different family types, we can see that couple parent families are prevalent when children are very young. As children grow, relationships between adults change, and children move into new family types.

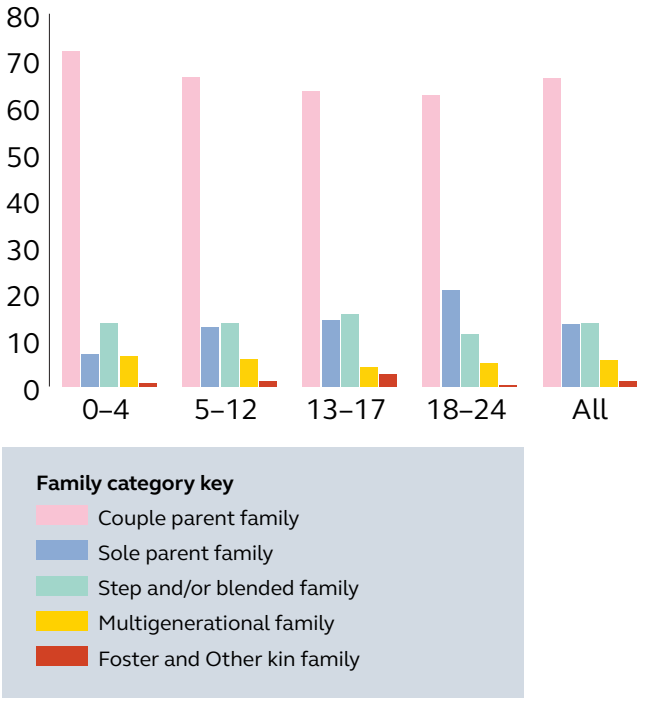
We also show that step and/or blended families tend to include the largest number of children and young people, as do foster and other kin families. Sole parent families tend to have the smallest number of children and young people.

Figure 2.2 shows that 66% of all children and young people live in couple parent families. Children and young people raised in other family settings most often live in step and/or blended families or sole parent families, each accounting for more than 1 in 10 children and young people in families.

The age profile of children and young people living in families also varies across family types. The results are indicative of changing family circumstances as children grow older and as parents separate, re-partner and family members join or leave the family unit.

Very young children aged between birth and 4 years are more likely to be part of couple parent families (72%) followed by step and/or blended families (14%). However, only 7% of very young children are part of sole parent families, while 21% of young people aged 18 to 24 years live with one parent. There are also slightly higher proportions of teenagers aged 13 to 17 years who live in step and/or blended families (16%) and in foster and other kin families (3%) than other age groups.

Figure 2.2 Age of children in families (%)

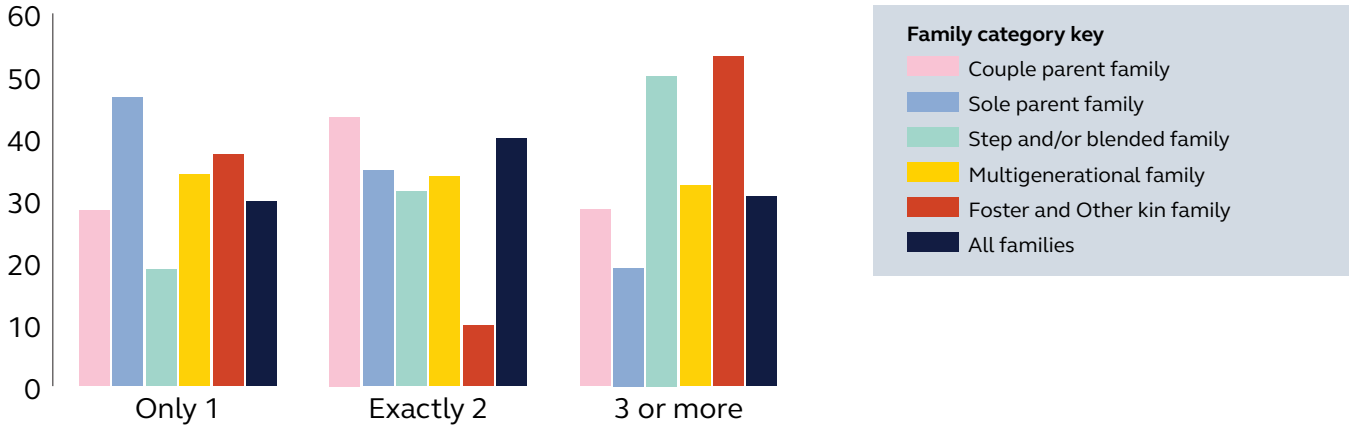


Note: For underlying data see Table D.2

In terms of the number of children and young people, family size varies considerably across family type. Overall, families are slightly more likely to have two children or young people (40%), with approximately equal proportions of families with either one child or young person, and with three or more children (30% and 31%) (see Figure 2.3).

Sole parents tend to have the smallest families, with nearly half consisting of just one child or young person (46%). Step and/or blended families tend to be the largest with half of all families consisting of three or more children or young people (50%). While foster and other kin families also tend to be large (53%), they are also particularly likely to be small (37%). Very few foster and other kin families consist of adults and two children (10%). Multigenerational families are slightly more likely to include just one child or young person (34%), and couple parent families are slightly more likely to include two children or young people (43%).

Figure 2.3 Number of children in families (%)



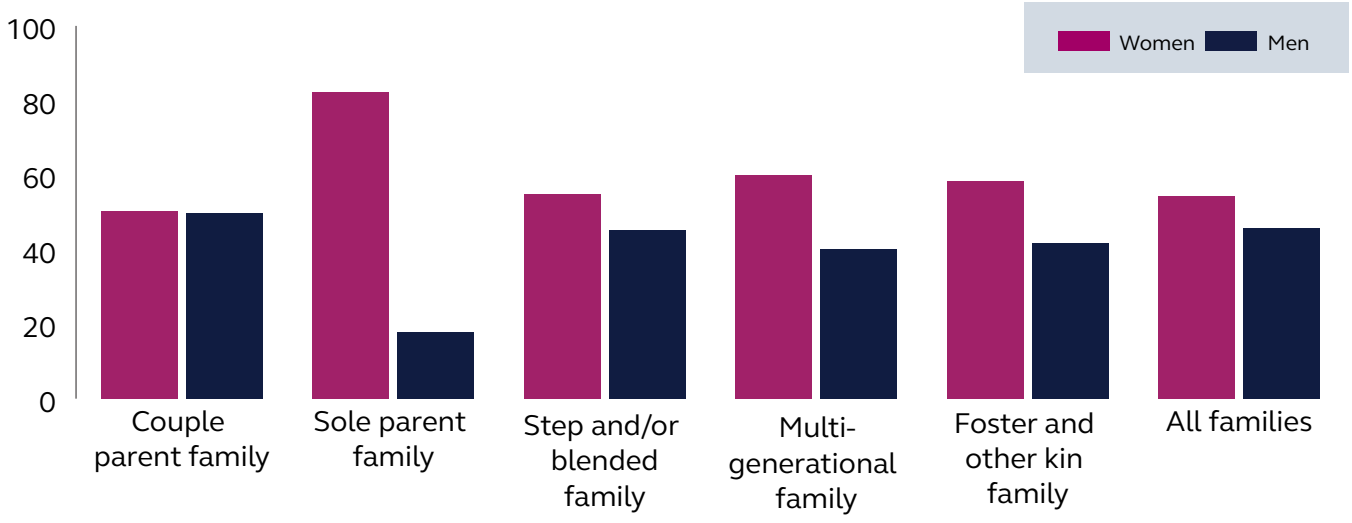
Note: For underlying data see Table D.3

Gender distribution in families

Our experience of much of family life is markedly shaped by our gender, as we will see in Chapter 4, in the way that parents share parenting and domestic responsibilities, and in the capacity for parents to work. Here, we show that more than 4 in 5 sole parent families are headed by women. Women are slightly more likely to make up multigenerational and foster and other kin families.

Figure 2.4 shows that overall, across all families, there is an almost even split between the gender of adults (54% women to 46% men), however this varies by family type. Consistent with other research (ABS, 2022), 82% of sole parent families are headed by a woman. Women are slightly more likely, at around 60%, to be in the majority among adults in multigenerational (60%) and in foster and other kin families (58%).

Figure 2.4 Gender of adults in families (%)



Note: For underlying data see Table D.4

Cultural diversity among families

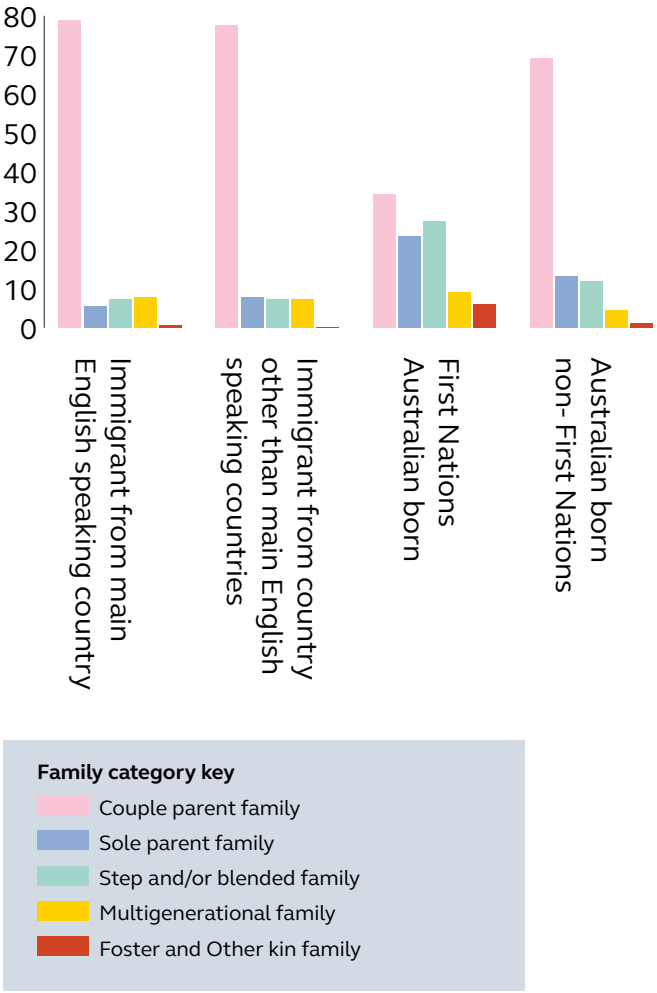
Examining the cultural background of families highlights important relationships between cultural diversity and family diversity. Most importantly, we can see that First Nations families are more likely to include a diverse range of family types compared to other groups.

Nonetheless, across most cultural groups as shown in Figure 2.5, couple parent families are the most common form of family type, accounting for about two thirds to three quarters of family members. This includes Australian-born people who are non-First Nations people (69%), and immigrants from English speaking (79%) and non-English speaking (78%) backgrounds.

First Nations peoples have a much more diverse mix of family types, with around a third belonging to couple parent families (34%), almost a quarter to sole parent families (23%), over a quarter to step and/or blended families (27%), and just under a tenth to multigenerational families (9%). Foster and other kin families are also a notable form of family for First Nations people at 6%.

There is almost twice the proportion of Australian-born First Nations people in sole parent families (13%) compared to immigrants, whether from English speaking or non-English speaking backgrounds (6% and 8%, respectively). Similarly, more than a tenth of Australian-born people who are non-Indigenous are in step and/or blended families (12%), compared to around 7% of immigrants.

Figure 2.5 Cultural background (%)



Note: For underlying data see Table D.5

Chapter 3

Families live in a wide range of economic and social circumstances.

More comprehensive information about the economic and social conditions of families further expands our understanding of the diversity in family circumstances.

This section shows that couple parent families have, on average, higher levels of income and greater wealth than other families. This extends to wealth in the family home – although more than half of people in all family types own or are purchasing their home, this is much more common among couple parent families. Sole parent families, step and/or blended families, multigenerational families, and foster and other kin families are more likely to secure a home through the private rental market.

Parents' education levels may impact earning capacities, with couple parent families more likely to have completed some type of tertiary qualification through to a Bachelor's degree. Multigenerational and foster and other kin families with higher proportions of older adults in the household are more likely to not have a secondary school qualification.

The economic and social circumstances of foster and other kin families indicate a need to better understand these families. The results suggest that some are in families with relatively high economic resources and home ownership, and others are in families with limited access to income or wealth and draw on the private rental market for housing. Unfortunately, numbers in our analysis are low, which makes some of the findings unreliable. However, these findings may be due to the inclusion of grandparent carers in this group, who may have purchased a home and accumulated superannuation over their lifetime. Potentially, others providing foster, kin or other care for children and young people have access to fewer economic resources.

Some families have higher incomes, some have higher risk of living in poverty

Although there is a range of incomes in all family types, some groups are less likely to have access to an adequate income than others. In the following section, we show that couple parent families have the highest average income. Not only are incomes lower on average in other family types, but these groups are also at greater risk of experiencing poverty.

Table 3.1 presents two different indicators of income, weekly equivalised household disposable income and poverty rates based on poverty lines set at 50% and 60% of median equivalised household income.[10]

Incomes vary substantially across family types. Couple parent families have the highest incomes, with a median weekly equivalised household income of $1,255 that is about 55% more than the incomes of foster and other kin families ($808). The incomes of other family types lie between these two: for step and/or blended families it is $919; multigenerational families $1,003; and sole parent families $862.

The risk of living in poverty is highest among foster and other kin families, with a third (33%) of people living in poverty when measured using the 50% poverty line. Poverty rates are much lower for people in couple parent families (6%) than for the general population (13%). However, there is evidence that many families live close to the poverty line as poverty rates increase substantially when the poverty line is set at 60% of median equivalised household income. Four in 10 people living in foster and other kin families (40%) are identified as at risk of poverty, along with over a quarter of those in sole parent families (29%).

10 Refer to Appendix C for definitions of economic terms.

Table 3.1 Income levels ($) and poverty rates (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All (population)
Weekly income (median)	$1,255	$862	$919	$1,003	$808	$1,114
Poverty rate (50%)	5.8%	18.3%	12.5%	14.1%†	33.3%†	13.3%
Poverty rate (60%)	9.4%	29.1%	21.2%	20.1%	40.0%	19.7%

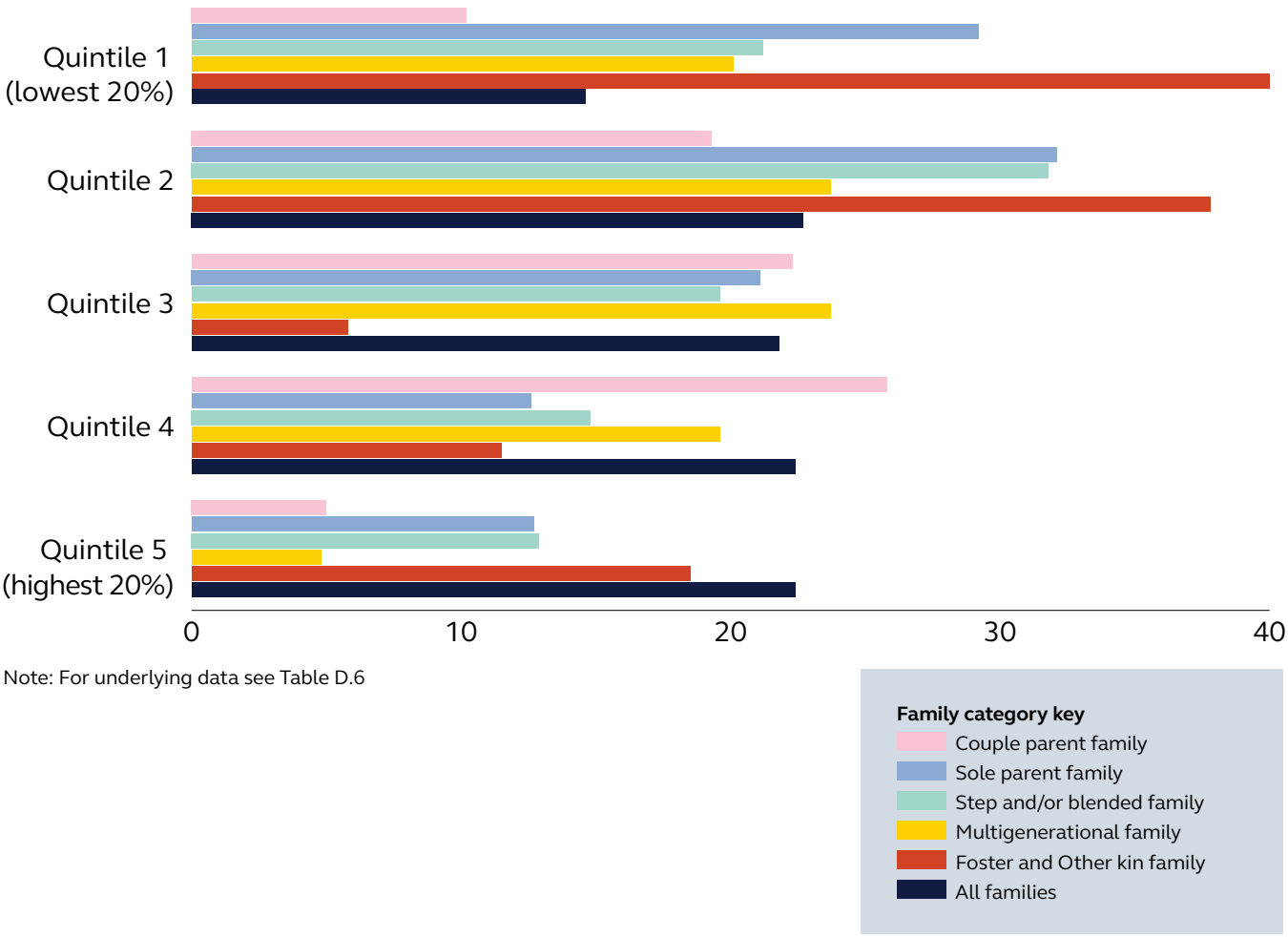
Note: Estimates are based on equivalised (OECD) household disposable income. Poverty line is set using cross-sectional enumerated person population weights, HILDA Wave 22.

There is significant variation in the incomes of families across the quintile distribution. The results in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2 illustrate that couple parent families are generally in a better income position than other families. While couple parent families are most likely to be positioned in the top two income quintiles, most other family types are positioned in the lowest two or three income quintiles.

Around 50% of couple parent families have incomes in the top 40%, and around 10% have incomes in the bottom 20%. Median income levels are at least 1.5 times higher than in other families. In comparison, just over 61% of sole parent families have incomes that place them in the bottom 40% of the income distribution. The sole parents annual equivalised income for sole parents is estimated to be $43,027.

It is a similar scenario for step and/or blended families, with just over 53% with incomes in quintiles 1 and 2 (between 0 to 40% of the income distribution). For multigenerational families, there is a slightly higher likelihood for members to have incomes in the middle of the income distribution than in the bottom (19%) and top quintiles (10%).

Figure 3.1 Distribution of income (%)



Note: For underlying data see Table D.6

Table 3.2 Distribution of income (median $ value)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Quintile 1 (lowest 20%)	$27,780	$27,506	$27,866	$26,456	$22,012	$27,527
Quintile 2	$43,371	$43,027	$41,259	$46,313	$47,942	$43,095
Quintile 3	$58,750	$55,422	$58,106	$56,754	$52,741	$58,106
Quintile 4	$76,112	$78,359	$76,222	$71,208	$72,934	$75,901
Quintile 5 (highest 20%)	$111,884	$107,049	$110,253	$92,744	$110,467	$111,134
All	$65,437	$44,940	$47,895	$52,297	$42,114	$59,548

Note: Estimates are based on equivalised (OECD) household disposable income.

Wealth is not evenly distributed

Just as with income, there are substantial variations between families when we compare their wealth. Wealth, including assets like the family home, is highest amongst couple parent families, and notably lower for other family types. Foster and other kin families need further investigation, as the findings suggest they tend to be both the wealthiest and among those with the lowest levels of wealth.

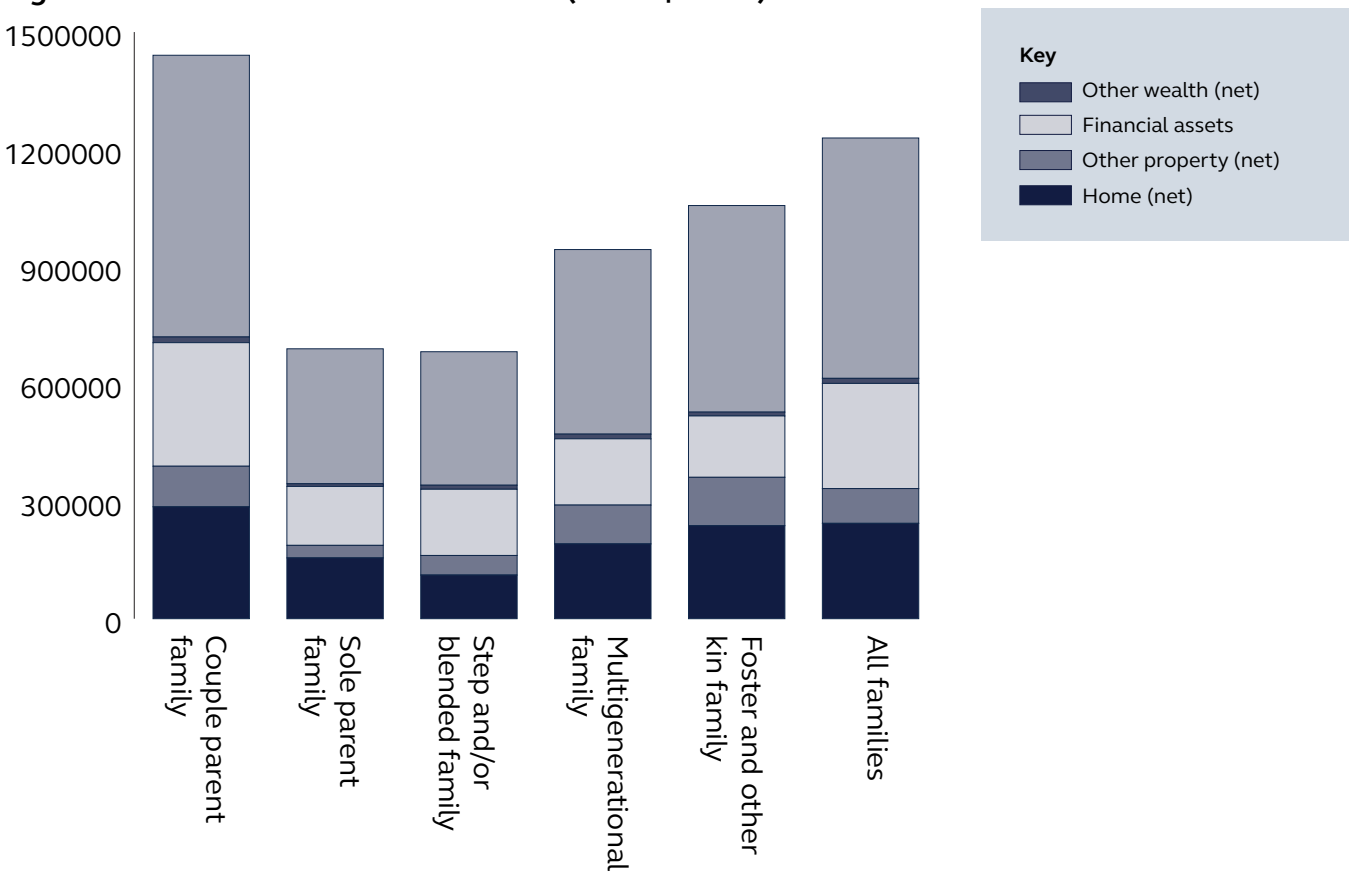
In this section, we compare the equivalised household net wealth of families based on their total financial and non-financial assets, minus the total debts of all members of the household.[11]

In Figure 3.2 the total mean net wealth of couple parent families, at $720,340, is at least 1.3 times higher than for any other family type. The total mean net wealth of foster and other kin families is around $530,000; for multigenerational families around $470,000; for sole parent families $345,000; and the lowest for step and/or blended families at $340,000.

A substantial part of family wealth is the family home, where the mean dollar value is highest among couple parent families (mean net value $286,000) and foster and other kin families ($238,000). Other financial assets such as businesses and superannuation are also important, especially in couple parent families where they are valued at $316,000.

The value of other financial assets ranges from $157,000 for foster and other kin families to $169,000 for step and/or blended families. Sole parent families have the least access to other forms of wealth whether through property, financial assets or non-financial wealth such as vehicles and collectibles.

Figure 3.2 Wealth sources and values (mean $ value)[12]



Note: Estimates are based on equivalised (OECD) household net wealth.

11 Refer to Appendix C for definitions of economic terms.

12 Home value (net) consists of the value of the home minus the home debt. Other property (net) consists of the value of other property minus the debt attached to it. Other wealth (net) consists of other non-financial asset classes (collectibles and vehicles) minus other debt classes (such as credit card debt, HECS debt, car loans, personal loans, hire purchase agreements). Refer to Appendix C for definitions of economic terms.

The next figures explore the distribution of equivalised household net wealth within each family type. Figure 3.3 shows the distribution of each family type across wealth quintiles, while Table 3.3 provides the value of the mean net wealth in each quintile for each family type.

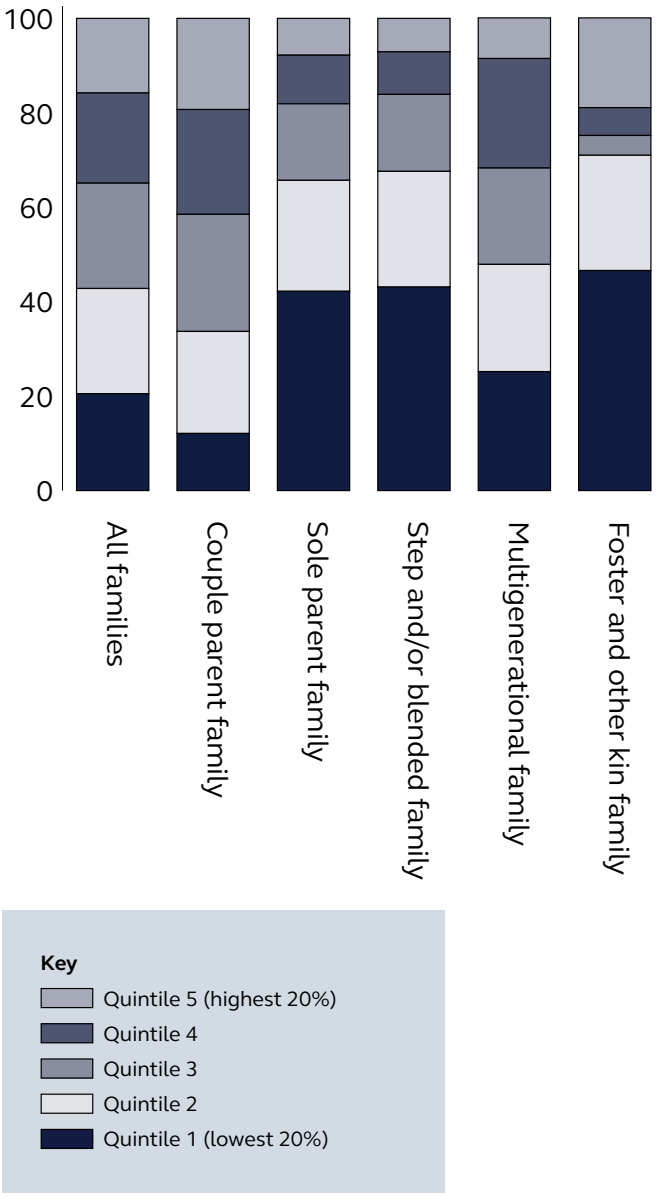
These demonstrate that most couple parent families are in the middle of the wealth distribution, between quintiles 2 and 4 (that is between 20% and 80% of the wealth distribution). In these brackets, mean net wealth is $194,000, $430,000 and $788,000, respectively.

By contrast, all other family types are most likely to be positioned in the lowest two quintiles for net wealth, where mean values are substantially lower. For sole parents, mean net wealth is $24,000 in quintile 1 and substantially higher in quintile 2 ($175,000). The mean net wealth values for step and/or blended families are very similar to those of sole parent families, where quintile 1 is $24,000 and quintile 2 is $185,000, suggesting a significant difference between access to wealth for families at the very bottom of the wealth distribution. However, multigenerational families show even larger differences: while mean net wealth is very low in quintile 1 at just $8,000, it is much higher for families in quintile 2 who have a mean net worth of $180,000.

The findings for foster and other kin families are unreliable because of low numbers in the data. However, they suggest that a very large proportion of foster and other kin families (close to 47%) are in quintile 1, the lowest 20% of the wealth, with a mean net worth of $18,000. For those in quintile 2, mean net worth is $175,000. Interestingly, and pointing to widely divergent experiences among foster and other kin families, just under one in five (19%) are in the highest quintile, with mean net worth of over $2.1 million.

This distribution is unique to foster and other kin families and points to a need to further explore the wealth of these families. It is possible that a future analysis of how families form and change over time may enable us to further understand these dynamics.

Figure 3.3 Distribution of net wealth (%)



Note: For underlying data see Table D.8

Table 3.3 Net wealth by distribution (mean $ value)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Quintile 1 (lowest 20%)	$30,537	$24,472	$24,922	$8,005	$18,194	$25,739
Quintile 2	$194,166	$175,440	$185,868	$180,084	$175,993	$189,751
Quintile 3	$430,948	$418,364	$412,299	$399,565	$442,705	$426,589
Quintile 4	$788,002	$762,921	$792,286	$896,857	$719,980	$794,169
Quintile 5 (highest 20%)	$2,037,662	$1,887,197	$2,077,074	$1,629,061	$2,192,426	$2,020,537
Total net wealth	$720,340	$345,068	$341,321	$471,946	$528,219	$614,566

Note: Estimates are based on equivalised (OECD) household net wealth.

Adult education varies

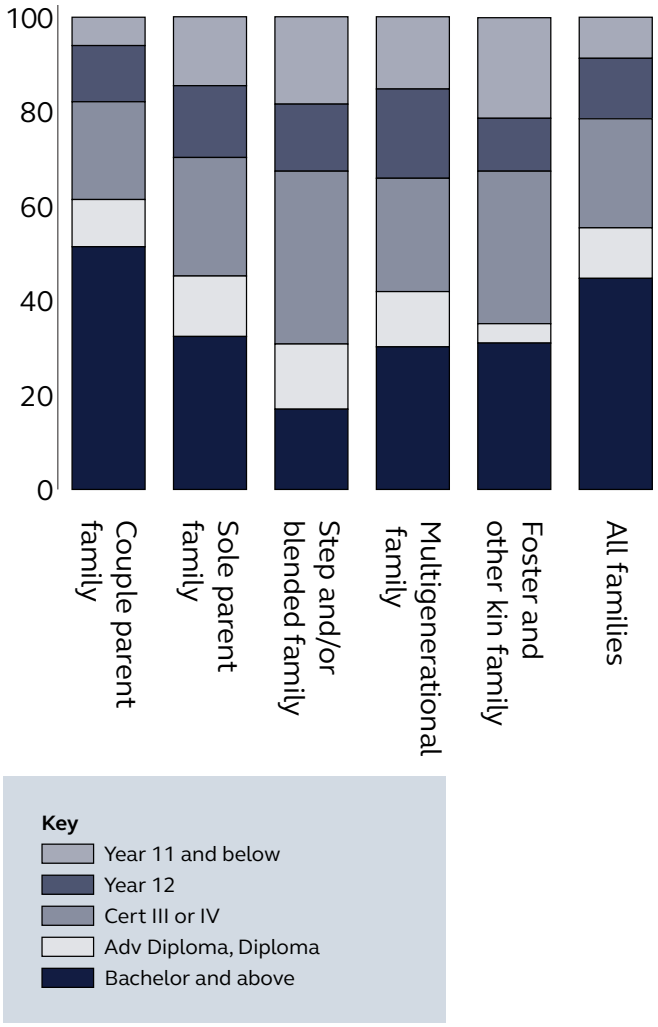
Here we explore the level of education held by people with parenting responsibilities. This is important for a variety of reasons which affect family life, including the cultural capital of the family and the influence on learning and education for children. We examine it here because of its potential influence on earning capacity.

Variations in income and wealth can also arise because of variations in earning capacities, or the hours per week that someone works, which we explore in Chapter 4.

Figure 3.4 shows a large group of adults with tertiary levels of education in couple parent families, with over half of this group (51%) holding a Bachelor's degree or higher. In most other family types less than 1 in 3 adults have a Bachelor's degree.

People in foster and other kin families and multigenerational families with parenting responsibilities are most likely to have left school before Year 12. This is probably because these groups contain many older people who studied before completing Year 12 was commonplace. Diploma and Certificate qualifications are most common among step and/or blended families, where they are held by just over half of all people with parenting responsibilities (14% Diploma or Advanced Diploma and 37% Certificate III or IV).

Figure 3.4 Education of adults with parenting responsibilities (%)



Note: For underlying data see D.9

When facing financial hardship many families turn to their support networks

Financial hardship is evident among all family types, but some families are more likely to experience financial difficulties than others. Understanding that couple parent families tend to have both the highest income levels and the highest levels of wealth compared to other types (see above), it is perhaps not surprising that this group is the least likely to face financial hardship.

By contrast, for many living in other family types, meeting financial commitments is likely to be more difficult. Importantly, however, many say they can turn to friends, family and community supports for help when they are going through tough times.

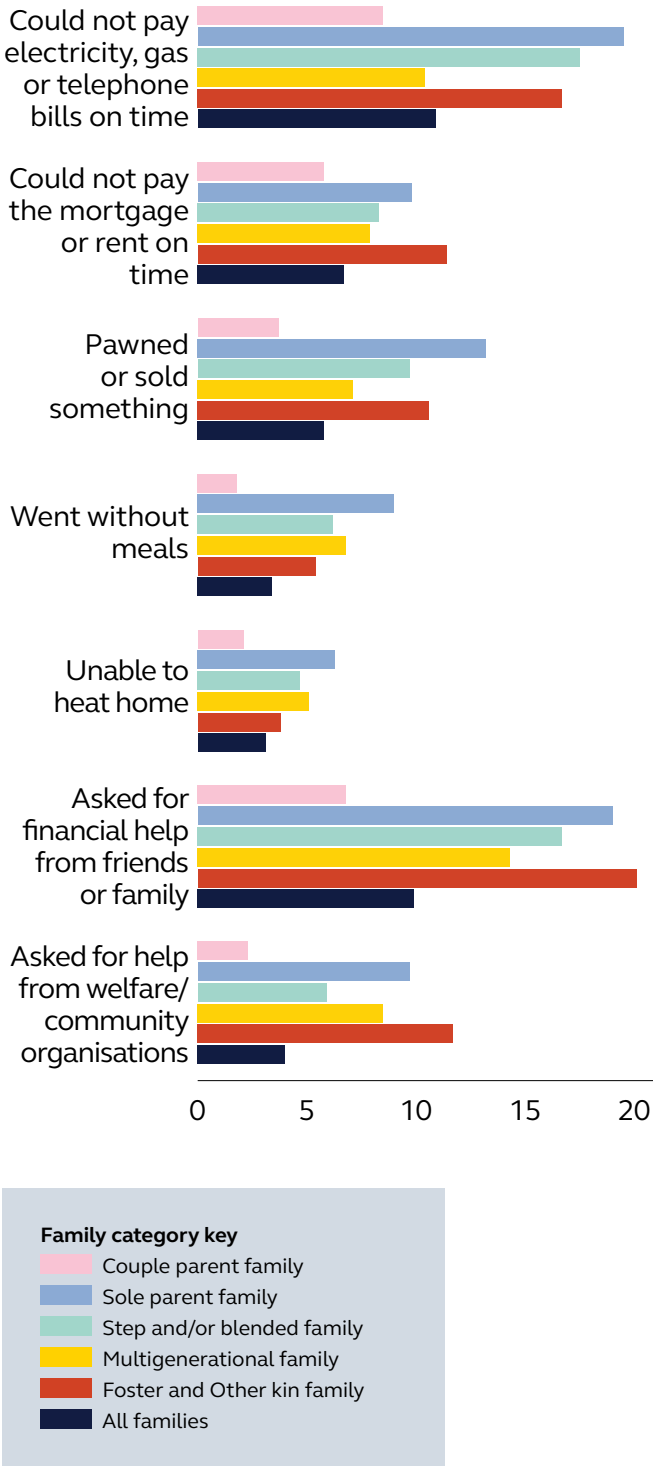
Families respond differently in their ability to meet basic financial commitments because of a shortage of money. Figure 3.5 shows the prevalence of seven indicators of financial stress across the different family types. Around 1 in 5 sole parent families find it difficult to pay utility bills on time (20%). A lack of financial capacity to pay utility bills is also predominant amongst step and/or blended (18%) and foster and other kin families (17%).

Pawning or selling items to make ends meet is an occurrence for about 1 in 10 sole parent families (12%), step and/or blended families (10%), and foster and other kin families (11%). Sometimes, money shortages are so great that families cannot afford to eat, with 9% of sole parent families, around 7% of multigenerational families, and 6% of step and/or blended families going without meals.

In times of financial hardship, the support of others is valuable. Almost a fifth of sole parent families asked friends and family for financial assistance when money was too tight (19%). Friends and family are also important sources of financial support for step and/or blended families (18%), and foster and other kin families (17%).

Welfare and community organisations also assisted families in difficult financial situations. A larger proportion of foster and other kin families (12%) and sole parent families (10%) reported asking welfare and community organisations for support.

Figure 3.5 Financial stress items (%)

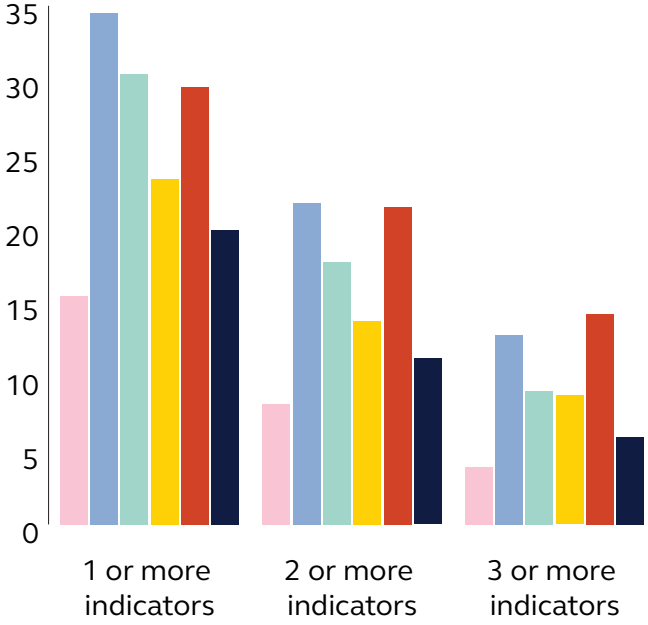


Note: For underlying data see Table D.10

To understand the cumulative impact of a shortage of money to meet financial commitments, the seven indicators in Figure 3.8 are combined to create a measure of financial stress.

Figure 3.6 below shows that financial stress is common across all family types but is experienced most acutely by sole parent and foster and other kin families. Just over a fifth of people in each of these family types (21% and 22%, respectively) have experienced at least two of the financial challenges listed above, while a sixth (around 14% and 13% respectively) have experienced at least three financial challenges.

Figure 3.6 Financial stress index (%)

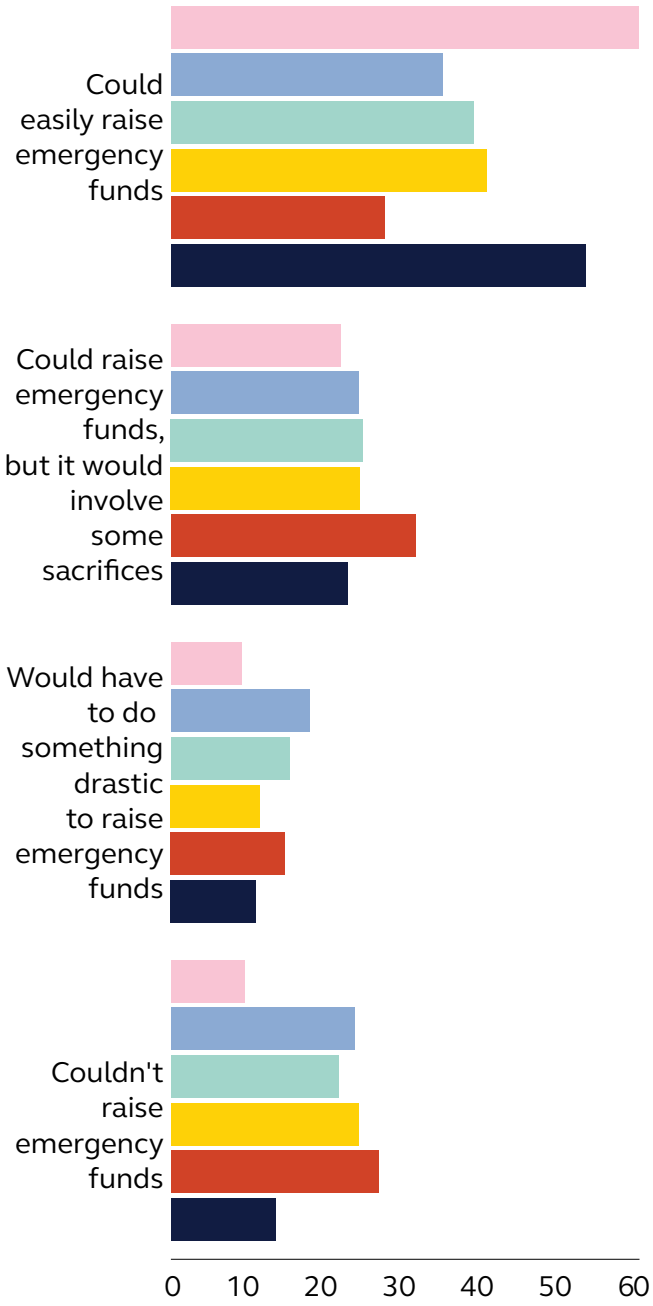


Note: For underlying data see Table D.11

Finally, Figure 3.7 illustrates that most families have the capacity to raise $4,000 in an emergency, even though for at least 20% in each family group it would involve some sacrifices. This is the case across all family types, although couple parent families (60%) are most likely to say they can raise $4,000 easily.

Importantly though, between a fifth and a quarter of most family types said they could not raise $4,000 as emergency funds. This was the case for 24% of sole parent families, 22% of step and/or blended families, 24% of multigenerational families, and 27% of foster and other kin families.

Figure 3.7 Capacity to raise funds in an emergency (%)



Note: For underlying data see Table D.12

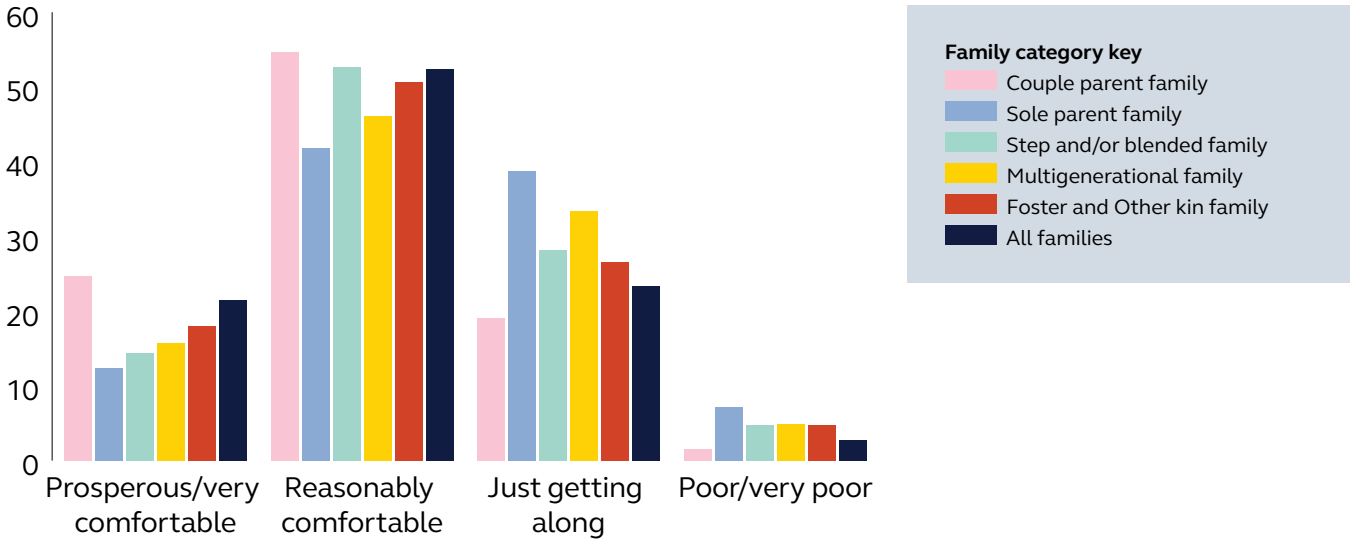
Most families feel comfortable with their financial position

Despite the wide range of economic circumstances of different family types, most people consider themselves to be relatively comfortable and are generally satisfied with their financial situation.

In each family type (Figure 3.8), except for sole parent families, around half of the family members consider themselves to be reasonably comfortable. There is more variation across families in the proportion of people who feel they are doing better or worse than 'reasonably comfortable'.

A quarter of people in couple parent families consider themselves to be prosperous or at least very comfortable. But this is only the case for about 1 in 6 people in other family types, for example, 12% for sole parent families. By contrast, around a third of all those in sole parent families (39%), multigenerational families (33%), and step and/or blended families (28%) said they are 'just getting along', but only 19% of people in couple parent families feel this way.

Figure 3.8 Financial prosperity (%)



N Note: For underlying data see Table D.13

Table 3.4 Financial satisfaction (mean scores)

	Satisfaction with your financial situation
Couple parent family	7.29
Sole parent family	6.27
Step and/or blended family	6.55
Multigenerational family	6.53
Foster and other kin family	6.92
All families	7.29

Similarly, most adults in families suggest that they are fairly satisfied with their financial situation when asked to rank on a scale from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied). The mean score in each family type in Table 3.4 ranges from 6 to 7 out of 10. However, reflecting their access to income, wealth and experiences of financial hardship, there are significant differences in scores – the mean score is highest among couple parent families (7.29 out of 10), followed by foster and other kin families (6.92), step and/or blended families (6.55), multigenerational families (6.53) and sole parent families (6.27).

Chapter 4

While relationships are strong, gender influences experiences of family life.

Family life is made up of a myriad of daily responsibilities and interactions between family members. The following section explores the subjective experiences of those in families around their satisfaction with each other, as well as how they feel about household responsibility and caregiving.

Relationships within families are a source of satisfaction and most people rate their relationships very highly in all family types. We show that relationships with children are especially important and that children tend to get along with each other in all family types.

Gender continues to define our experiences of families. In this section, we see that women feel they do more of the work and feel less satisfied with the division of labour in their family than men. This finding is consistent across family types. In fact, there is greater difference between women's and men's experiences of family life than there is between family types.

However, there are some variations. For example, women in multigenerational families are more likely to feel tired and worn out than women in other families. And in foster and other kin families, men find parenting more challenging than women. But, when asked about their share of parenting or child rearing, these men felt they do their fair share and are highly satisfied with their contributions to housework and child care.

The share of home duties relates to employment patterns among men and women. Men are most likely to be employed full-time. A similar proportion of women are employed, but they are more or less evenly divided between full-time and part-time hours. Young people, too, are employed at high rates, with most either working or combining work with study. These patterns are consistent across all family types.

Foster and other kin families, multigenerational families, sole parent families and step and/or blended families are all more likely to be caring for someone with a long-term illness or disability.

Family relationships are strong

Most people, regardless of the type of family they lived in, rated the quality of the relationships in their family very highly. Relationships between adults and children and young people are particularly highly rated.

Survey participants rate their relationships with family members on a scale from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied). In Table 4.1, we see that most families are highly satisfied with their relationships with children (mean scores for these relationships were around 8 or more for most family types), although they are highest for couple parent and multigenerational families.

Importantly, although slightly lower than parents' (including other kin) own satisfaction with their children, people in most families say that children get along with each other within the household, with means scores close to 7.5 or above across all family types.

The families with the most strained relationships are sole parent families. It is difficult to interpret some of this data for sole parents, who are asked to rate their relationship with their partner[13] and their partner's relationship with their children. Sole parents themselves decide if they want to answer the question and whether to interpret it to mean a current or former partner. This means data is not consistently reported.

Table 4.1 shows that sole parents are less satisfied at just under 7.3. Even more dissatisfaction is evident in the mean score for their partner's relationship with children, which is much lower than other families at 5.6 out of 10.

13 Note: The question also asks all survey participants about their satisfaction with their relationship with their most recent spouse or partner. A 'not applicable' option was also available.

Table 4.1 Satisfaction with family relationships (mean scores)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family
Responding person's relationship with their children	8.59	8.24	7.99	8.57	7.95
Children in household get along with each other	7.84	7.70	7.56	7.85	7.44
Responding person's relationship with partner	8.02	7.28	7.85	8.37	8.20
Partner's relationship with their children	8.42	5.61	7.30	7.94	7.95

Note: The scale ranges from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied). Where relationships were not applicable to the respondent, they could elect that option.

Gender shapes how we feel about family life

Our experience of much of family life is markedly shaped by our gender. For this reason, the following sections compare the experiences of men and women[14] on how they feel about parenting and if they feel that parenting and domestic responsibilities are fairly shared in their family.

We find that women continue to feel more stressed and more tired by raising children and believe they do more than their fair share of parenting and housework. Men, by comparison, are slightly less stressed and tired, and much more likely to believe they are contributing their fair share. Not surprisingly, then, women tend to be less satisfied with the way child rearing tasks are shared than men.

These patterns are clear across all family types. Importantly, and perhaps not surprisingly, sole parents find sharing parenting responsibilities more difficult. They are more likely to say they do more than their fair share and they are less likely to say they are satisfied with how child rearing is shared.

Experiences of raising children

Table 4.2 shows responses of women and men to questions regarding raising children on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

These questions were asked of all adults who say they have parenting responsibilities for children aged less than 18 years, regardless of whether they have a biological or legal parenting relationship. Note that this analysis compares the experiences of women as a group to men as a group, whether they are sole parents, or in a same-sex[15] or opposite-sex relationship.

Overwhelmingly, their responses show that women find parenting more challenging than men. This finding is consistent across all family types, with little variation by gender.

There are two notable exceptions. Firstly, women in multigenerational families are more likely than others to say that they often feel tired or worn out, with a mean score of 4.9 out of 7, compared to 3.7 for men in a similar family type, and 4.6 for all women. Women in multigenerational families are also more likely to say that taking care of their children is more work than pleasure (mean score of 3.4 out of 7, compared to 3 for all women and men in multigenerational families).

The other exception is in foster families, where men, not women, indicated higher mean scores across all statements regarding raising children. On every measure, men with foster or other kin parenting responsibilities find parenting more challenging than women.

14 Unfortunately, data on non-binary parents is not available.

15 Unfortunately, it is not possible to compare the experiences of same- and opposite-sex relationships as there is limited data in HILDA on gender and sexual identity.

Table 4.2 Parenting responsibilities (mean scores)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/ or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Being a parent is harder than I thought it would be						
Women	4.62	4.67	4.42	4.52	3.79	4.59
Men	4.18	3.67	4.16	3.71	4.62	4.14
All	4.40	4.53	4.31	4.23	4.03	4.39
I often feel tired, worn out, or exhausted from meeting the needs of my children						
Women*	4.64	4.63	4.61	4.90	4.09	4.65
Men	4.05	3.45	3.93	3.69	4.50	4.01
All	4.36	4.47	4.32	4.47	4.21	4.37
I feel trapped by my responsibilities as a parent						
Women	3.02	3.17	3.15	3.36	2.45	3.07
Men*	2.89	2.72	2.89	3.04	3.54	2.90
All	2.96	3.10	3.04	3.25	2.77	2.99
I find that taking care of my children is much more work than pleasure						
Women	2.91	2.92	3.13	3.42	2.72	2.97
Men*	2.86	3.20	2.90	2.93	4.08	2.89
All	2.89	2.96	3.04	3.24	3.12	2.93

Note: The scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Note: Differences in means that are not statistically significant at p<0.10 are marked with an*.

Perceptions of effort in child rearing

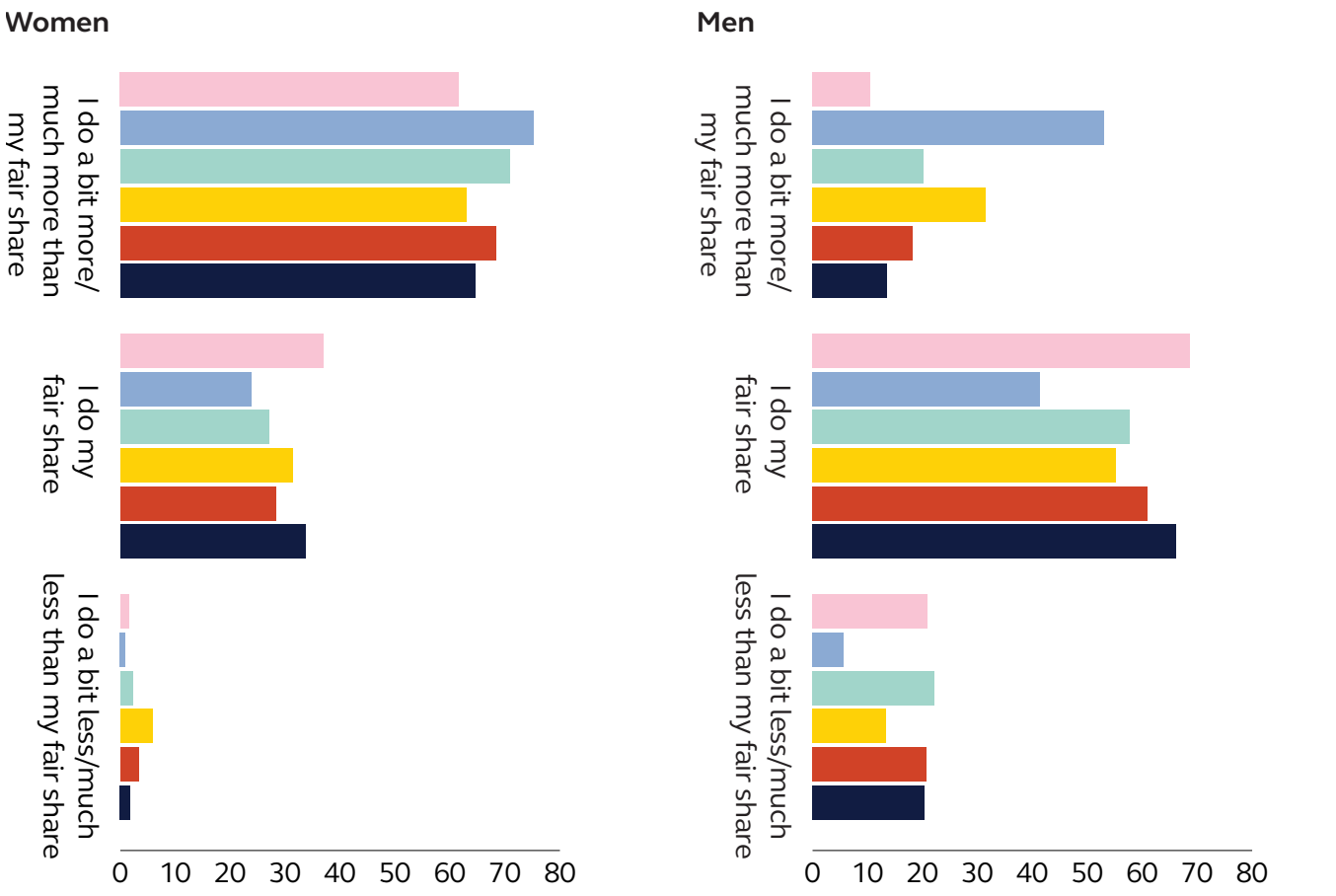
The difference in responses between women and men extends to the perceptions of how responsibility for looking after children is shared. These questions were asked of all adults with parenting responsibilities for children aged less than 18 years, regardless of whether their parenting relationship is biological or legally defined. Importantly, the question was "Do you think you do your fair share of looking after the children (for whom you have parenting responsibilities)?". The question does not specifically ask about anyone else who might contribute, such as a partner or another parent.

In Figure 4.1, nearly two thirds of women (65%) report that they do more than their fair share, while a similar percentage of men instead report that they do just their fair share, not more or less than they should (66%).

This pattern is consistent across all family types, except for sole parent families, with over three quarters (75%) of women confirming that the responsibility of looking after children predominantly lies with them. Likewise, over half of men in sole parent families (53%) report that they are doing more than their fair share.

These findings are difficult to interpret. As sole parents, it is perhaps not surprising that they tend to think they are doing more than their fair share of raising children. Although, some sole parents may consider that doing most of the parenting is fair since they are parenting solo. On the other hand, these responses may point to the importance of other people outside the household, such as other parents and other adults. For example, sole fathers may be able to rely more on the mother of the children to contribute to parenting, while sole mothers may more often not be able to rely on fathers.

Figure 4.1 Perception of share of parenting responsibilities (%)



Note: For underlying data see Table D.14

When asked how satisfied they are with how the tasks of raising children were shared[16], men tend to be more satisfied than women (Table 4.3). There are important differences between family types, though, with both men and women in sole parent families much less satisfied; women in sole parent families rate their satisfaction with how child rearing tasks are shared at an average of just 5.4 out of 10.

The difference between men and women's satisfaction is greatest in multigenerational families and foster and other kin families: on average, men are close to 1.5 points more satisfied with the division of childcare tasks than women. The scores for men are particularly high in these families (around 8 in 10).

16 Note: The question relates to children for whom the respondent has parenting responsibilities, regardless of whether they live together, are biologically related or have a legal parenting responsibility.

Table 4.3 Satisfaction with share of child rearing tasks (mean score)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/ or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Women	7.14	5.38	6.67	6.76	7.25	7.00
Men	7.74	5.94	7.44	8.07	8.71	7.69
All	7.44	5.56	7.04	7.36	8.01	7.34

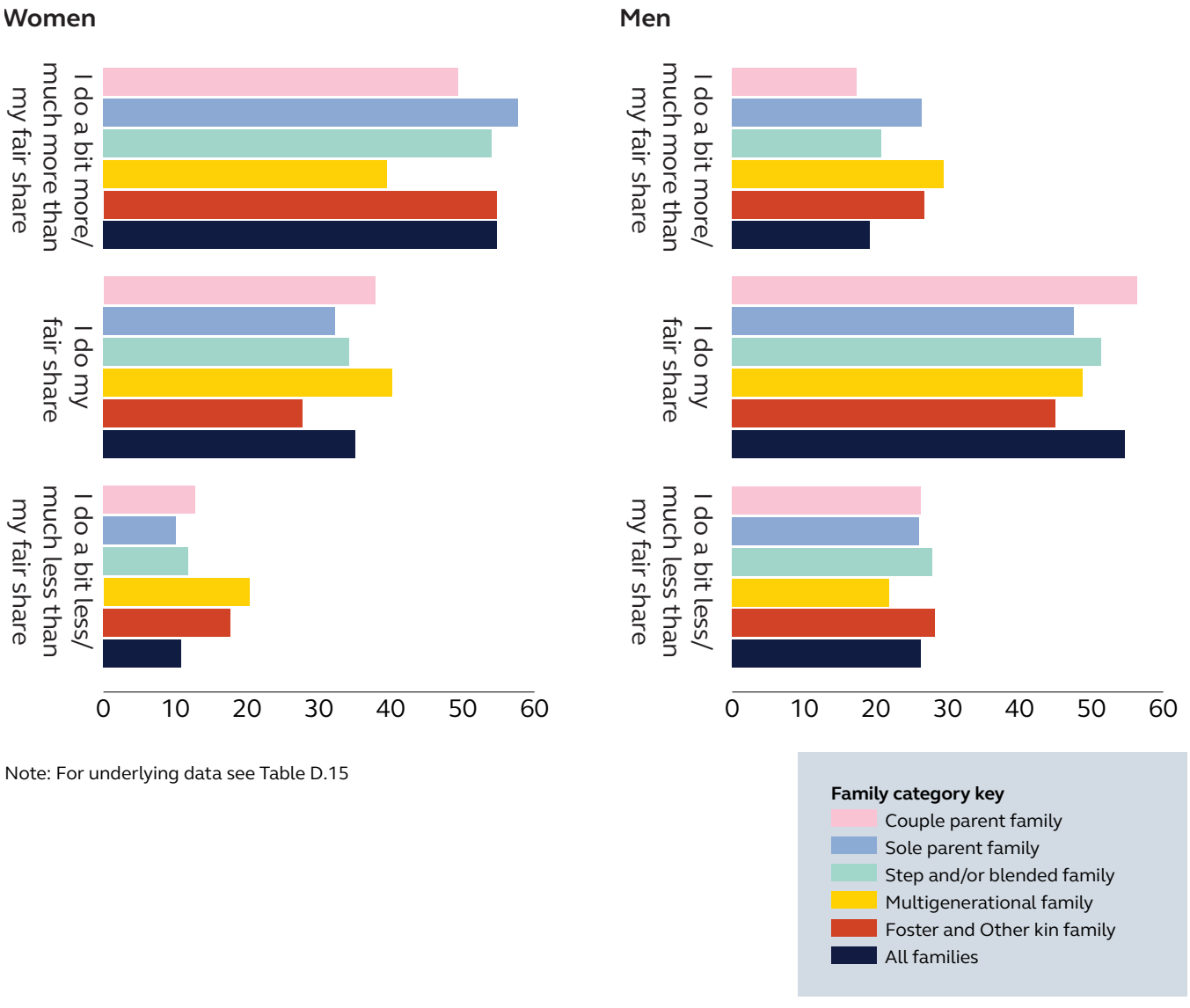
Note: The scale ranges from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied).

Perceptions of distribution of household duties

Housework is also a family task which continues to be more stressful for women than men. Women are more likely to say they do more than their fair share, and less likely to be satisfied with the way domestic tasks are divided. Sole parents find sharing domestic tasks particularly challenging, which is not surprising as they are the only adult in the household.

When asked "Do you think you do your fair share around the house?" just over half of all women (55%) in Figure 4.2 said they did more than their fair share of housework, while just over half of all men (55%) said they did their fair share, not more or less. This is consistent across all family types.

Figure 4.2 Perception of share of work around the house (%)



Note: For underlying data see Table D.15

Table 4.4 presents the mean scores on how satisfied adults are with the way household tasks are shared between them and their partner. As before, the scale ranges from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied).

Although the mean scores lie within a range of 5.5 to 7.9, there are some discernible patterns. In all family types, women are less satisfied than men. The difference between men's and women's mean scores is greatest in multigenerational families and foster and other kin families. This mostly seems to be because mean scores for men were particularly high in these family types.

Table 4.4 Satisfaction with division of household tasks (mean score)

	Women	Men	All
Couple parent family	6.75	7.55	7.14
Sole parent family	5.57	6.73	5.91
Step and/or blended family	6.51	7.19	6.83
Multigenerational family	6.33	7.9	7.07
Foster and other kin family	6.23	7.8	6.99
All families	6.65	7.52	7.07

Note: The scale ranges from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied).

Most adults are employed

Employment is a key contributor to a family's economic situation and their ongoing experience of family life. A key change to family practices in recent decades has been the steady rise in the proportion of women who combine employment with parenting. More women than ever before maintain a job throughout their children's lives (Warren et al., 2020).

Despite this, in all family types there are clear patterns on the whole: most men work full-time, while some women work full-time, some part-time and some are not engaged in employment. This pattern is reasonably steady among many of the family types, despite the extra care responsibilities of all families compared to couple parent families. Sole parent families and foster and other kin families demonstrate somewhat different employment patterns, perhaps because of these care responsibilities, and, in the case of sole parent families, the presence of only one adult at home.

Figure 4.3 presents the proportions of working-age adults inclusive of parents, grandparents and other household members that are involved in the labour market. The highest full-time employment rates are among men living with other adults – in 84% couple parent families, in 82% step and/or blended families and in 74% multigenerational families. Less than 10% of men work part-time in any family type with the exception of foster and other kin families. Very few men are not in the labour force, except for men in sole parent families, where more than a quarter are focused full-time on parenting or other activities (28%).

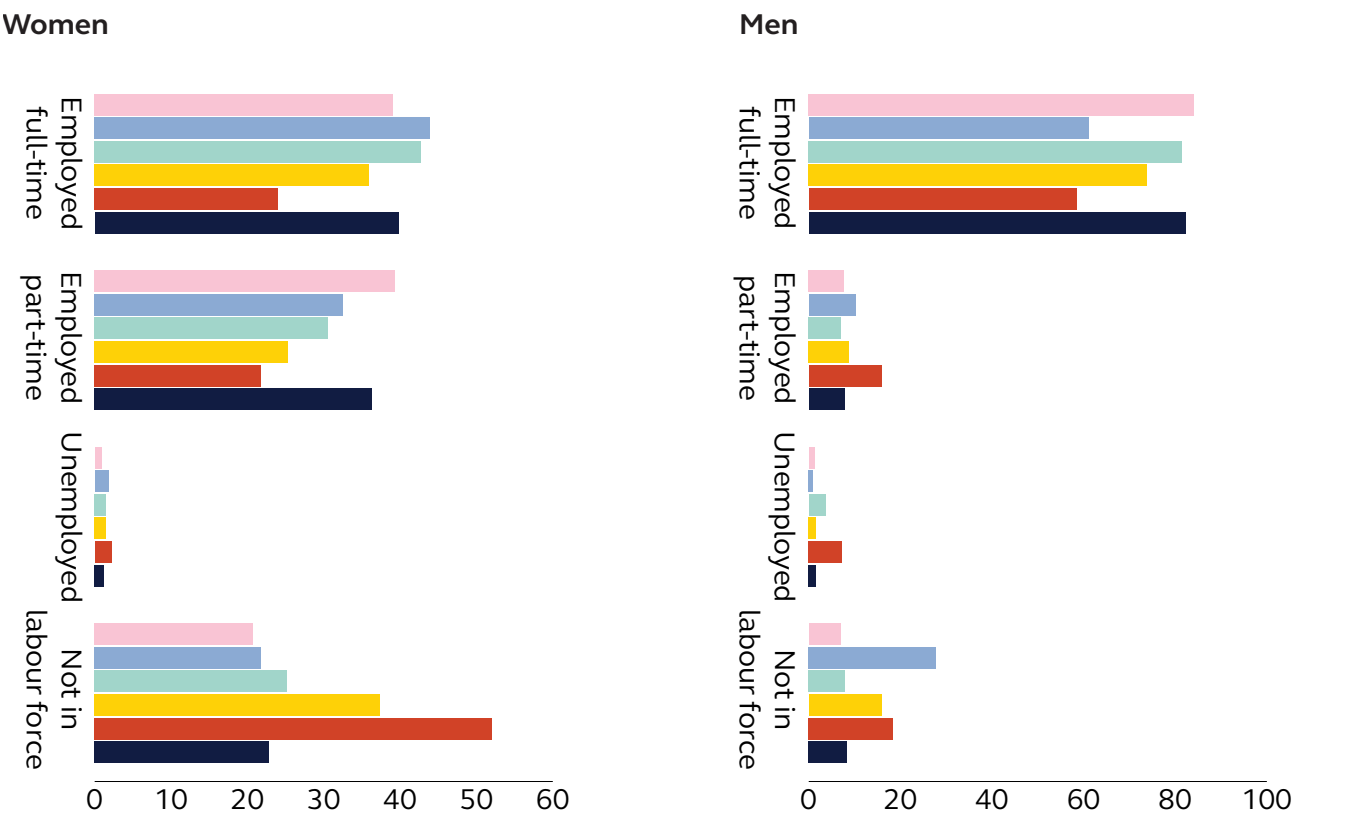
By contrast, women's employment is more evenly divided between full-time and part-time hours. Women are most likely to work full-time in sole parent families (44%) and step and/or blended families (43%), and slightly less likely in couple parent families (39%) and multigenerational families (36%). Around a third of women work part-time in couple parent families (39%), sole parent families (33%) and step and/or blended families (31%), and around a quarter in multigenerational families (25%) and foster and other kin families (24%).

Half (52%) of women in foster and other kin families, where some grandmothers may have retired, were not in the labour force, compared to between a third and a fifth of women in other family types. This is followed by multigenerational families (37%), step and/or blended families (25%), sole parent families (22%) and couple parent families (21%).

Employment patterns are noticeably different in two family types: sole parent families and foster and other kin families. In foster and other kin families, employment rates are lower for men and for women – possibly because this group includes grandparents who are providing kin care and might already have retired.

Sole parent families present a unique pattern of employment between men and women. Men are less likely to work full-time than men in other families, but women are more likely to work full-time than other women. Part-time employment rates for both men and women are similar to their peers. Men are much more likely to not be in the labour force than other men, being much more like women in sole parent families in this regard.

Figure 4.3 Labour market participation of working-age adults in families (%)



Note: For underlying data see Table D.16

There are consistent high levels of satisfaction across family types with their employment opportunities, with mean satisfaction ratings ranging from 7.2 out of 10 among multigenerational families, to 7.81 and 7.84 for foster and other kin families and couple parent families respectively.

Most young people engage in work or study

As Figure 4.4 shows, most young people aged 18 to 24 are engaged in some kind of employment in all family types and many of them are also studying. This is the case for around 4 out of 5 young people in couple parent, sole parent, step and/or blended and multigenerational families.

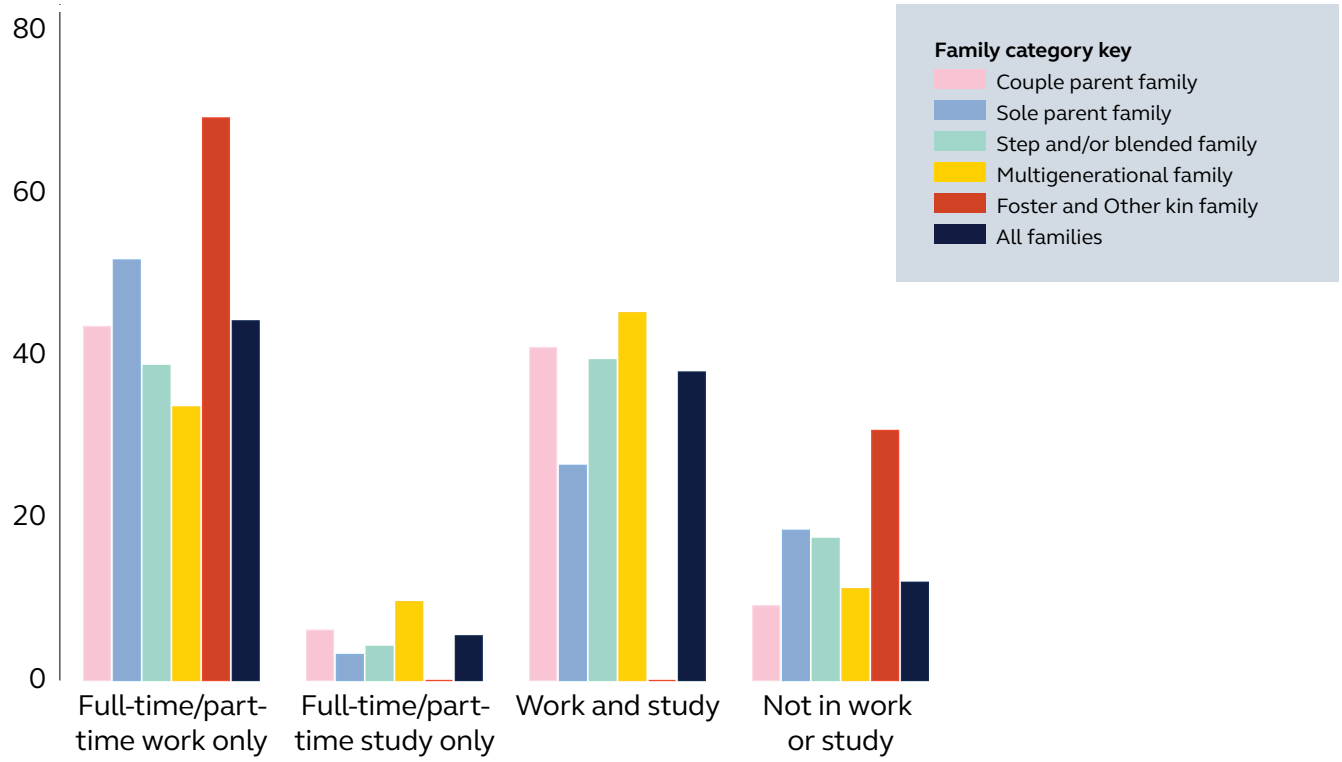
Although patterns are evident between family types, these are not statistically significant. However, the findings suggest that young people living with a sole parent might be more likely to be engaged in part-time or full-time work only (52%) and less likely to be studying only (3%).

By contrast, young people in multigenerational families appear less likely to work only (34%), with almost half more likely to be combining employment with study (45%). Young people living with couple parents are somewhere in between, with around two fifths working full-time or part-time (44%), and another two fifths working while also studying (41%). The same is true for young people in step and/or blended families.

Unfortunately, data for young people living as part of foster and other kin families are unreliable due to low numbers. However, they suggest that many are not in employment nor in study (31%). This appears to also be the case for young people living with a sole parent (19%) or in step and/or blended families (18%). By contrast, young people living with couple parents are much less likely to not be engaged in some combination of work or study (9%).

Remembering that care responsibilities are higher amongst sole parent, step and/or blended, multigenerational and foster and other kin families, it's possible that some young people have care responsibilities that make work or study difficult. It's also possible that some young people in these families have disabilities or long-term health conditions themselves which make employment or study more challenging.

Figure 4.4 Work and study commitments of young people (18 to 24 years) (%)



Note:For underlying data see Table D.17

Health and care responsibilities in families

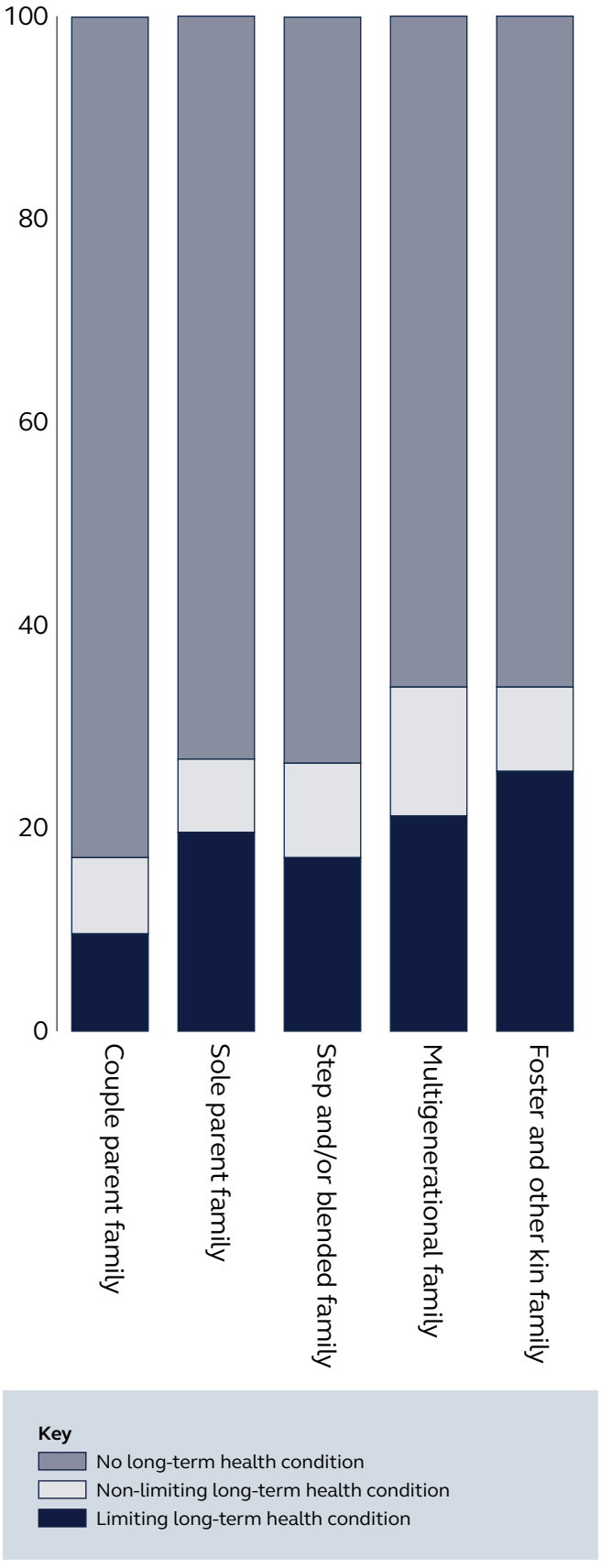
A key family practice is the provision of care to family members during times of ill health or disability. To understand how this varies across family types, we explored the health of family members and their care responsibilities. We found that some family types are more likely to be supporting someone with illness or disability compared to others: foster and other kin families, multigenerational families, sole parent families and step and/or blended families.

Family members aged 15 years and above were asked if they have a long-term health condition, impairment or disability that restricts their everyday activities, such as learning difficulties, mobility challenges, dementia, chronic pain and mental illness.

Figure 4.5 illustrates that perhaps because of the presence of older adults, members of multigenerational families and foster and other kin families are more likely to experience long-term health conditions that cause limitations to their daily lives (21% among multigenerational families, and 26% among foster and other kin families), or long-term health conditions that are not limiting (13% and 8%, respectively).

Limiting long-term health conditions are also common for around a fifth of people in sole parent families (20%) and step and/or blended families (17%). People in couple parent families are the healthiest, with only 1 in 10 family members experiencing a limiting long-term illness.

Figure 4.5 Proportion of individuals with a limiting long-term health condition (%)



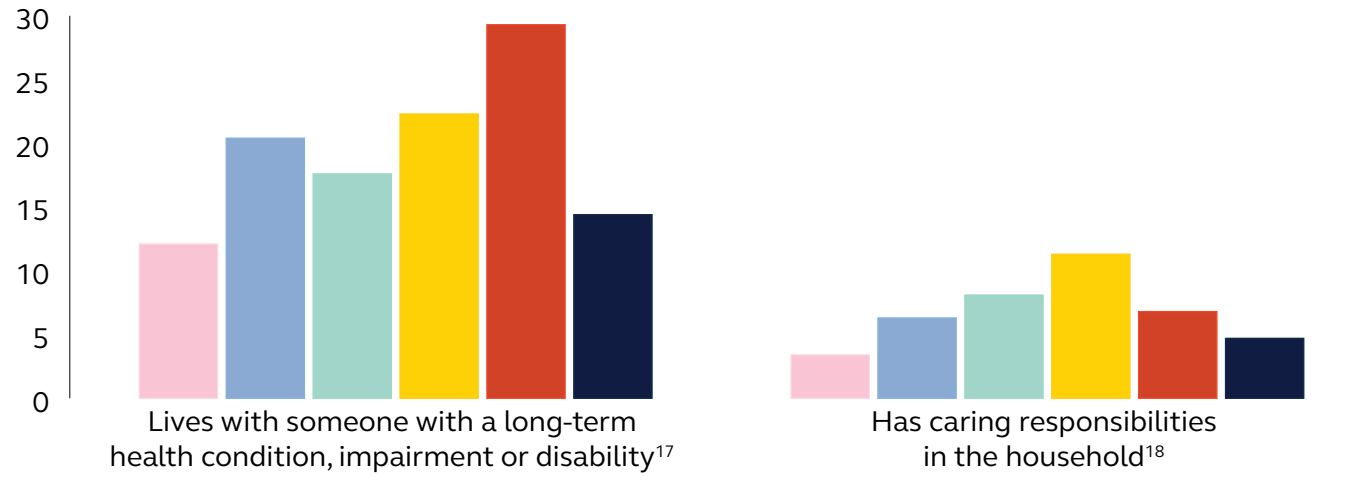
Note: For underlying data see Table D.18

Figure 4.6 provides two different profiles of care and care responsibilities across family types. The first identifies families with at least one member who has a long-term physical, mental or emotional health condition, impairment or disability that requires, as a minimum, some level of supervision and care by others in the family. The second identifies if a family member has caring responsibilities for another family member on an ongoing basis due to a long-term health condition, age or disability.

Although close to 15% of families include someone with a long-term health condition, impairment or disability who lives with them, there is substantial variation across family type. Just less than a third of foster and other kin families report living with someone with a long-term health condition (29%), and over a fifth of multigenerational families (22%) and sole parent families (20%). Couple parent families, by contrast, are much less likely to include people with long-term health conditions, impairment or disability (12%).

As expected, people are more likely to report that they have caring responsibilities in their household among those family types where ill health and disability are more prevalent, particularly, multigenerational families (11%), step and/or blended families (8%) and sole parent families (6%).

Figure 4.6 Long-term health conditions, impairment and disability (%)



Note: For underlying data see Table D.19

17 'Long-term health condition, impairment or disability' includes sight problems not corrected by glasses or contact lenses; hearing problems; speech problems; blackouts, fits or loss of consciousness; difficulty learning or understanding things; limited use of arms or fingers; limited use of feet or legs; a nervous or emotional condition which requires treatment; frequent headaches or migraine; any other condition that restricts physical activity or physical work (eg back problems); any disfigurement or deformity; any mental illness which requires help or supervision; shortness of breath or difficulty breathing; chronic or recurring pain; long-term effects as a result of a head injury, stroke or other brain damage; a long-term condition or ailment which is still restrictive even though it is being treated or medication is being taken for it; or any other long-term condition such as arthritis, asthma, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, dementia, etc.

18 A person with caring responsibilities is someone who lives with anyone in the household who has a long-term health condition, who is elderly or who has a disability, and for whom they care or help on an ongoing basis with self-care (eg bathing, eating or getting dressed), mobility and communication in their own language.

Chapter 5

Families are embedded in communities and neighbourhoods.

Connections with other family, friends and the community is an important aspect of how families gain support and engage in family life.

Families live in a diverse range of neighbourhoods and forms of housing. People in all family types live in a mix of wealthy and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, but couple parent families are more likely to live in the wealthiest neighbourhoods. Sole parent families, step and/or blended families, multigenerational families, and foster and other kin families are more likely to live in poorer neighbourhoods.

When asked about potential problems with early education and care, families most often said cost was an issue, but some also experienced problems with finding quality services or services in the right location and juggling multiple types of care.

Connections beyond the immediate family are important. At least every week, sometimes every day, around half of all family members spend time with friends or extended family. Sole parent families and foster and other kin families are most likely to have frequent contact with people beyond their household.

Family type influences the type of home people live in

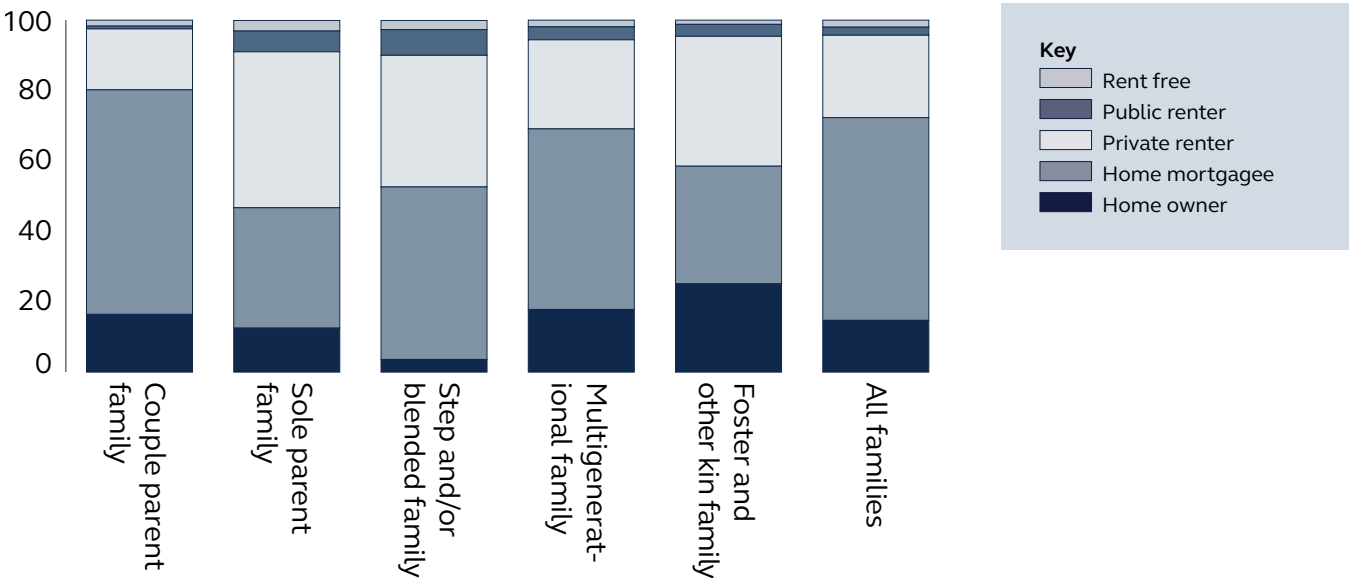
Family type is strongly connected to the type of housing families are likely to live in. Across all family types, most people said they are living in a home they are purchasing or own outright. But couple parent families are much more likely to own or be purchasing a home than other groups. A substantial proportion of sole parent families, step and/or blended families, multigenerational families and foster and other kin families are renting, most often in the private rental market.

Figure 5.1 reveals that more than half of all families (58%) are in the process of buying a home, but this is most prevalent among couple parent families (64%). Similarly, multigenerational families and step and/or blended families are also often mortgagees (51% and 49%, respectively). With the presence of an older generation, multigenerational families are most likely to own their homes outright (18%) along with couple parent families (16%).

Unfortunately, because the number of foster and other kin families in the data is low, analysis of housing is unreliable for this group. Our findings suggest that despite very low incomes (see section on income), a quarter of foster and other kin families own their own homes (25%). This may reflect grandparents providing kin care later in life, after they have fully purchased their homes. This may also give some foster and kin carers a degree of protection from financial hardship, however this group is also very likely to be living in accommodation that is privately rented (37%).

Other families are also highly reliant on the private rental market for their homes. These include nearly half of sole parent families (44%), and a quarter of multigenerational families (25%). Sole parent families (6%) and step and/or blended families (7%) are more than three times likely than all families to rent public housing.

Figure 5.1 Housing tenure by family type (%)

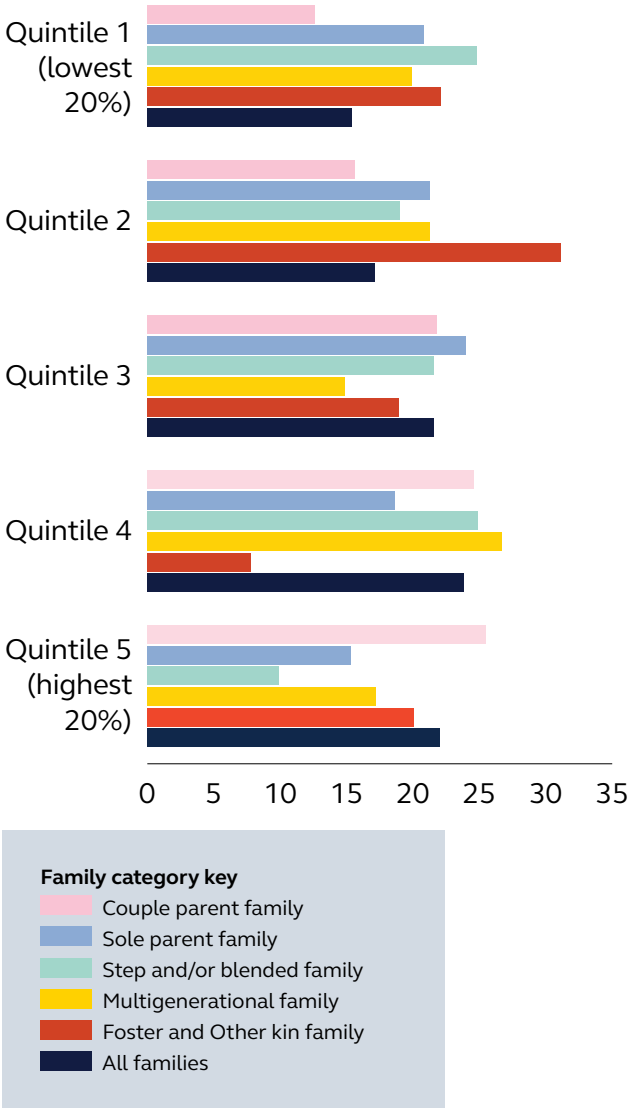


Note: For underlying data see Table D.20

The SEIFA Index describes the relative disadvantage experienced in a local government area (LGA) compared to other LGAs (Figure 5.2). All LGAs in Australia are ranked, and then divided into five equal groups (quintiles). All things being equal, families should be evenly distributed across the quintiles.

However, this is not the case. Half of couple parent families live in LGAs in the top two quintiles (25% in quintile 4, 26% in quintile 5). Other family types are much more likely to live in LGAs in the most disadvantaged quintiles. This is prevalent amongst half of foster and other kin families (22% in quintile 1 and 31% in quintile 2), and more than 40% of sole parent families, step and/or blended families and multigenerational families.

Figure 5.2 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (%)



Note: For underlying data see Table D.21

Similar to the levels of satisfaction with their financial situation, people report consistent high levels of satisfaction across family types with the home in which they live, although variations do exist (Table 5.1). Sole parent families and step and/or blended families report slightly lower mean scores compared to the other family types (7.88 and 7.90 respectively).

The same pattern is true for satisfaction with the neighbourhood in which families live, with higher mean scores amongst couple parent (8.01) and foster and other kin families (8.10). Overall though, families appear slightly less satisfied with their neighbourhood than with their homes (8.13 for homes and 7.88 for neighbourhood).

Table 5.1 Satisfaction with home and neighbourhood (mean scores)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
The home in which you live	8.19	7.88	7.90	8.28	8.49	8.13
The neighbourhood in which you live	8.01	7.43	7.65	7.66	8.10	7.88

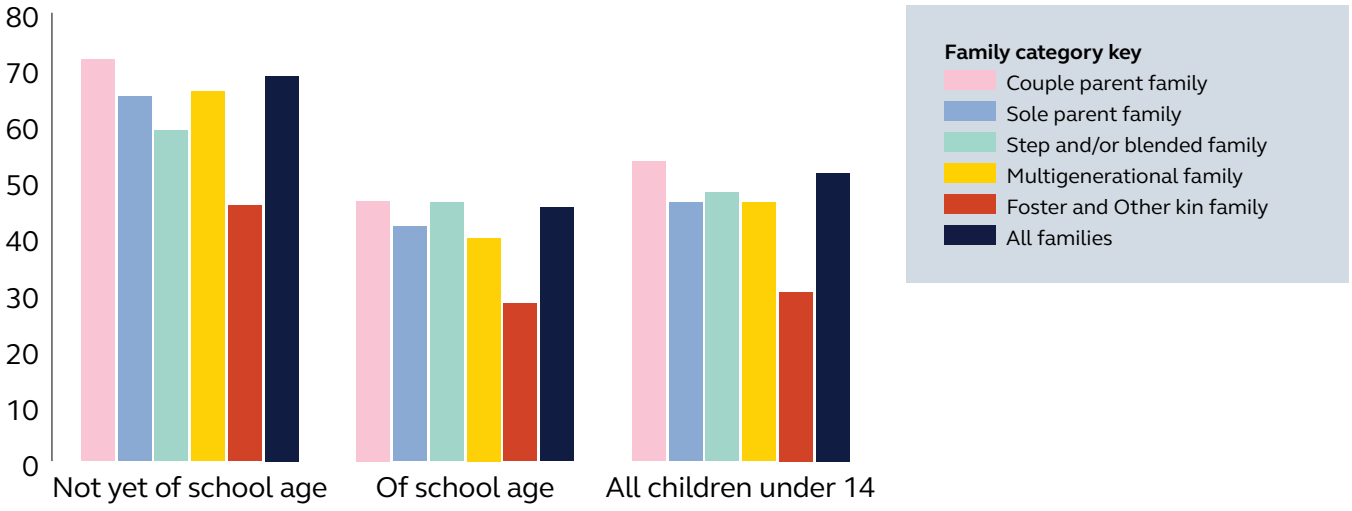
Note: The scale ranges from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied).

Families and early childhood education and care

Most families rely on others to help them care for their children (Figure 5.3). These arrangements are most common among families with children who are not yet of school age (69%), and highest among couple parent families (72%), multigenerational families (66%) and sole parent families (65%).

Among families with children who are of school age, there is less variation between families. Foster and other kin families are much less likely to turn to others for support with care for children, although these findings are less reliable due to small sample numbers. This extra support can either be formal services (for example, long daycare, preschool or out-of-school-hours care) or informal arrangements with friends, extended family or neighbours.

Figure 5.3 Care for children outside the family



Note: For underlying data see Table D.22

Child care types

Families rely on a mix of formal services and informal support from neighbours, friends and family to look after their children, before they are school aged and once they are of school age.

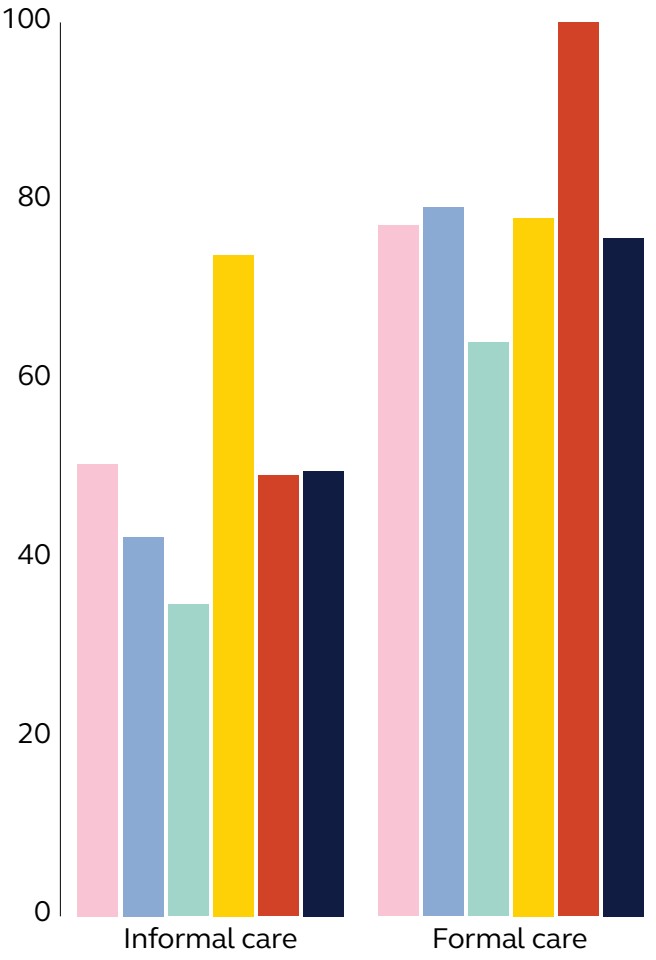
Children not yet of school age

Formal early childhood education and care services are important for families with children who are not yet at school.

Of those who use either care outside of the immediate family, most use formal services (Figure 5.4). Formal care includes regulated care away from the child's home such as family daycare, private/community long daycare centre, kindergarten/preschool and workplace long daycare centre (for those who are working). This is highest among sole parent families (79%), multigenerational families (78%) and couple parent families (77%), and less common among step and/or blended families (64%). Informal support to care for young children is also important. This is care provided by grandparents, siblings, other relatives, neighbours, friends, and paid sitters or nannies either in the child's home or elsewhere and can be paid or unpaid.

Among multigenerational families who use either formal or informal care, 74% used informal care – suggesting the important role of grandparents in caring for children in these families. Informal care however is also high amongst couple parent families (51%) and sole parent families (42%), and lower in step and/or blended families (35%).

Figure 5.4 Caring for and educating children not yet at school outside the immediate family (%)



Note: For underlying data see Table D.23

Note: Total population estimates are for all households.

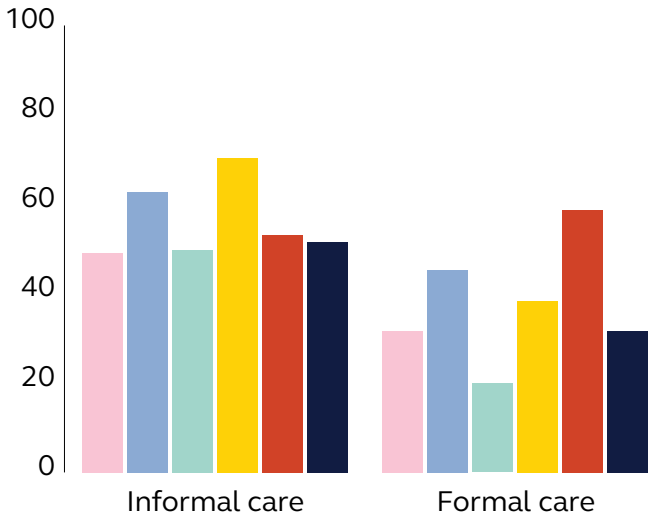
Note: Percentages do not add to 100% because some families use both formal and informal care.

Care for school aged children

Things change once children start school as far fewer families use formal services like out-of-school-hours care or family daycare, and other much less common care options (for example, friends and neighbours, children looking after themselves or staying at the parent's workplace).

Figure 5.5 shows that of families who use either formal or informal care to look after school aged children, formal services are used more by sole parent families (45%) and multigenerational families (38%), and less so by couple parent families (32%) and step and/or blended families (20%). By contrast, informal care from grandparents, friends and other family is higher amongst multigenerational families (70%), sole parent families (63%), and about half of step and/or blended families (50%) and couple parent families (49%).

Figure 5.5 Care for and educating children at school outside the immediate family (%)



Note: For underlying data see Table D.24

Note: Total population estimates are for all households.

Note: Percentages do not add to 100% because some families use both formal and informal care.

Challenges with child care

Table 5.2 reports on difficulties that families encounter with early education and care. Specifically, people with parenting responsibilities who have considered using early education and care in the last 12 months so that they or their partner could undertake paid work were asked about cost, quality, location and choice of child care.

The scale, ranging from 0 (not a problem at all) to 10 (very much a problem), has been grouped into three categories: not a problem (0), sometimes a problem (1 to 4) and a problem (6 to 10). Figures for multigenerational families and foster and other kin families are too unreliable to report due to low numbers in the sample.

Across the three family types, the biggest issue parents have with early education and care is the cost (21%), especially in step and/or blended families (40%). However, issues with the cost of early childhood education and care remains a problem, with over 50% of all family types reporting that it is always a problem or sometimes a problem. The exception is sole parent families, where only 2 in 5 families (41%) report it as a problem (always or sometimes). This is possibly as a consequence of increases in the Child Care Subsidy for those on low incomes (Bray et al., 2021).

On every other measure, about 20% of people with parenting responsibilities in step and/or blended families are more likely to experience constant problems with quality, lack of choice, location and the need to juggle multiple work-care arrangements. These ongoing difficulties are lower for couple parent families (around 10%), and less than 10% for sole parent families.

However, couple parent families indicate sometimes problematic issues with quality early education and care (19%) and juggling multiple care arrangements (23%). Although, it should be noted that differences between families are not statistically significant with respect to quality and location (finding good quality services and finding services in the right location).

Table 5.2 Issues with early childhood education and care for families who work (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/ or blended family	All families
The cost of child care				
Not a problem	18.1	23.7	21.3	19.4
Sometimes a problem	43.8	44.0	29.6	41.7
A problem	38.2	32.3	49.1	38.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Finding good quality child care*				
Not a problem	40.1	51.5	43.1	42.0
Sometimes a problem	39.7	34.7	31.7	36.8
A problem	20.3	13.9	25.2	21.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Finding a place at the childcare centre of your choice				
Not a problem	41.9	55.4	46.0	43.6
Sometimes a problem	37.3	30.5	21.9	35.4
A problem	20.8	14.1†	32.1	21.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Finding a childcare centre in the right location*				
Not a problem	45.4	52.8	46.8	46.1
Sometimes a problem	37.6	35.1	27.6	35.9
A problem	17.1	12.0†	25.6	18.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Juggling multiple childcare arrangements				
Not a problem	32.3	41.6	29.0	33.0
Sometimes a problem	45.5	32.9	39.0	44.0
A problem	22.1	25.5	32.0	23.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate; †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.
Note: The scale ranges from 0 (not a problem at all) to 10 (very much a problem).
Note: Differences in proportions for these issues are not statistically significant at p<0.10 are marked with an *.

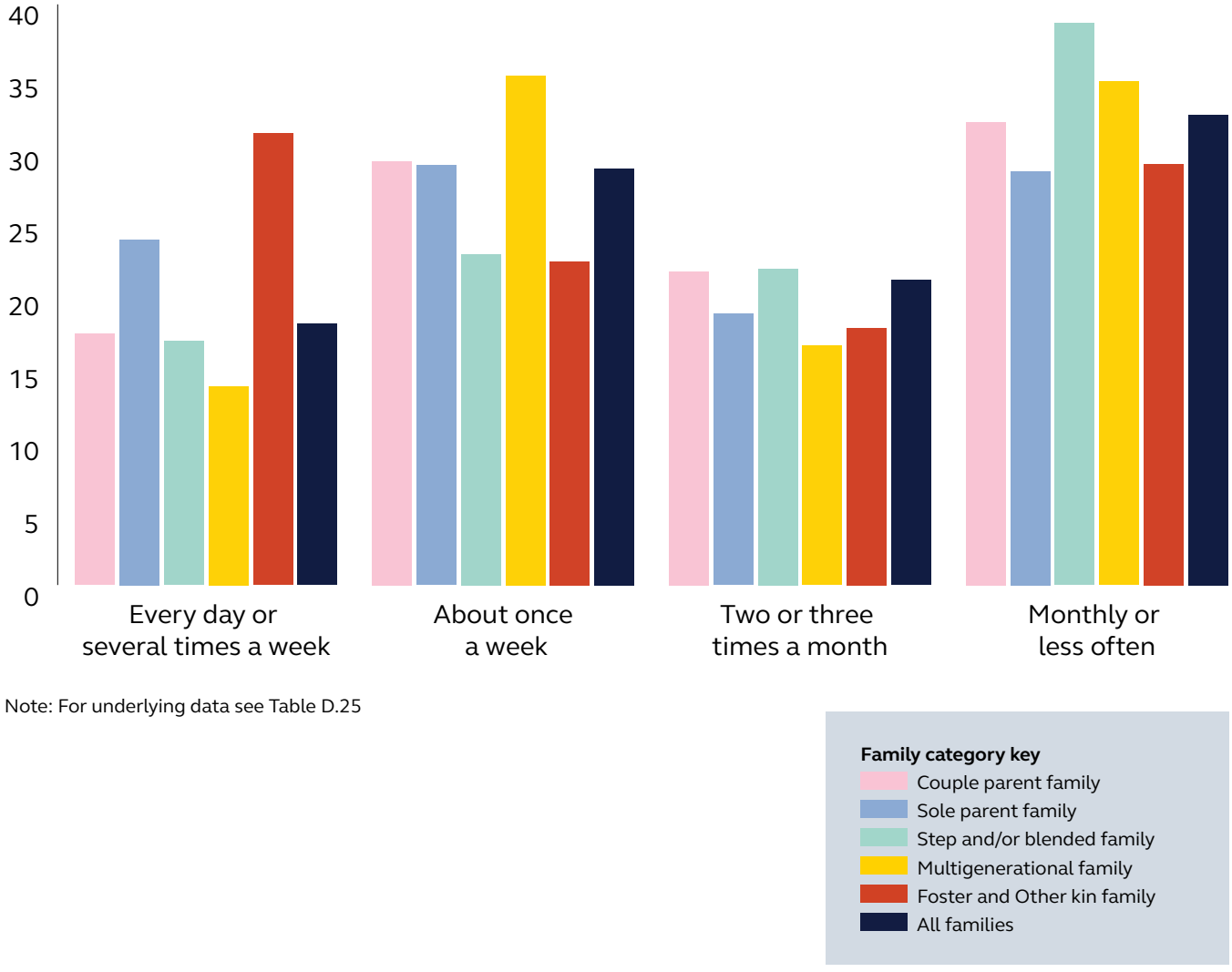
Families and their community connections

Family lives extend beyond the household to other family members and friends. Just under half of all family members spend time with friends or extended family at least every week, sometimes every day.

Figure 5.6 shows that frequent contact with friends and family is especially important for sole parent families and foster and other kin families. Nearly a third (31%) of people in foster and other kin families see friends and family at least several times each week, while nearly a quarter of people in sole parent families do so (24%). This compares to around 15% of the remaining family types.

Just over a third of people in multigenerational families (35%) connect with friends and family every week, and so do around a quarter of people in all other family types (29% of couple parent families, 29% of sole parent families, 23% of step and/or blended families, 22% of foster and other kin families). People in step and/or blended families have the least frequent association with friends and relatives compared to other family types, with 39% making contact every month or less often.

Figure 5.6 Frequency of social contact with friends and/or relatives living outside the household (%)



Note: For underlying data see Table D.25

Table 5.3 shows the frequency in which adults in different families maintain these connections in a variety of ways, on a scale from 1 (never) to 6 (very often). The most regular form of contact for most families is through telephone, email or post with friends or relatives who live elsewhere. On average, people in all family types indicate a mean score of 3.5 out of 6. This is followed by keeping in touch with friends, with most families providing a score of 3.

Families visit extended family and have conversations with those around them in the neighbourhood less often, and even less often attend services at places of worship. Sole parents are engaged in these types of social connections less often than other family types, especially when it comes to conversations with those around them in the neighbourhood. Couple parent families and multigenerational families engage in conversation on current affairs and attend places of worship most often, compared to sole parent and step and/or blended families.

Table 5.3 Connections with the community (mean scores)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family
Telephone, email or mail contact with friends or relatives living elsewhere*	3.53	3.23	3.47	3.40	3.77
Keep in touch with friends*	3.11	2.98	3.01	3.08	2.95
Visit extended family or family living elsewhere	2.49	2.08	2.21	2.55	2.37
Talk about current affairs with friends, family or neighbours	2.39	1.96	2.07	2.34	2.11
Chat with neighbours	2.20	1.61	1.98	2.04	2.06
Attend services at a place of worship	1.13	0.71	0.73	1.46	0.79

Note: The scale ranges from 1 (never) to 6 (very often).
Note: Differences in means for items that are not statistically significant at $p<0.10$ are marked with an *.

Conclusion

The Uniting Families Report 2024 offers insight into the diverse tapestry of family life in Australia. Our analysis of HILDA data shows that while 69% of Australian children reside in couple parent families, over 30% are raised in sole parent, step and/or blended, multigenerational, or foster and other kin families. This understanding challenges conventional notions of family structure and underscores the importance of inclusive support systems.

The report uncovers that sole parent families, despite comprising only 11% of households, often face heightened financial stress and housing instability compared to couple parent households. Their experiences reflect broader socioeconomic disparities, requiring targeted interventions to alleviate these challenges.

Moreover, the increase in same-sex families raising children, influenced by shifts in societal attitudes and policy reforms like the 2017 marriage equality vote, underscores the evolving landscape of family dynamics in Australia. This demographic shift emphasises the need for inclusive and affirmative policies that support family formations and ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities for all.

The disparities in wealth and educational attainment among different family types further highlight systemic inequalities. For instance, couple parent families generally exhibit higher levels of educational attainment and greater economic stability, while foster and other kin families may vary significantly in economic resources depending on caregiver circumstances.

These findings compel us to continue our advocacy for services and policies that recognise and address the multifaceted needs of families. By fostering dialogue and catalysing action, our commitment to disrupting entrenched disadvantage is unwavering.

Future editions of the Uniting Families Report will take wide inspiration and focus on the challenges and issues of the day. Each year a spotlight topic will be explored through a range of research methods to bring insights on an area of need and opportunity.

Alongside the UNSW Social Policy Research Centre, Uniting looks forward to bringing you on this 10-year journey of exploring and understanding families with us.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Data scoping

Regular and consistent reporting on the state of families in Australia requires accurate, timely and comprehensive data.

The final selection of the Census and HILDA followed several guiding principles. Firstly, we prioritised nationally representative datasets so that findings could be broadly generalised for most Australian families in the population. Additionally, we chose datasets that cover the widest range of ages, different population groups and a breadth of topics of interest on family life. Flexibility of variables is key to identifying diverse family types and to exploring the complexity of family relationships and experiences. A final consideration is the regularity of data (with a preference for annual releases) and the timeliness of data for advocacy and knowledge exchange purposes (less than three years old).

Table A.1 provides an overview of the various datasets considered for this report. We intend to include new family-based surveys in the future as they become available.

Table A.1 Description of potential datasets

Dataset	Main features	Variables of interest and data linkages	Strengths and limitations
ABS Census	Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing collects demographic, social and economic information on every person and household in Australia and provides population-level statistics. ***Population groups:*** • All Australian adult population is defined as 15 years and above • Children are defined as under 15 years of age • Includes citizens, permanent residents and visitors present on Census night (10 August 2021) • In the 2021 Census, there were 25,422,788 people in Australia and 10,852,208 households (private dwellings) ***Frequency and timeline:*** • Conducted every five years (latest data release is 2021) • Some Census data is released in phases, eg key demographic, cultural diversity and health data was released in June 2022; employment, educational qualifications and internal migration in October 2022; and more-complex data such as distance to work, socio-economic indexes for areas (SEIFA) and counts for people experiencing homelessness were released in mid-2023.	***Variables of interest:*** • General demographic data • Data on relationships within households such as family blending, family composition, household composition • Cultural diversity such as ancestry, country of birth, and language spoken at home • First Nations person and household status, and whether using Indigenous language at home • Disability and caring indicators including unpaid work and care • Income indicators • Geographical indicators • Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) ***Data linkages:*** • The Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset (ACLD) combines a 5% sample of Census data from 2006, 2011 and 2016 • It provides information on pathways for population groups of interest • It contains information on age, sex, country of birth, labour force status and other dwelling, household and family characteristics • Potential use to analyse how family structures change over time	***Strengths:*** • Population-based statistics every five years for each state, territory and local government area at the aggregate and microdata level ***Limitations:*** • Infrequent releases (every five years) • Current data 2021 is nearly three years old • ACLD only available up to 2016 • Limited data on family experiences • Relationships between all household members are not evident (only in relation to reference person) • Microdata access (via DataLab) is limited to a 5% sample for 2011 and 2016, so detailed population-based estimates are not possible • No children's perspectives

HILDA	The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey is a panel survey of Australian households that follows household members over the course of their lifetime. ***Population groups:*** • Adult population is those aged 15 years and above • Children are defined as persons aged under 15 years • Collects information on approximately 17,000 Australians every year. ***Frequency and timeline:*** • Longitudinal, conducted every year since 2001 • As of December 2023, there are 22 Waves of HILDA data • Intermittent Waves include topics of special interest, such as work-life balance, deprivation, wealth, fertility and retirement	***Variables of interest:*** • General demographic data such as age, gender, education and employment • Income and deprivation • Education • Health • Household and family relationships including changes in household and family compositions over time • Subjective variables such as attitudes towards marriage and children, parenting and paid work • Carers and nature of care relationship	***Strengths:*** • Insights on household and person dynamics over time and/or cross-sectionally • Breadth and depth of variables allows for complex variable construction and analysis • Focus on family and household formation and experiences, income and work aligns with a focus on family • Updated annually ***Limitations:*** • No children's perspectives • First Nations sample is relatively small • Limited sample of people recently migrated (including refugees) • Excludes people who are homeless, living in very remote areas and living in institutions such as hospitals and other health care • Limited categorisation of gender and sexual identity
LSAY	The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) is a survey that tracks young people as they transition from school to work. It is a nationally representative sample that collects information on education and training, employment and social development. ***Population groups:*** • Follows approx 14,000 young people in each cohort starting at age 15 (Year 9) to about 25 years of age • Around 14,000 students start out in each cohort • In the latest 2015 cohort, there were 14,530 students recruited ***Frequency and timeline:*** • Six cohorts of young people followed annually since 1995, 1998, 2003, 2006, 2009 and 2015 • The first five cohorts (Y95, Y98, Y03, Y06 and Y09 cohorts) have all completed the survey program • Data for the 2015 cohort: Wave 8 was released in 2022	***Variables of interest:*** • LSAY collects information across four major topic areas: demographics, education, employment and social • This includes variables on living arrangements at home, objective and subjective data on schooling and subjects and other attitudinal and aspiration questions • Since 2003, the first survey wave has been integrated with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), making the data on school achievement internationally comparable.	***Strengths:*** • Insights into household and family dynamics of a young person over time in Australia • Internationally comparable school achievement data • Potential to link with other administrative datasets (ACARA, NAPLAN, National Vet Provider and Higher Education Statistics Collection) ***Limitations:*** • High attrition rate • Restricted data: focusing on geographical and school indicators • Data is not current – latest data (Wave 8) young people are aged 20 to 22; for earlier waves, young people are now adults

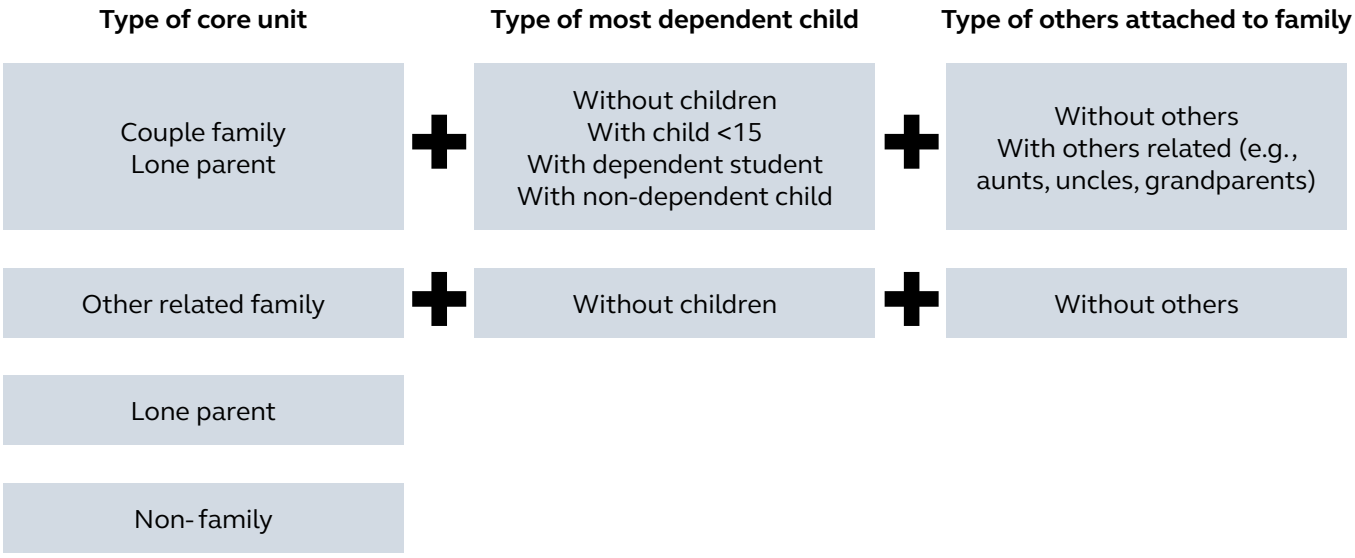
LSAC	Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) tracks the development of children and their families within Australia's social, economic and cultural environment. ***Population groups:*** • Follows approx 10,000 children in two cohorts: the B cohort ('Baby' cohort) of around 5,000 children aged 0 to 1 years and the K cohort ('Kinder' cohort) of around 5,000 children aged 4 to 5 years • Informants include the child/young person, their parents (both resident and non-resident), carers and teachers ***Frequency and timeline:*** • Commencing in 2004, data is collected from two cohorts every two years • Between-wave mailout questionnaires were sent to participating families in 2005, 2007 and 2009 • Wave 9 was postponed and switched to two online surveys due to COVID. In Wave 9, children are aged 16 to 18 years. • Wave 10 commenced in Jan 2023 in two phases, with the second phase commencing in October 2023. Data not yet released.	***Variables of interest:*** • Family and partner relationships • Parenting attitudes and behaviour • Physical and mental health and wellbeing • School achievement • Social security support payments • Income, assets and debt	***Strengths:*** • Provides insights into household, family and personal dynamics of a child through their development from a young age • Comprehensive and holistic perspective as questions are of the child, and parents, carers and teachers • Potential to link with other datasets: Medicare (Immunisation, MBS and PBS), NAPLAN, AEDC and Centrelink ***Limitations:*** • High attrition rate • Data is not current – for latest data (Wave 9) young people are aged 16 to 18; for Wave 10, young people will be between 20 and 22 years
LSIC	Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) follows the development of up to 1,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families across urban, regional and remote Australia. ***Frequency and timeline:*** • Information is collected annually from two groups of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children who were aged 6 to 24 months (B cohort) and 3½ to 5 years (K cohort) in 2008 • LSIC also follows their parents, carers and school teachers • The latest release (Wave 13, 2020), children are aged 12 to 16 years	***Variables of interest:*** • Closeness of relationships and contact with family • Family history and connection to Country and culture • Child's social and emotional wellbeing	***Strengths:*** • Design and implementation of the survey is highly sensitive to cultural issues • Provides insights into household, family and personal dynamics of a child through their development from a young age ***Limitations:*** • Non-representative sample • Difficulty to make direct comparisons with the rest of the population • Non-comparability with LSAC and other surveys • Small sample sizes • Data is not current – latest data (Wave 13 in 2020) young people are aged 12 to 16

PLIDA	Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), previously known as the Multi-Agency Data Integration Project (MADIP), is a highly comprehensive longitudinal administrative dataset for persons and families. It combines different datasets on health, education, government payments, income and taxation, employment, and population demographics (including the Census) over time. ***Frequency and timeline:*** • Data is collected from different modules for periods ranging from 2011 to 2019	***Variables of interest:*** Linked data is provided in separate files or 'modules' for example: • Core Module – demographic information (Census, Death Registrations, DOMINO Centrelink Administrative Data, Medicare Consumer Directory and Personal Income Tax data) • Geography Module – Geographic information (Census, DOMINO Centrelink Administrative Data, Medicare Consumer Directory, and Personal Income Tax data)	***Strengths:*** • Highly comprehensive administrative data for persons and families ***Limitations:*** • Data is not current – latest data is 2019 • Administrative data so does not capture family dynamics, practices or wellbeing • Limited self-reported data capturing perspectives, attitudes or feelings • Data analysis is complex and lengthy • No certainty of future updates
AEDC	The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a nationwide data collection of early childhood development by the time children commence their first year of full-time school. ***Frequency and timeline:*** • Data is collected by teachers of children in their first year of school • Record of first-time full-time student is based on the student's date of birth and is recorded as under 5 years, 5 years, 6 years and over 6 years • Commencing in 2009, the AEDC is held every three years with five collections to date	***Variables of interest:*** Teachers respond to around 100 questions that measure early childhood development and school readiness across five key areas known as domains: • Physical health and wellbeing • Social competence • Emotional maturity • Language and cognitive skills (school-based) • Communication skills and general knowledge Children are allocated a score against the domains to determine whether they are developmentally on track, at risk or vulnerable.	***Strengths:*** • Comprehensive collection of national data on children aged 5 to 6 in their first year of formal schooling • Large sample sizes ***Limitations:*** • Publicly available data is limited • Questions on families and relationships are limited • Limited to children in first year of formal schooling

Appendix B – Family type methodology

HILDA provides a detailed classification of family and household relationships based on the Standards for Statistics on the Family developed by the ABS and used in all their publications (ABS, 1995). These classifications are hierarchical and have specific definitions attached to a dependent child, dependent student and non-dependent student, and fixed distinctions between couples, lone parents, and lone persons as illustrated in Figure B.1 below (Summerfield et al., 2023: Figure 4.3).

Figure B.1 Construction of family type description in HILDA



The definitions are:

- A dependent child is aged under 15; a dependent student is aged 15 to 24, studying full-time, not working full-time, lives with their parent and does not have a child of their own; while a non-dependent child is at least 15 years of age, lives with their parent, is not a dependent student and does not have a child of their own.
- An other-related family member is not part of a couple or parent-child relationship but is related to other household members.
- A couple self-identifies as being part of a married or de facto relationship and resides in the same household.
- A lone parent is a person who does not have a partner usually resident in the household and has a parent-child relationship with a (dependent or non-dependent) child who lives with them. The lone parent may have a relationship with someone outside the household (ABS, 1995: 90).

In assigning relationships, HILDA also assumes that a couple relationship takes precedence over a parent-child relationship; the most recent generation is given precedence over an older generation; and children without parents are attached to their closest relative or a person most likely to resemble a parent-child relationship.

Justification for many of the inclusion/exclusion criteria binding the ABS (1995) decisions are centred on practical, regulatory or historical reasons. For instance, the restriction of families to members resident in the household is because survey data is collected at a household level. The age criteria of under 15 for children is based on the capacity to legally work full-time. The definition of family is centred historically around the concept of 'relatives' as distinct from care or choice relationships.

Nevertheless, there are important principles embedded within these statistical standards that allow for the extension of conventional ABS/HILDA family types to incorporate the wider range of family types identified in this report. First is recognising the distinction between households and families, so that different families may coexist within a household (ABS,1995:4). Second is the centring of families around ideas of familial and dependency relationships (ABS,1995:40). Third, and related to this, is the emphasis on parent-child relationships and child dependency that identifies, as a minimum, economic dependency based on age and student status (ABS,1995:41).

These pre-defined categories are used in combination with the relationship grid on the Household form in HILDA to map the relationship between all household members (unlike the ABS which maps relationships only to the reference person) and create the family types identified in this report.

Similar to HILDA and the ABS, a set of criteria and prioritisation is applied that assigns household members to distinct family types with the intention of making visible those groups that are often subsumed within the conventional grouping of couple or sole parent families. These are:

- A child is defined as under 18 years old and a young person between the ages of 18 and 24 years. Allocation is determined according to the HILDA relationship variable identifying a child under 15, a dependent student or a non-dependent child aged 24 years or under. It also includes people identified as lone persons, other family members and unrelated members under the age of 18.

- All parent/kin families have at least one child or young person in the relationship configuration but there may be combinations of other relationships between members living in the household.

- A step and/or blended family is identified if there exists a stepchild, stepparent, stepsibling or step grandparent relationship in the household.

- A multigenerational family is identified if there exists a grandparent or grandchild relationship between members and there is usually at least a grandparent-parent-child relationship.

- A foster family is identified if there exists a foster relationship between any household members, with the exclusion of a foster grandparent/grandchild relationship.[19]

- An 'other' kin family exists if there is any child or young person in the household without another household member identifying themselves as being a parent (including foster, step and/or blended or kin carer) to that child. This is a minimal category to include children and young people not assigned in HILDA to couple parents or sole parents.

- In assigning families, precedence is given respectively to foster families, multigenerational and then step and/or blended families taken from the sample of couple parent, sole parent or other kin relationships. This precedence is established to ensure the visibility of these less common family types.

There are a few exceptions to these priority rules which are a function of the way household members are either categorised or self-identify in HILDA. For instance, consider Susan aged 60 who is a grandparent to children all under 24 years, Tia (13), Benny (11), Barbie (14) and Tom (18). However, children Tia and Tom are natural/adopted siblings, while Benny is a stepsibling and Barbie another stepsibling to all. Within HILDA, Susan self-identifies as a sole parent (not a grandparent) and Tom self-identifies as an 'other' family member (and not a dependent or non-dependent student). Hence, even though it is plausible that this family describes both an 'other kin' and a multigenerational family, in this case Susan, Tia, Benny and Barbie are a multigenerational family and Tom a lone person.

19 HILDA does not distinguish between a step or foster grandparent/grandchild relationship, so these have been assigned as part of step and/or blended families.

Table B.1 illustrates the nature of relationships across the full enumerated sample of individuals, including children. Households that include families with children and young people account for 56% of the population, while 44% is made up of couples without children, lone persons and people living in unrelated or related households (with no children or young people). It is the 56% of the 'in scope' population that is the subject of this Families Report.

Table B.1 HILDA classifying relationships, 2022

	Sample (n)	(%)
Couple parent with at least 1 child or young person	8,018	38.7
Sole parent with at least 1 child or young person	1,338	6.4
Step and/or blended parent with at least 1 child or young person	1,947	6.8
Multigenerational parent with at least 1 child or young person	528	3.2
Foster parent with at least 1 child or young person	98	0.4
Other kin family with at least 1 child or young person (raising other children or young adults that are not part of a parent-child relationship)	91	0.2†
Couple without children	5,728	24.7
Lone person	3,587	17.3
Other unrelated or related (with no children or young adults)	397	2.3
Total	21,732	100

Weight: Cross-sectional enumerated person population weights.

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard – cautious estimate.

Appendix C – Technical details

This appendix provides additional information on HILDA to aid in the interpretation and analysis of estimates.

Inferences to the population (HILDA)

The HILDA survey uses a complex sample design, with the original Wave 1 sample based on regional stratification, geographic ordering, household clustering, and unequal weighting (Summerfield et al., 2023: 109). The 'in scope' population excludes those in very remote areas, non-private dwellings (for example, homeless or institutionalised individuals), non-resident visitors (Summerfield et al., 2023: 143), and is limited in representing immigrants arriving after 2011.

To address the complex sample design and account for attrition, various weights are available for quantitative analysis: cross-sectional, longitudinal, and replicate weights, applicable at enumerated, responding household and responding person levels (Summerfield et al., 2023:100).

This report uses cross-sectional enumerated person population weights for estimates relating to the age and gender of the household members in the family. Cross-sectional household population weights are applied to household variables (income, wealth and child care). The remaining estimates are based on cross-sectional responding person population weights (that exclude members aged under 15 years). The jackknife weighting method, based on these weights and their associated replicate weights, is used to calculate standard errors and p-values (Summerfield et al., 2023:109).

Wave 22 (2022) includes data on 9,003 responding households with 21,732 members. Of these, 15,954 were interviewed (aged 15 and over), and 4,557 children under 15 were not interviewed. Using ABS enumerated population benchmarks, this represents 25,508,591 people, comprising 20,709,090 individuals aged 15 and over and 4,799,417 children under 15 (Summerfield et al., 2023). The weighted population of responding persons is 20,791,740.

Statistical tests

Although data from the Household form provides information on household and family formations for all members (including those under 15 years), data on other topics is collected through personal and self-completion questionnaires. Varying response rates affect the reliability of estimates.

Standard errors measure the reliability of sample estimates to the population. Following ABS and HILDA conventions, estimates are marked with a † if the relative standard error (RSE) is between 25% and 50%, and with a †† if the RSE is above 50%, indicating caution or unreliability. Unmarked estimates have an RSE less than 25%, implying a 95% confidence interval of approximately +/- 50% (Wilkins et al., 2024, p. 6).

Statistical tests of difference in proportions that are **not** significant at the 10% level are marked with an *. Similarly, statistical tests of difference in means that are **not** significant at the 10% level are marked with an *.

Economic terms

Household disposable income refers to the combined income of all household members from wages and salaries (including fringe benefits), earnings from self-employment, investment and other income, and social security payments of every person over 15 years in the household, with a deduction for personal income tax.

Equivalised household disposable income is calculated by dividing household income by an equivalence scale to take account of needs (and economies of scale) for different sized households. We use the modified OECD equivalence scale that divides household income by 1 for the first household member, 0.5 for each additional household member aged 15 years and over, plus 0.3 for each child aged under 15 years. The resulting equivalised household disposable income estimate is assumed to be the same for each household member on the assumption that all share the same standard of living.

The poverty rate is the percentage of people with equivalised household incomes less than 50% or 60% of the median of equivalised household incomes in the population (often referred to as poverty lines). The use of 50 and 60% provides an insight into the sensitivity of estimates to shifts in the poverty line.

Quintiles are derived by ranking the weighted sample of all adults and children by their equivalised incomes (that is, the income distribution) and splitting them into five equal groups. The first quintile identifies incomes that are in the lowest 20% of the income distribution, while the fifth quintile identifies incomes that are in the highest 20% of the distribution. The same approach is applied to wealth.

Household net wealth refers to the total financial and non-financial assets, minus the total debts of all household members. Financial assets consist of liquid assets measured from bank accounts, superannuation, cash investments, equity investments, trust funds and the cash value of life insurance policies. Non-financial assets consist of the home, other real estate property, business assets, collectibles and vehicles. Debt components include home debt, other property debt, business debt, and other forms of debt such as credit card debt, HECS debt, car loans, personal loans and hire purchase agreements.

Equivalised household net wealth is calculated by dividing household net wealth by the OECD equivalence scale, which is also used for income. There is no consensus on whether household wealth should be equivalised, given that it can be used to finance current and future consumption. However, we equivalise it to ensure that the needs of children and young people are considered in assessing households' capacity to access wealth for current consumption, especially given the challenges in predicting future needs and changing family dynamics.

Census Population Counts Population numbers used in Table 2.1 have been derived using different relationship variables from the Census TableBuilder (including family composition, family blending, relationships between families, and the person's relationship to the reference person in the household). Groups are not mutually exclusive and overlap:

- Multigenerational families also include grandparent families (available for 2016 and 2021 only).
- The count for foster families does not include the enumerated persons living with them. It only includes the count of children who have been identified as "foster children under 15 years", "dependent foster student" and "non-dependent foster children aged 0-24 years" to the household reference person.
- The count for other kin families only includes the count of children who have been identified as "other related child under 15", "unrelated child under 15" as well as "other related persons aged 0-24". It does not include the enumerated persons living with them.
- Other related persons include non-dependent grandchild, brother/sister, father/mother, grandfather/grandmother, cousin, uncle/aunt, nephew/niece and other related individual not elsewhere classified and dependent student grandchild (in 2016 data only). Unrelated persons include group household member and unrelated individual living in family household.

Appendix D – Data tables

The following data tables depict data presented in figures and infographics.

Table D.1 Proportion of individuals in each family type, 2022/HILDA family types, 2022

Family type	Sample (n)	(%)
Couple parent family	8,018	69.4
Sole parent family	1,338	11.4
Step and/or blended family	1,947	12.3
Multigenerational family	528	5.8
Foster family	98	0.7
Other kin family (raising other children or young people who are not part of a parent-child relationship)	91	0.4†
Total	12,020	100.00

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate.

Table D.2 Age of children in families (%)

Years	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended parent family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	Total
0–4	72.1	7.0	13.6	6.5	0.8†	100
5–12	66.4	12.7	13.7	6.0	1.1†	100
13–17	63.4	14.3	15.6	4.2	2.6	100
18–24	62.5	20.7	11.3	5.1	0.4†	100
All	66.2	13.5	13.6	5.6	1.2	100

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate.

Table D.3 Number of children in families (%)

Number of children	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended parent family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
1	28.3	46.4	18.8	34.1	37.3	29.7
2	43.3	34.7	31.3	33.7	9.8††	39.9
3 or more	28.4	19.0	49.9	32.3	53.0	30.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

Table D.4 Gender of adults in families (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended parent family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Women	50.2	82.1	54.8	59.9	58.4	54.3
Men	49.8	17.9	45.2	40.1	41.6	45.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table D.5 Cultural background (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended parent family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	Total
Immigrant from main English speaking country	78.9	5.5	7.3	7.7††	0.7†	100
Immigrant from country other than main English speaking countries	77.5	7.7	7.2	7.4†	0.2††	100
First Nations Australian born	34.2	23.4	27.2	9.1†	6.1†	100
Australian born non-First Nations	69.2	13.3	11.8	4.6	1.2	100

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate; †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

Table D.6 Distribution of income (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Quintile 1 (lowest 20%)	10.2	29.2	21.2	20.1	40.0	14.6
Quintile 2	19.3	32.1	31.8	23.7	37.8†	22.7
Quintile 3	22.3	21.1	19.6	23.7	5.8††	21.8
Quintile 4	25.8	12.6	14.8	19.6†	11.5†	22.4
Quintile 5 (highest 20%)	22.4	5.0	12.7	12.9†	4.8††	18.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate; †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

Table D.7 Wealth sources and values (mean $ value)[20]

Mean ($)	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Home (net)	286,161	155,544	111,682	191,373	237,846	243,846
Other property (net)	103,695	32,000	50,020	99,120	123,697	88,896
Financial assets	315,925	150,697	169,311	169,485	156,880	268,871
Other wealth (net)	14,558	6,826	10,308	11,968	9,796	12,953
Total net wealth	720,340	345,068	341,321	471,946	528,219	614,566

Note: Estimates are based on equivalised (OECD) household net wealth.

Table D.8 Distribution of net wealth (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Quintile 1 (lowest 20%)	12.1	42.2	43.1	25.2	46.6	20.5
Quintile 2	21.6	23.5	24.5	22.7†	24.4†	22.3
Quintile 3	24.8	16.2	16.3	20.4	4.2††	22.3
Quintile 4	22.2	10.3	9.0	23.2†	5.9††	19.1
Quintile 5 (highest 20%)	19.3	7.8	7.1	8.6†	19.0†	15.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate; †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

Table D.9 Education of adults with parenting responsibilities (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Bachelor and above	51.4	32.4	17.0	30.2†	31.0	44.7
Adv Diploma, Diploma	10.0	12.8	13.8	11.7†	4.1††	10.7
Cert III or IV	20.7	25.1	36.6	24.0	32.3	23.1
Year 12	11.9	15.2	14.2	18.9†	11.2†	12.8
Year 11 and below	6.0	14.6	18.5	15.3†	21.3†	8.7

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate; †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

20 Home value (net) consists of the value of the home minus the home debt. Other property (net) consists of the value of other property minus the debt attached to it. Other wealth (net) consists of other non-financial asset classes (collectibles and vehicles) minus other debt classes (such as credit card debt, HECS debt, car loans, personal loans, hire purchase agreements). Refer to Appendix C for definitions of economic terms.

Table D.10 Financial stress items (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Could not pay electricity, gas or telephone bills on time	8.5	19.5	17.5	10.4†	16.7†	10.9
Could not pay the mortgage or rent on time	5.8	9.8	8.3	7.9†	11.4†	6.7
Pawned or sold something	3.7	13.2	9.7	7.1†	10.6†	5.8
Went without meals	1.8	9.0	6.2	6.8†	5.4†	3.4
Unable to heat home	2.1	6.3	4.7	5.1††	3.8†	3.1
Asked for financial help from friends or family	6.8	19.0	16.7	14.3	20.1	9.9
Asked for help from welfare/ community organisations	2.3	9.7	5.9	8.5	11.7	4.0

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate; †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

Table D.11 Financial stress index (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
1 or more indicators	15.4	34.5	30.4	23.3	29.5	19.9
2 or more indicators	8.1	21.7	17.7	13.7	21.4†	11.2
3 or more indicators	3.9	12.8	9.0	8.7†	14.2†	5.9

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate.

Table D.12 Capacity to raise funds in an emergency (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/ or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Could easily raise emergency funds	59.9	34.8	38.7	40.4	27.4	53.1
Could raise emergency funds, but it would involve some sacrifices	21.7	24.0	24.6	24.2	31.3	22.6
Would have to do something drastic to raise emergency funds	9.0	17.7	15.2	11.4	14.6†	10.9
Couldn't raise emergency funds	9.4	23.5	21.5	24.0	26.6†	13.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate; †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

Table D.13 Financial prosperity (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Prosperous/very comfortable	24.7	12.4	14.4	15.7†	18.0†	21.5
Reasonably comfortable	54.7	41.8	52.7	46.1	50.7	52.4
Just getting along	19.1	38.8	28.2	33.4	26.5†	23.3
Poor/very poor	1.5	7.1†	4.7	4.9†	4.8††	2.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100.0

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate; †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

Table D.14 Perception of share of parenting responsibilities (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/ or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Women						
I do a bit more/much more than my fair share	61.6	75.2	70.8	62.9	68.3	64.5
I do my fair share	36.9	23.8	27.0	31.3	28.3†	33.7
I do a bit less/much less than my fair share	1.5†	0.9†	2.3†	5.9††	3.4††	1.8†
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Men						
I do a bit more/much more than my fair share	10.5	53.0	20.2	31.5	18.2††	13.6
I do my fair share	68.6	41.3	57.7	55.2	61.0	66.1
I do a bit less/much less than my fair share	20.9	5.6	22.1	13.4†	20.8††	20.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate; †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

Table D.15 Perception of share of work around the house (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/ or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All Families
Women						
I do a bit more/much more than my fair share	49.4	57.7	54.0	39.5	54.7	54.8
I do my fair share	37.8	32.2	34.2	40.2	27.7	35.1
I do a bit less/much less than my fair share	12.8	10.1	11.8	20.3	17.7†	10.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Men						
I do a bit more/much more than my fair share	17.3	26.4	20.8	29.5	26.8†	19.1
I do my fair share	56.4	47.6	51.4	48.8	45.0†	54.7
I do a bit less/much less than my fair share	26.3	26.0	27.9	21.8	28.2†	26.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate.

Table D.16 Labour market participation of working-age adults in families (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/ or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All Families
Women						
Employed full-time	39.1	43.9	42.7	35.9	24.0†	39.8
Employed part-time	39.3	32.5	30.6	25.3	21.8†	36.3
Unemployed	0.9†	1.8†	1.5†	1.5†	2.2††	1.2
Not in labour force	20.7	21.8	25.2	37.4	52.0	22.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Men						
Employed full-time	84.1	61.1	81.5	73.8	58.4	82.2
Employed part-time	7.7	10.2†	7.0	8.8†	15.9††	7.8
Unemployed	1.3	0.9††	3.7†	1.6††	7.3††	1.6
Not in labour force	6.9	27.8†	7.9	15.9†	18.4†	8.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
All						
Employed full-time	61.6	47.0	60.0	51.0	37.8	59.2
Employed part-time	23.5	28.5	20.1	18.7	19.5†	23.3
Unemployed	1.1	1.6†	2.4†	1.5†	4.2††	1.3
Not in labour force	13.8	22.9	17.5	28.8	38.5	16.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate; †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

Table D.17 Work and study commitments of young people (18 to 24 years) (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Full-time/part-time work only	43.6	51.8	38.8	33.7†	69.3††	44.3
Full-time/part-time study only	6.2†	3.2†	4.2††	9.7††	0.0	5.5
Work and study	41.0	26.5	39.5	45.3†	0.0	38.0
Not in work or study	9.2	18.5	17.5	11.3†	30.8†	12.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate, †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

Note: Cautious estimates – differences in these proportions are not statistically significant at $p<0.10$.

Table D.18 Proportion of individuals with a limiting long-term health condition (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family
Limiting long-term health condition	9.6	19.6	17.1	21.2	25.6†
Non-limiting long-term health condition	7.5	7.2	9.3	12.7	8.3†
No long-term health condition	82.8	73.2	73.5	66.1	66.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate.

Table D.19 Long-term health conditions, impairment and disability (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/ or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Lives with someone with a long-term health condition, impairment or disability[21]	12.1	20.4	17.6	22.3	29.3	14.4
Does not live with someone with a long-term health condition, impairment or disability	87.9	79.6	82.4	77.7	70.7	85.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Has caring responsibilities in the household[22]	3.4	6.3	8.1	11.3†	6.8†	4.7
Does not have caring responsibilities in the household	96.6	93.7	91.9	88.7	93.2	95.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate.

21 'Long-term health condition, impairment or disability' includes sight problems not corrected by glasses or contact lenses; hearing problems; speech problems; blackouts, fits or loss of consciousness; difficulty learning or understanding things; limited use of arms or fingers; limited use of feet or legs; a nervous or emotional condition which requires treatment; frequent headaches or migraine; any other condition that restricts physical activity or physical work (eg back problems); any disfigurement or deformity; any mental illness which requires help or supervision; shortness of breath or difficulty breathing; chronic or recurring pain; long-term effects as a result of a head injury, stroke or other brain damage; a long-term condition or ailment which is still restrictive even though it is being treated or medication is being taken for it; or any other long-term condition such as arthritis, asthma, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, dementia, etc.

22 A person with caring responsibilities is someone who lives with anyone in the household who has a long-term health condition, who is elderly or who has a disability, and for whom they care or help on an ongoing basis with self-care (eg bathing, eating or getting dressed), mobility and communication in their own language.

Table D.20 Housing tenure by family type (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/ or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Home owner	16.4	12.5	3.6†	17.8†	25.1††	14.7
Home mortgagee	63.8	34.2	49.0	51.3	33.4†	57.6
Private renter	17.3	44.3	37.4	25.3†	36.9†	23.4
Public renter	0.8†	5.9	7.3	3.7††	3.4††	2.3
Rent free	1.7	3.0††	2.6†	1.9††	1.2†	2.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate; †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

Table D.21 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Quintile 1 (lowest 20%)	12.6	20.8	24.8	19.9	22.1†	15.4
Quintile 2	15.6	21.3	19.0	21.3	31.1†	17.1
Quintile 3	21.8	24.0	21.6	14.9†	18.9†	21.6
Quintile 4	24.6	18.6	24.9	26.7†	7.8††	23.8
Quintile 5 (highest 20%)	25.5	15.3	9.9	17.2†	20.1†	22.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate; †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

Table D.22 Care for children outside the family

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Not yet of school age	71.6	65.1	59.0	66.0	45.6††	68.7
Of school age	46.4	41.8	46.1	39.8	28.1†	45.3
All children under 14	53.4	46.1	47.9	46.2	30.2†	51.4

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate; †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

Note: Total population estimates are for all households.

Note: Includes formal education and care services, as well as informal arrangements with family, friends and neighbours.

Table D.23 Caring for and educating children not yet at school (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/ or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Informal care	50.6	42.4	34.9	74.0	49.3††	49.8
Formal care	77.3	79.3	64.2	78.1	100.0	75.9

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate; †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

Note: Total population estimates are for all households.

Note: Percentages do not add to 100% because some families use both formal and informal care.

Table D.24 Caring for and educating children at school (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/ or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All families
Informal care	49.1	62.8	49.8	70.4	53.2††	51.5
Formal care	31.7	45.2	19.9	38.4†	58.8††	31.6

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate; †† above 50% relative standard error – unreliable estimate.

Note: Total population estimates are for all households.

Note: Percentages do not add to 100% because some families use both formal and informal care.

Table D.25 Frequency of social contact with friends and or relatives living outside the household (%)

	Couple parent family	Sole parent family	Step and/or blended family	Multigenerational family	Foster and other kin family	All Families
Every day or several times a week	17.3	23.8	16.8	13.7	31.1	18.0
About once a week	29.2	28.9	22.8	35.1	22.3	28.7
Two or three times a month	21.6	18.7	21.8	16.5†	17.7	21.0
Monthly or less often	31.9	28.5	38.7	34.7	29.0	32.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: † 25% to 50% relative standard error – cautious estimate.

“Family is my life. I love my kids, I’ll do anything for them and I’d like to think they’d do anything for me. I don’t know where I’d be if I didn’t have my family. Being a sole parent changed who I was and how I work as well. I had to make all the decisions when it was just me and be responsible for those decisions as well, which made me a bit more assertive.”

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