



The longitudinal study of Australian children

Study update

JUNE 2009



Once again, thank you for being part of **Growing Up in Australia**. Your continued support is very much appreciated. The information you supply, after it is made anonymous, is now being used by around 300 approved researchers and a wide range of work is being undertaken to look at issues related to children's health, wellbeing and school progress.

Recent news

The third wave of home visits has been completed and some of the information families gave us about their lives is presented in this *Study Update*. We were able to interview 86% of the families who took part in the first wave, which is an excellent result by international standards.

We will be holding our second conference on *Growing Up in Australia* at the end of the year in Melbourne. This will be a great opportunity for researchers and users to share the many insights being gained from the study.

The fourth wave of the study will also begin later this year, although most interviews will occur in 2010. Once again the success of the study depends on your help. We look forward to seeing you next time!

Contact

Each participant in the study is irreplaceable, so you are a vital part of Australia's only long-term national study of childhood. Please take the time to contact us if you move house or your contact details change:

Call us for free on: 1800 005 508 or email us at: <growingup@abs.gov.au>

Parental Leave in Australia study

In 2005, our first mailout survey included questions about the use of parental leave around the time of the birth of children in the younger cohort. Your responses showed us—among other things—that:

- around one-third of Australian working mothers used some paid maternity leave;
- more than half combined different forms of paid and unpaid leave;
- the average duration of leave for mothers was 40 weeks; and
- close to half of those who took leave reported that they had returned to work earlier than they would have liked because they needed the money.

Were you one of the "100"?

In 2007, interviews were conducted by Chris Diamond, Fiona McDonald and John Murray with 100 mothers chosen at random from those who had indicated their willingness to be involved in a follow-up to this study. **If you were one of the 100, the Parental Leave in Australia research team would like to seek your permission to include the (anonymous) text of your interview in a data archive.** The purpose of the archive is to make the richness of the data available to qualified and approved researchers to help them study social issues and provide advice to policy-makers. All interviews have been rigorously checked to remove any potentially identifying information—hence, any material archived will be completely anonymous.

If you were one of the 100, the researchers would really appreciate you contacting Dr Peter Walters, University of Queensland, email: <p.walters@uq.edu.au>, phone: (07) 3364 9457, to let him know if you agree to your information being included. If you wish, you will be sent a summary of findings from the interview research and entered into a draw for a \$100 gift voucher.

Work and family

- As might be expected, more mothers returned to work as children got older. Three-quarters of mothers with children aged 8–9 years were working in paid employment compared with 63% of mothers with children aged 4–5 years. Working part-time was common among mothers with children from both age groups, with close to half engaged in part-time work. Approximately 2% of mothers were looking for work.



- In families where the study child lived with both parents, most fathers (93%) were engaged in full-time employment, and a further 3% were in part-time work. Where parents no longer lived together, around 78% of fathers were working full-time.
- Of those parents in paid work, 84% of mothers and fathers said they were able to work flexible hours, and 84% of mothers and 78% of fathers agreed or strongly agreed that having both work and family responsibilities gave their life more variety. However, 62% of fathers and 41% of mothers also said that because of work responsibilities they have missed out on home or family activities in which they would have liked to have taken part.

TV and electronic games

- As the children get older, many more of them play with electronic games. For example, about 65% of 7–8 year olds had an electronic games system such as a Nintendo® DS or PlayStation®, compared with 23% of 3–4 year olds.
- Most parents (75%) of 7–8 year olds were happy with the amount of time their child spent watching television, videos and DVDs or playing computer games, but 21% would like their child to spend less time with these forms of entertainment.
- Almost two-thirds (62%) of parents with 3–4 year olds had rules about how many hours of television their child could watch. Over half (54%) of the parents found it fairly easy to manage their child's television watching and 36% found it very easy, but 10% found it difficult or very difficult.

Parenting

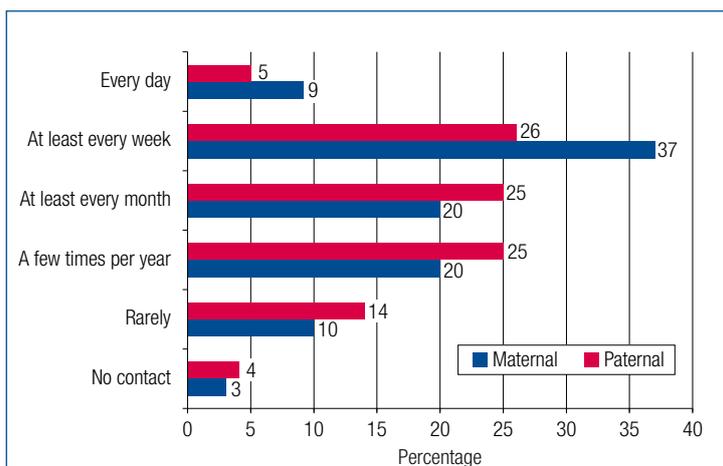
- Many of the parents in the study felt positive about their parenting skills, with 36% of mothers and 43% of fathers describing themselves as a “better than average parent”, and a further 26% of mothers and 25% of fathers describing themselves as “a very good parent”. In addition, 92% of mothers and 80% of fathers said they often or always had “warm, close times together” with their child.
- Parents seemed well supported by their community, with 75% of mothers and 63% of fathers saying they had someone to confide in either most or all of the time, and 77% of mothers and 55% of fathers in the study saying they had contact with their friends every week or every day.

Except for “TV and electronic games”, all figures are based on preliminary data from Wave 3 and include both cohorts, unless otherwise specified. Data for mothers and children are from information provided by the primary interviewee, 97% of whom were mothers. Data on fathers are mainly from the questionnaire

completed by the study child's other resident parent (about 60% of whom responded), or from the telephone interview conducted with parents who no longer live with the child's other parent. The “TV and electronic games” data are from the 2007 between-waves survey and responses were obtained from about 70% of families.

Grandparents

- Grandparents continue to play an important role in the lives of the children in the study. As graph 1 shows, of children living with both parents, two-thirds (66%) saw their maternal grandparents at least once a month, and 57% saw their paternal grandparents at least once a month.
- Three-quarters (74%) of mothers say their own parents supported them sometimes or more often in raising their children.



Graph 1: Children's contact with grandparents for children living with both parents

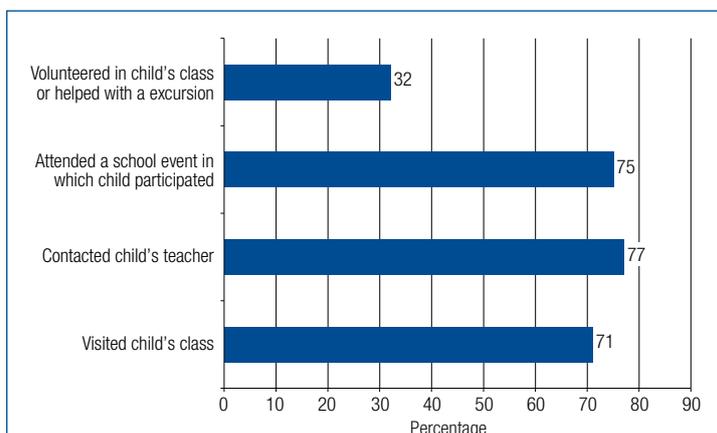


Teachers and schooling

- Teachers play an important role in the study, adding to the depth of information we have about how the children are faring. We have had a wonderful response from teachers in Wave 3, with over 80% of questionnaires returned.
- The teachers reported that 88% of the children aged 4–5 years very often or always enjoyed school/preschool/child care. The 8–9 year olds also enjoyed school, with 84% of their teachers saying that the children were often or very often eager to learn new things. Three-quarters (74%) of the teachers reported that the children often or very often paid good attention in class.
- Many parents have contact with their child's school (see Graph 2), with around three-quarters having attended a school event, contacted their child's teacher or visited their child's classroom in the past year.

Schooling for 8–9 year olds

- Of the 8–9 year old children in the study, 22% were in Year 4, 73% were in Year 3 and 4% were in Year 2. The majority of mothers seemed happy with their child's school, with 91% saying they were either satisfied or very satisfied with it. Only 3% said they were dissatisfied.
- Nearly all children appeared to be enjoying school, with 90% of mothers saying that their children looked forward to going to school most days.
- Most parents had high hopes for their children's education: two-thirds of mothers said that they thought their children would go to university. Nearly all mothers (98%) expected their children to finish high school.

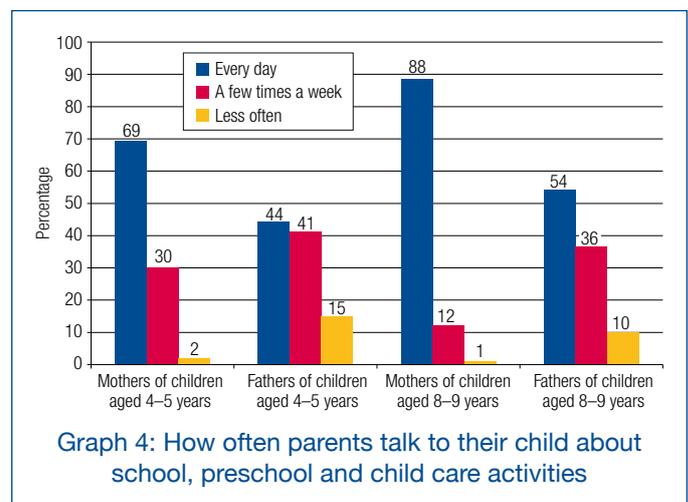
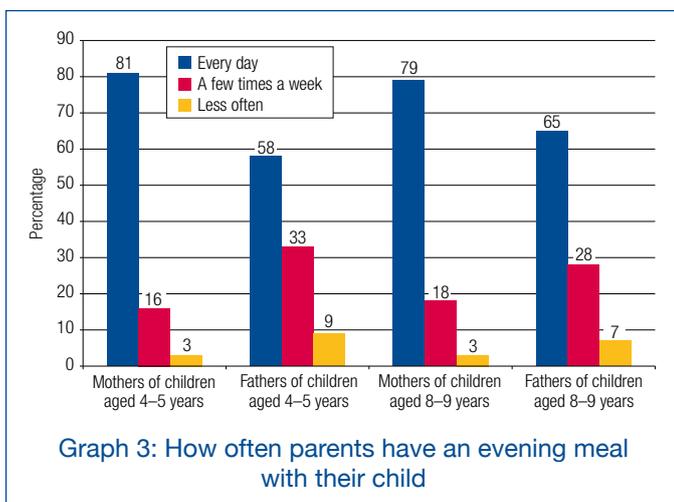


Graph 2: Parents' involvement with their child's education

Activities with children

- Reading to children was a common activity among parents of 4–5 year olds. Over half (54%) of children were read to by their parents almost every day and another quarter (26%) were read to on 3–5 days a week. Fewer parents read to their 8–9 year old children, with 12% of children being read to nearly every day and 18% read to 3–5 days a week.
- Children are often involved in everyday activities, such as cooking and caring for pets. Around 40% of parents said that their children helped with these activities nearly every day and 30% had children who helped on 3–5 days per week.
- About four-fifths of mothers had their evening meal with their 4–5 and 8–9 year old children every day (see Graph 3). This was less common among fathers (58% of fathers of 4–5 year olds and 65% of fathers of 8–9 year olds).

- For children aged 8–9 years, 28% of mothers and 7% of fathers helped their child with homework every day, and a further 37% of mothers and 40% of fathers helped with homework a few times a week.
- Many mothers talked with their children about how school was going: 69% of mothers with 4–5 year olds and 88% of mothers with 8–9 year olds talked about this with their child every day (see Graph 4). While fewer fathers did this every day (58% of fathers of 4–5 year olds and 65% of fathers of 8–9 year olds), the great majority talked about school with their children at least a few times a week.



Children's health

- Nine in ten parents (89%) reported that their child was in excellent or very good health.
- Most parents with 4–5 year old children reported that their child's sleeping habits/patterns were not a problem (70%), as did 80% of parents with 8–9 year olds.
- Children's bedtimes became slightly less regular as they got older. Half (49%) of the parents with 4–5 year olds said that their children always went to bed at a regular time compared to 45% of those with 8–9 year olds.
- By the time children were aged 8–9 years, 30% had at some time been diagnosed with asthma by a doctor, compared with 20% of 4–5 year olds. However, only half (52%) of diagnosed 8–9 year olds had taken medication for asthma in the previous 12 months, compared with two-thirds (67%) of diagnosed 4–5 year olds.
- Skin and food allergies are two of the most common ongoing conditions experienced by the study children. Eczema affected 14% of children aged 4–5 years and 11% of children aged 8–9 years. Seven per cent of 4–5 year olds and 6% of 8–9 year olds were allergic to certain foods.
- The majority of parents (87%) believed that their children were of normal weight. When the children's measurements were taken, 71% were normal weight, 23% were overweight or obese, and 6% were underweight.



The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

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Advice provided by a consortium of leading researchers and academics

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 Please let us know what you think!*