



3 Children, youth and families

3.1 Introduction

Children and young people in Australia are growing up in an environment of rapid social and economic change. The impact this is having on their development, health and wellbeing has received growing attention over the last 5 years. Further, there is an extensive body of evidence that points to the long-term benefits that can be gained by investing in a child's early years. Childhood, particularly early childhood, has emerged as a key priority for governments and non-government organisations.

This chapter provides a contemporary profile of Australia's children, youth and families in a context of change. It captures the dynamic and diverse nature of childhood, adolescence and family life. Section 3.2 begins with a socio-demographic overview of children and youth from the 1980s, and presents population projections to 2026. Section 3.3 describes the characteristics of Australian families over the last decade. Section 3.4 presents information on trends in adoptions. Sections 3.5 and 3.6 examine the transitions in a young person's life: from early childhood to child care, preschool, school, higher education and finally to employment. Section 3.7 considers some of the risks associated with growing up and their outcomes – abuse, victimisation and homelessness. As child neglect is regarded as one of the strongest predictors of later youth offending, this section considers juvenile offending in a welfare context. The final section, 3.8, outlines some new national data collections that are being developed to provide a better basis for future policy and planning.

Broad policy framework for children and youth

In September 2001, the Australian Government established a Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing, to develop a whole-of-government approach to the early years of life. A major responsibility of the task force was to lead the development of a National Agenda for Early Childhood. The task force brings together policy makers across Australian Government departments to coordinate efforts to improve outcomes for children. In 2003, it published a consultation paper on the National Agenda (Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development 2003) which was used to create a draft policy framework. This focuses on four key action areas: healthy young families, early learning and care, supporting families and parenting, and creating child-friendly communities. The National Agenda is expected to be released by the end of 2005, after final consultations with state and territory governments.

Central to the National Agenda for Early Childhood is the capacity to be able to regularly monitor how Australia's children are faring, and how certain population groups, such as Indigenous children and children from rural and regional Australia, are faring by comparison (ACCAP 2004). Contributing to this process, several states and territories have commissioned reports monitoring the progress of children within their

jurisdiction (Centre for Epidemiology and Research 2002; NSW and Queensland Commissions for Children and Young People 2004; Tennant et al. 2003).

Most states and territories have also developed early childhood and parenting policies. In 2002, New South Wales introduced the Families First policy which is an early intervention and prevention strategy aimed at the parents of children aged 0–8 years. It has areas in common with the National Agenda as its focus is on children's health and wellbeing and community support for families, but it also includes the development of parenting skills (Families First 2003). Since 2002, Victoria has had a Children First policy, which focuses on developing services for children and families, such as children's centres, improved funding of preschools, helping children with special needs, protecting children from abuse, and improving neonatal and postnatal care and services (Bracks 2002). In 2004 the ACT launched its Children's Plan, which caters for children up to 12 years of age. The plan takes elements from all of the above-mentioned policies. For example, it looks at neonatal and postnatal services, access to education, protection of children, community services and participation of children in activities (ACT DHCS 2004). Western Australia has developed many policies in relation to children, but its most comprehensive policy is the Early Years Framework, which is centred around children aged 0–8 years and their families. This policy aims to create a cohesive approach to child and family services: community support for children and families, prevention and early intervention for children's health, and 'safety-net' type services (WA DCD 2004).

In addition to their policies focused on children, the Australian Government and all states and territories have created policies for youth. Nationally, the Australian Government has published *Living Choices*, a comprehensive guide to policies and programs related to the needs of young people (FaCS 2003). In terms of education and employment, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs has been instrumental in the advancement of youth issues. In 2002, representatives from the Australian Government and state and territory governments signed a declaration called *Stepping Forward: Improving Pathways for All Young People* that committed all jurisdictions to 'developing practical ways to increase the social, educational and employment outcomes of Australia's young people' (MCEETYA 2002a). This has established a common direction in developing transition opportunities for young people, particularly those most at risk.

At the state and territory level, New South Wales has created a youth policy independently of this declaration called *Working Together – Working for Young People*, which has very similar aims to the declaration (Office of Children and Young People 2002). The Northern Territory has a policy framework called *Building a Better Future for Young Territorians*, which is aimed at children and young people aged 12–25 years. It is similar to that proposed by New South Wales in that it focuses on providing opportunities for participation. However, it is also concerned with improving the health and wellbeing of youth (NT Office of Youth Affairs 2004). South Australia has recently released its policy framework, *Youth Action Plan*, which covers all of the above mentioned areas in its key goals (Office for Youth 2004). The Australian Capital Territory has produced the *ACT Young People's Plan 2004–08*, which emphasises participation and successful transitions (OCYFS 2004). In Victoria, the youth policy framework, *Respect: The Government's Vision for Young People*, aims to provide a common approach to future developments in youth policy and programs (DVC 2002).

Tasmania has released a report called *State of our Youth* (Tasmanian Office of Youth Affairs 2002), which outlines Tasmania's programs and policies for young people and addresses a similar range of issues. Both South Australia and Queensland have an Office for Youth, and Western Australia, and Office for Children and Youth, which help to develop and coordinate policies, programs and services for young people.

3.2 Australia's children and youth

This section describes Australia's children and youth population, including its size and composition, regional distribution, and cultural diversity. It provides a context for exploring many issues influencing the wellbeing of children and youth. Understanding the size and composition of this population group contributes to good policy decisions about the services required by children and young people, including schools, child care and health and welfare services. In addition, parents' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics also have an impact on the health and wellbeing of children. The family context of Australia's children and young people is discussed in the next section.

Changing demographic profile

There are a number of ways to define children and youth, depending on either the particular data collections or legal requirements. Most commonly, children are persons aged 0–14 years and youth are those aged 15–24 years. While all children aged under 15 years are regarded as dependent on their parents for support, wellbeing and development, the ABS extends the definition of 'dependent children' to young people aged 15–24 years who are full-time students living at home with a parent in the household, and who do not have a partner or a child of their own. Non-dependent children include young people aged 15–24 years who live at home with their natural, step, adopted, foster or blended family and who are not in full-time education.

In most Australian jurisdictions only young people aged 15 years or over are permitted to work or leave school, although in some jurisdictions the legal minimum leaving age is higher than 15 years. Eighteen is the age at which young people legally attain adulthood and are allowed to vote. For many young people it also marks the end of formal schooling and the beginning of the transition to further studies, employment and independent living. Consequently many statistical collections use 18 years as a cut-off point between adolescence and adulthood. The data presented in this chapter use a variety of these definitions, depending on the subject matter under discussion and constraints imposed by the data source.

In June 2004, there were approximately 4 million children aged 0–14 years and 2.8 million young people aged 15–24 years living in Australia. This represented 20% and 14% of the total population respectively (ABS 2004a). When combined, the child and youth population aged 0–24 years account for 6.8 million people or one-third of the Australian population (Table 3.1).

Past and future trends

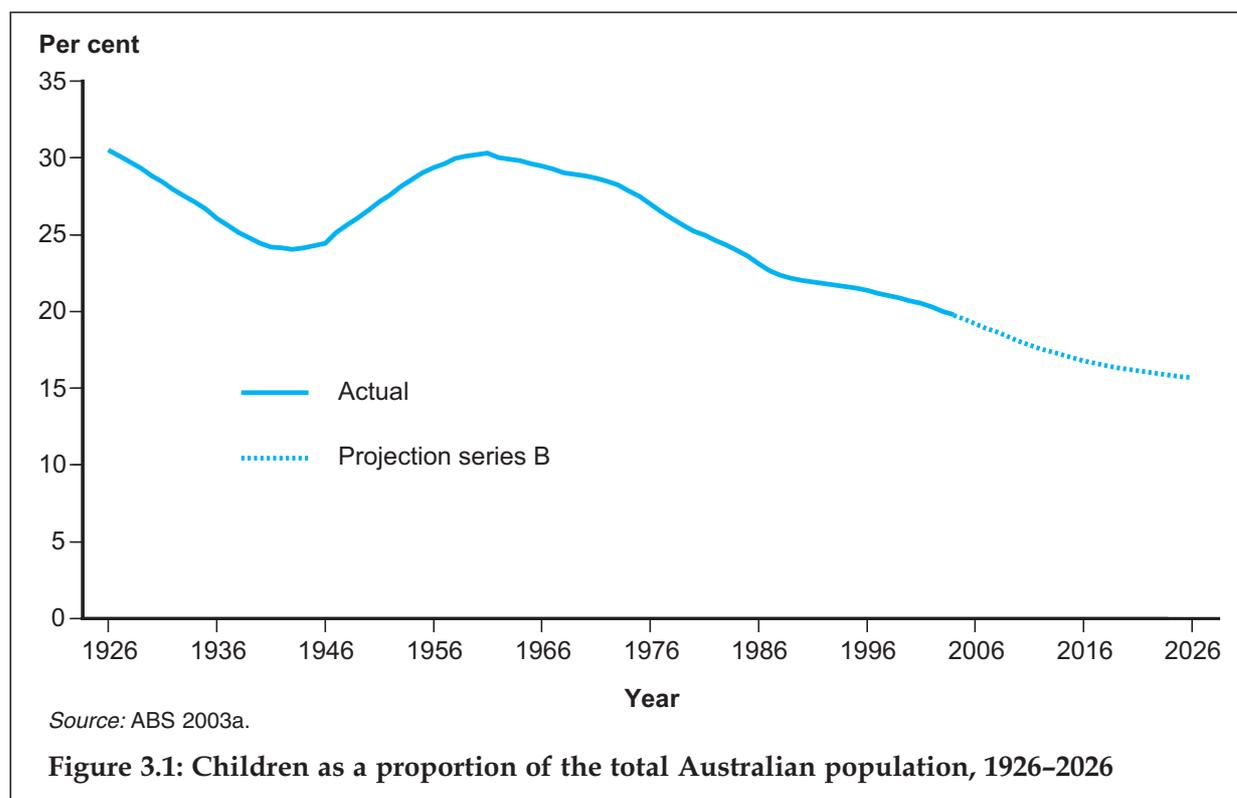
The proportion of children in the population has changed in response to changing fertility patterns. During the early 1920s in Australia, the total fertility rate (TFR) was 3.1 births per woman. The TFR fell to low levels during the Great Depression of the 1930s, reaching its lowest point of 2.1 births per woman in 1934. The TFR rose rapidly

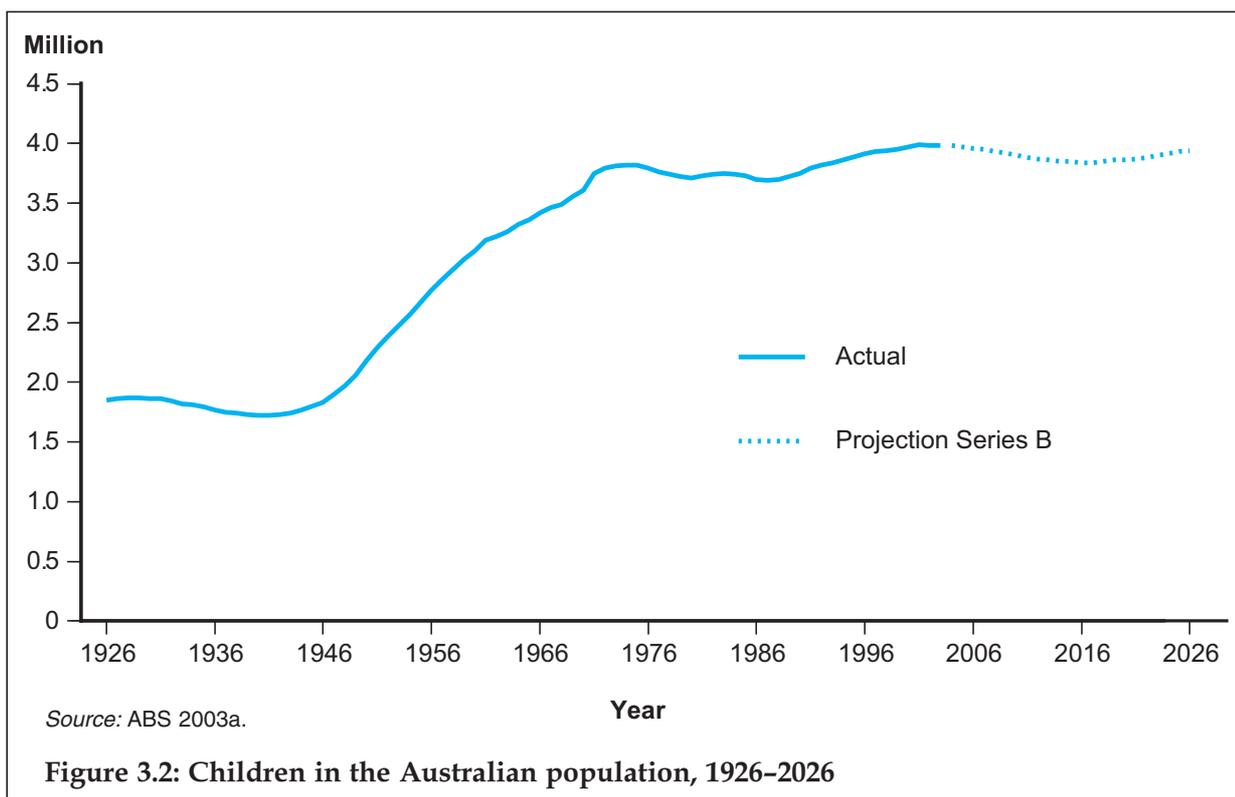
following World War II, reaching a peak of 3.5 births per woman at the height of the baby boom in 1961. Since then, Australian fertility rates have declined for a variety of reasons, including the wider acceptance and use of oral contraceptives, delayed age of child-bearing and increasing proportion of women remaining childless (ABS 2004b). Over the last 6 years the TFR has stabilised and was 1.75 births per woman in 2003.

As a result of these trends in fertility, the proportion of children aged under 15 years in the population fell from the mid-1920s until World War II and rose during the baby-boom years. From a peak of 30% in 1961, the proportion fell to 20% in 2004, well below the previous low point of 24% in 1943 (Figure 3.1). The most recent ABS population projections indicate that if the TFR fell to 1.6 births per woman, the proportion of children in the total population would fall to 16% in 2026 (ABS 2003a). The decrease is mainly caused by the ageing of the population as large cohorts of baby boomers move into older age groups and survive longer than their forebears.

It is important to recognise that while their proportion has been declining since the early 1960s, the number of children increased rapidly until the mid-1970s, remained steady until the 1990s and then began to increase gradually once again (Figure 3.2). The number of children in 2026 is projected to be about 3.9 million, much the same as in 2004.

The relative proportion of children in the population has important implications for planning and the distribution of resources. The resources allocated to children and families may account for a smaller proportion of government spending on services in the future. For example, as the proportion of young people in the population declines, education costs as a share of gross domestic product may fall. A range of social welfare payments including family assistance, parenting allowances and unemployment benefits will account for a smaller proportion of overall government expenditure (SCRCSSP 2005).





Geographical distribution of children and youth

In 2004, one-third of Australian children lived in New South Wales, almost a quarter in Victoria and almost one-fifth in Queensland (Table 3.1). While only 1% of children lived in the Northern Territory, they accounted for more than a quarter of the total population of the Northern Territory itself. This is partly explained by the younger age profile of Indigenous people, who make up a large proportion of the population of the Northern Territory.

Table 3.1: Distribution of children and young people across the states and territories, June 2004

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia ^(a)
Number									
0–14 years	1,326,389	959,572	797,906	399,636	285,832	97,102	63,187	50,560	3,980,951
15–24 years	912,714	687,237	550,951	285,846	206,059	64,570	52,148	30,527	2,790,406
Total population	6,731,295	4,972,779	3,882,037	1,982,204	1,534,250	482,128	324,021	199,913	20,111,297
Proportion of state or territory population (%)									
0–14 years	19.7	19.3	20.6	20.2	18.6	20.1	19.5	25.3	..
15–24 years	13.6	13.8	14.2	14.4	13.4	13.4	16.1	15.3	..
Proportion of Australian population (%)									
0–14 years	33.3	24.1	20.0	10.0	7.2	2.4	1.6	1.3	100.0
15–24 years	32.7	24.6	19.7	10.2	7.4	2.3	1.9	1.1	100.0

(a) Includes Other Territories comprising Jervis Bay Territory, Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

Source: ABS 2004a.

In 2003, 64% of children lived in major cities, 22% in inner regional areas and 11% in outer regional areas (Table 3.2). Children living in remote or very remote areas accounted for approximately 3% of the child population. In comparison, a slightly higher proportion of young people aged 15–24 years lived in major cities (69%), and slightly lower in other areas. Compared to other jurisdictions, the Northern Territory had the highest proportion of children and young people living in very remote areas (30% for both cohorts). Of all children living in very remote areas, the vast majority lived in the Northern Territory (31%), Queensland (29%) and Western Australia (27%). The same was true of young people living in very remote areas—34% lived in the Northern Territory, 27% in Queensland and 26% in Western Australia.

Table 3.2: Distribution of children and young people across remoteness areas, June 2003 (per cent)

Remoteness category	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
Children aged 0–14 years									
Major cities	69.4	70.9	49.9	66.8	68.5	..	99.8	..	63.5
Inner regional	21.9	23.4	26.8	13.6	13.9	62.1	0.2	..	22.2
Outer regional	7.8	5.6	18.7	10.8	12.9	35.6	..	49.1	11.2
Remote	0.7	0.1	2.8	5.6	3.6	1.8	..	21.2	1.9
Very remote	0.2	..	1.8	3.2	1.1	0.5	..	29.7	1.2
Young people aged 15–24 years									
Major cities	74.1	76.1	56.1	74.4	75.4	..	98.8	..	69.1
Inner regional	19.4	19.7	23.6	11.1	11.2	68.1	0.2	..	19.4
Outer regional	5.9	4.1	16.8	8.2	9.9	30.1	..	51.5	9.1
Remote	0.5	0.1	2.1	3.8	2.6	1.3	..	18.8	1.4
Very remote	0.1	..	1.4	2.5	0.9	0.4	..	29.6	1.0

Source: AIHW, derived from ABS Statistical Local Area population estimates.

Indigenous children and young people

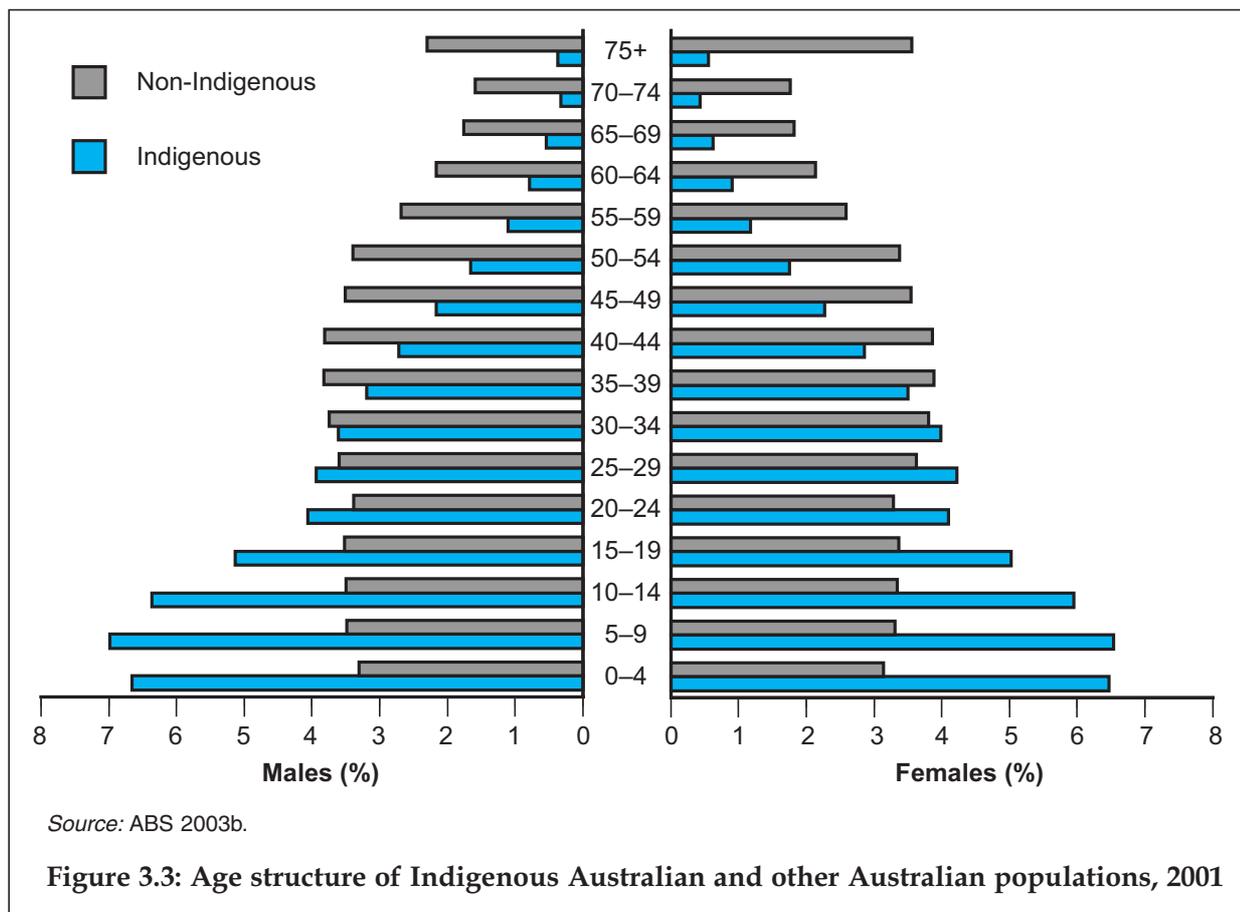
In 2001, Indigenous children made up 4.5% of all children while Indigenous young people made up 3.2% of all young people (ABS 2003b). The Indigenous population has a much younger age structure than other Australians (Figure 3.3). In June 2001 there were 179,000 Indigenous children aged 0–14 years, and 84,000 Indigenous young people aged 15–24 years. Children made up 39% of Indigenous Australians, compared with 20% of other Australians. Similarly, young people made up 18% of the Indigenous population and 14% of other Australians. This reflects both the higher birth rate among the Indigenous population, and higher levels of mortality at younger ages.

Cultural and linguistic diversity

With almost one-quarter of the population born overseas, Australia is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. The proportions of children and young people born overseas are somewhat lower than the total population, at 6% and 16% respectively in 2003 (ABS 2004c). However, children born in Australia to overseas-born parents are not included in these figures.

In 2003, of the 227,000 children born overseas, the largest groups were born in New Zealand (19%) and England (11%). Of those born in non-English-speaking countries, the largest groups were from the Philippines and India (4% each), China (3%), and South Korea, Indonesia, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam (2% each).

In all, 430,000 young people were born overseas. Their birthplaces were somewhat more diverse, although New Zealand and England were again the most common countries of birth among this age group (13% and 8% respectively). The impact of overseas students living in Australia long-term can be seen in the other large groups, most of which are non-English-speaking: China and Vietnam (5% each), and the Philippines, Hong Kong (SAR of China), Malaysia, Indonesia and South Africa (all with 4%).



3.3 Australian families

Family formation and dissolution

With changing social attitudes towards marriage and fertility choices, Australian families have changed markedly over the last 30 years (ABS 2003c). Children today grow up in a wider variety of family types. Fewer Australians are entering a registered marriage and those who do are marrying at an older age.

In 2003, the highest registered marriage rates were in the 25-29 year age group (Table 3.3). Between 1997 and 2003 there was a 28% decline in marriage rates for those aged 24 years

and under. Over the same period, there was an increase in marriage rates among older age groups, particularly in the 30–34 year age group (with an increase of almost 14%). Reflecting these trends, the median age at first marriage increased during this period, from 27.8 to 29.2 years for males and from 25.9 to 27.3 years for females. On average, males are about 2 years older than females when they first marry.

Divorce rates increased only marginally over the 1997–2003 period, from 12.5 to 13.1 per 1,000 married people (Table 3.3). In 1991 the rate was 11.6 per 1,000 married males and 11.5 per 1,000 married females (ABS 2004d). (See Table 2.33 for age-specific divorce rates for 1983 to 2003.)

Table 3.3: Indicators of family formation and dissolution, 1997 and 2003

	Males		Females	
	1997	2003	1997	2003
Age-specific first marriage rates^(a)				
19 years and under ^(b)	1.0	0.8	5.0	3.8
20–24 years	26.7	19.2	44.7	34.0
25–29 years	48.9	46.4	47.7	49.2
30–34 years	29.5	33.5	23.1	28.0
35–39 years	15.7	17.5	11.5	13.5
40–44 years	9.4	10.3	7.3	7.9
45–49 years	7.3	7.4	5.8	5.9
50 years and over	3.4	3.5	1.9	2.0
Median age at first marriage	27.8	29.2	25.9	27.3
Divorce rate^(c)	12.5	13.1	12.5	13.1

(a) Per 1,000 never married male or female population of the appropriate ages, at 30 June for each year shown.

(b) Per 1,000 never married male or female population aged 15–19 years, at 30 June for each year shown.

(c) Per 1,000 married males or females respectively, at 30 June for each year shown. Rates in 2003 are for 2001 data.

Sources: ABS 1998; ABS 2004e; ABS 2005a.

The proportion of marriages that are de facto has slowly increased and the 2001 Census showed that 12% of people living in couples were in a de facto relationship (including same-sex couples), up from 7% in 1991 (see Table 2.31). Similarly, more recent data from the ABS Family Characteristics Survey showed that 12% of all couples with children aged 0–17 years were in a de facto marriage in 2003 (ABS 2004f).

Family types

The ABS categorises Australian families into two broad groups: couple families, which include intact, step and blended families; and one-parent families. In 2003, couples in both step (56%) and blended families (39%) were more likely than those in intact families (8%) to be in a de facto marriage (ABS 2004f). Table 3.4 shows the distribution of these family types in Australia during 1992 and 2003.

Between 1992 and 2003 the number of families with children aged 0–17 years increased by 5.5%. Both the number and proportion of intact couple families declined over this period. Against this, the number of both step and blended couple families and one-parent families increased slightly. However, step and blended families made up about

the same proportion of all families over this period (6% in 1992 and 7% in 2003), while the proportion of one-parent families increased from 17% to 22%. Lone mother families were the most common type of one-parent families and consequently accounted for most of this increase.

Table 3.4: Types of families with children aged 0–17 years, 1992 and 2003

Family structure	1992				2003			
	Families		Children		Families		Children	
	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent
Couple families								
Intact	1,815.2	76.3	3,529.3	77.9	1,775.5	70.7	3,333.8	71.8
Step	84.3	3.5	125.1	2.8	98.6	3.9	158.4	3.4
Blended	68.1	2.9	200.3	4.4	78.1	3.1	224.4	4.8
Total ^(a)	1,974.7	83.0	3,863.1	85.3	1,967.1	78.4	3,738.2	80.5
One-parent families								
Lone mother	349.6	14.7	582.0	12.9	466.4	18.6	786.4	16.9
Lone father	53.4	2.2	83.2	1.8	76.1	3.0	117.5	2.5
Total	403.0	16.9	665.2	14.7	542.6	21.6	903.9	19.5
Total families with children	2,377.8	100.0	4,528.3	100.0	2,509.6	100.0	4,642.1	100.0

(a) Includes 'other' couple families which are not classified as intact, step or blended, for example, grandparent couple families or families with only foster children.

Source: ABS 2004f.

Between 1992 and 2003 the number of children aged 0–17 years living in families increased by 2.5%. Paralleling the decline in the number of intact couple families, the number of children living in intact couple families fell by 6%. At the same time, the number of children living in all other family types increased, with the most notable increase being children in one-parent families (36%). As a result of these changes, the proportion of children living in intact couple families declined from 78% to 72%, while the proportion living in one-parent families increased from 15% to 20%. It is worth noting, however, that more than seven out of ten children lived in intact couple families in 2003.

The relationship between family type and a child's wellbeing is not a simple one. Many factors contribute to a child's experience, including the quality of the parent-child relationship, parenting style and monitoring, parental care and family discord (De Vaus & Gray 2003; Wise 2003). Studies suggest that children undergoing transitional change from one kind of family to another sometimes encounter difficulties adjusting to these changes (Sawyer et al. 2000; Silburn et al. 1996; Vimpani et al. 2002). Difficulties arise from children having to adjust to new parent-child relationships, parental stressors such as changed socioeconomic status, different parenting styles and discipline, disruption to family cohesion, sibling relationships and parental mental health issues (Deater-Deckard & Dunn 1999, cited in Wise 2003). Thus, while a child's welfare is not directly dependent on family type, certain factors which affect welfare are more likely to occur in particular family types.

Young people living at home

The ABS Family Characteristics Survey also sheds light on changing living arrangements for young people living at home (Table 3.5). The number of young people aged 15 years or over living in the family home has been growing, in some instances substantially. Between 1992 and 2003, the number of dependent students aged 15–24 years living at home increased by 46% to just over 1 million. The increase was greater among those living in couple families (51%) than those in one-parent families (30%). Similar trends can be seen among non-dependent young people, with increases of around 50% over the 10-year period.

Table 3.5: Living arrangements of children and young people, 1992 and 2003

(Age (years))	Children and young people in couple families			Children and young people in one-parent families			All children and young people in families		
	1992 ('000)	2003 ('000)	Change (%)	1992 ('000)	2003 ('000)	Change (%)	1992 ('000)	2003 ('000)	Change (%)
Dependent									
0–14	3,806.2	3,137.8	–17.6	630.6	751.7	19.2	4,436.8	3,889.5	–12.3
15–24	563.9	848.8	50.5	144.7	188.3	30.1	708.6	1,037.1	46.4
Non-dependent									
15–24	422.0	627.7	48.7	100.0	152.0	52.0	522.0	779.7	49.4
Total	4,961.6	4,963.3	0.0	1,002.4	1,281.4	27.8	5,964.1	6,244.7	4.7

Source: ABS 2004f:24.

Non-resident parents

One of the consequences of family breakdown, whether through a de facto partnership ending or through separation and divorce, is that the children involved no longer live with both their natural parents. In 2003, there were 493,200 non-resident parents of children aged 0–17 years (Table 3.6). Most non-resident parents were fathers (82%). Further, almost half of non-resident parents had formed new relationships, with 47% living in a couple family. However, non-resident parents were less likely to work full-time (64% compared with the national average of 72%), and more likely to be unemployed (8% compared with the national average of 6%) (ABS 2004f).

Grandparent families and kinship carers

Since 2000 both the community and the government have become more aware of the needs of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. Grandparents take on the role of primary carers of their grandchildren when the parents are no longer able to fulfil their parental responsibilities. The reasons for this include parental substance abuse, the death of one or both parents, a parent's mental or physical illness, or the child's need for a more protective environment (COTA National Seniors Partnership 2003). Since grandparents are part of a larger group of kinship carers, the issues they face have close links with the development of kinship care policy. Kinship care is ongoing care provided by a relative, close family friend or member of the community, and is often seen as a preferred option to foster care since it can maintain stability in a child's life (see 'Care and protection orders and out-of-home care', later in this chapter).

National data about grandparent families are contained in the 2003 ABS Family Characteristics Survey. In 2003 there were more than 22,500 grandparent families caring for more than 31,100 children aged 17 years or under (Table 3.7). In most of these families the youngest child was aged between 5 and 11 years, and grandparents were often caring for more than one child. In two-thirds of grandparent families, neither grandparent was employed.

Table 3.6: Non-resident parents of children aged 0–17 years, 2003

	Number ('000)	Per cent
Family type of non-resident parent		
Couple family with children	156.2	31.7
Couple family without children	73.8	15.0
One-parent family	70.5	14.3
Other family ^(a)	9.6	1.9
<i>Total family members^(b)</i>	<i>310.0</i>	<i>62.9</i>
<i>Total non-family members</i>	<i>183.2</i>	<i>37.1</i>
Age of non-resident parent		
15–24 years	21.0	4.3
25–44 years	337.8	68.5
45 years and over	134.3	27.2
Labour force status		
Employed—full-time	315.3	63.9
Employed—part-time	55.8	11.3
Unemployed	37.4	7.6
Not in the labour force	84.8	17.2
Total non-resident parents of children	493.2	100.0

(a) Refers to families where there are no partners or children (e.g. adult siblings living together without a parent).

(b) Non-family members include persons in lone person and group households, and unrelated individuals in family households.

Source: ABS 2004f.

Table 3.7: Grandparent families caring for children aged 0–17 years, 2003

	Grandparent families		Children in grandparent families	
	Number ('000)	%	Number ('000)	%
Age of youngest child (years)				
0–4	3.3	14.8	6.8	21.9
5–11	8.4	37.4	11.5	36.8
12–14	8.0	35.8	9.8	31.5
15–17	2.7	12.1	3.0	9.7
<i>Total</i>	<i>22.5</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>31.1</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Labour force status				
One or both grandparents employed	7.6	33.8	10.1	32.5
No grandparent employed	14.9	66.2	21.0	67.5

Source: ABS 2004f.

These statistics lend weight to the findings of the report into grandparents raising children, commissioned by the Australian Government through the Council on Ageing in each state and territory. The report studied the experiences of 499 grandparents raising 548 children. It found that grandparents caring for grandchildren face many hardships, including upheaval, and additional financial, legal and social costs, often with little extra support (COTA National Seniors Partnership 2003:6-7). Some become isolated, overwhelmed and at risk of 'granny burn-out'. Changes in policy have made various forms of family support, such as the Family Tax Benefit (see Box 3.1) and Child Care Support (see Box 3.5), accessible to grandparents raising their grandchildren. Many payments are not income- or assets-tested for eligible grandparent carers. However, as guardianship arrangements tend to be informal, grandparents may be left to bear the extra costs without the support that would typically be available to foster carers (COTA National Seniors Partnership 2003:8). Of particular concern is the unknown number of Indigenous kinship carers who are also in this situation. In June 2004 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) asked the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Council to report on the nature and extent of the needs of grandparent carers and what measures could be taken to address them. A report, with recommendations, will be considered by the council for forwarding to COAG in 2005.

Families and employment patterns

One of the most significant changes to family life over the last four decades has been the increased participation of women in the labour force (Gilding 1997). The majority of Australians now view child-rearing and generating family income as joint responsibilities (Bittman & Pixley 1997). Increased participation rates in employment reflect not only an increasing reliance on dual incomes to sustain a desired lifestyle but also the value women place on having a career. Whatever the reasons for the change, one consequence has been a heightened demand for child care places (see Section 3.5).

Table 3.8 presents data on the employment status of parents in families where the youngest child was aged 0-14 years. Between 1993 and 2003, the proportion of couple families where both parents were employed increased from 51% to 59%, making this the most common arrangement for couple families. The traditional male bread-winner model was the next most common family type for couple families, making up 32% of couple families, although the proportion has fallen from 36% in 1993. Families who are potentially at most risk (i.e. those where neither parent is employed) made up a small and declining proportion of couple families (6% in 2003, down from 11% in 1993). However, approximately 200,000 children aged 0-14 years lived in these families in 2003 (ABS 2004f:26).

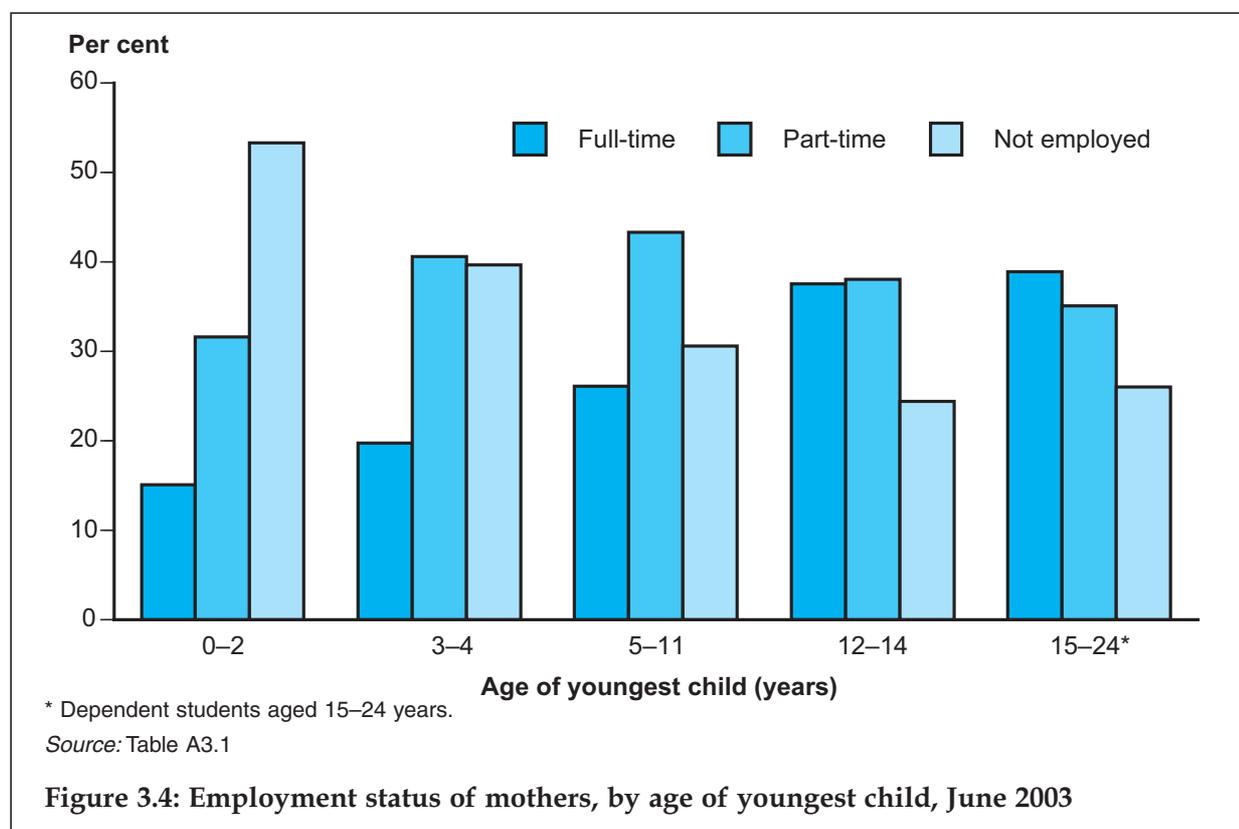
The picture is somewhat different for one-parent families with the youngest child aged under 15 years, 90% of whom were lone-mother families in 2003. Although the proportion of mothers who were employed increased from 39% to 46% between 1993 and 2003, the majority of lone mothers were not employed in either year (61% and 55% respectively were either unemployed or not in the labour force). Lone fathers were more likely to be employed than lone mothers, although the proportion declined between 1993 and 2003 from 61% to 57%. Over 400,000 children lived in one-parent families where the parent was not employed in 2003 (ABS 2004f:26).

Table 3.8: Employment status of parents with the youngest child aged 0–14 years, 1993 and 2003

	1993		2003	
	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent
Couple families				
Both parents employed	856.2	50.6	1,017.8	58.6
Mother only employed	47.0	2.8	57.4	3.3
Father only employed	606.6	35.9	558.6	32.1
Neither parent employed	182.3	10.8	104.4	6.0
Total	1,692	100.0	1,738.2	100.0
One-parent families				
<i>Lone-mother families</i>				
Mother employed	122.2	39.3	185.9	45.5
Mother not employed	189.0	60.7	222.8	54.5
<i>Lone-father families</i>				
Father employed	20.9	60.9	33.1	57.2
Father not employed	13.4	39.1	24.8	42.8
Total	345.5	100.0	466.6	100.0

Sources: ABS 1993; ABS 2004f.

The age of the youngest child in a family affects the working patterns of parents, particularly mothers. The majority of women whose youngest child was aged 0–2 years were not employed in 2003 (53%), while only 15% worked full-time (Figure 3.4).



For women with the youngest child aged 3–4 years, 41% worked part-time, 40% were not employed, and 20% worked full-time. The proportion of women who worked full-time increased steadily as the age of the youngest child increased, but levelled out once high school age was reached. The opposite pattern was apparent for the proportion of women not employed. Even when the youngest child was of high school age or older, about a quarter of women were not employed. Part-time work stands out as the most common form of employment for most women up until the youngest child reached early high school age.

Family income

Children living in families without economic security are at a greater risk of poor outcomes in both the short and longer term. The immediate impact of economic hardship is evident. Living in a low-income family can affect a child's nutrition, access to medical care, the safety of their environment, the level of stress in the home, and the quality and stability of their care (Shore 1997). In addition, research confirms that for a number of health and social outcomes, including socio-emotional functioning, mental health, physical health, educational attainment and later employment prospects, children in the lowest income groups are at a higher risk of disadvantage than other children (for overview, see Bradbury 2003; Mayer 2002). Evidence of the association between low socioeconomic status (which encompasses education and occupation as well as low income) and less favourable outcomes for children is documented in *A Picture of Australia's Children* (AIHW 2005a).

Income distribution is generally analysed using equivalised income. This enables a meaningful comparison of the incomes of households adjusted for size and age composition (Table 3.9). In 2002–03, 22% of Australia's children aged 0–14 years (854,000) lived in households with incomes in the lowest quintile. The proportion of children in one-parent households with incomes in the lowest quintile was more than twice that of children in couple households (43% compared with 17%). Therefore, compared to children living in couple families, children living in one-parent families have fewer resources available to them. The financial resources available to a household can have a significant impact on levels of household financial stress and consequently the wellbeing and future prospects of the children who live within them (AIHW 2005a).

Families experiencing financial stress

One-parent families and jobless families are most at risk of experiencing financial stress because of their low incomes. However, financial stress is not limited to these family types. Some couple families with one or more employed adults also experience some degree of financial hardship.

The ABS 2002 General Social Survey collected information on a range of indicators of financial stress which adds a new dimension to understanding the economic wellbeing of families (Table 3.10). Almost two-thirds of those living in jobless one-parent households, one-third of employed one-parent households, and 12% of couple families with at least one adult employed reported that they could not raise \$2,000 in a week. However, seeking financial help from friends or family was not uncommon, with 32% of jobless one-parent households, 22% of jobless couple households, and 23% of employed one-parent households reporting that they had sought such help in the last 12 months.

Table 3.9: Equivalised income quintiles for households with children aged 0–14 years, 2002–03 (per cent)

	Equivalised disposable income quintile (per cent distribution)						Total ('000)
	Lowest	Second	Third	Fourth	Highest	Total	
Households							
Couple, one-family household	16.6	22.4	26.1	20.6	14.2	100.0	1,698,539
One-parent, one-family household	38.3	29.4	21.5	8.0	2.8*	100.0	434,600
Multiple family household	11.5**	33.0	21.0*	23.8	10.7*	100.0	63,035
<i>Total households with dependants</i>	<i>20.8</i>	<i>24.1</i>	<i>25.1</i>	<i>18.2</i>	<i>11.9</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>2,196,174</i>
Children							
Couple, one-family household	17.3	24.6	26.1	19.4	12.6	100.0	3,091,655
One-parent, one-family household	43.2	29.6	18.2	6.9	2.2*	100.0	702,937
Multiple family household	16.3**	33.9*	19.4*	22.3*	8.2*	100.0	99,213
<i>Total children aged 0–14 years</i>	<i>21.9</i>	<i>25.7</i>	<i>24.5</i>	<i>17.2</i>	<i>10.6</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>3,893,806</i>

Note: Multiple family households contain two or more families. The vast majority of children in Australia (97.5%) live in one-family households.

Source: ABS data available on request, 2002–03 Survey of Income and Housing Costs.

Table 3.10: Selected household financial stress indicators, 2002

Financial stress indicators	Jobless households with children under 15				Households with children under 15 and with one or more adults employed			
	One-parent family		Couple family		One-parent family		Couple family	
	No. ('000)	(%)	No. ('000)	(%)	No. ('000)	(%)	No. ('000)	(%)
Could not raise \$2,000 within a week	121.8	64.3	51.8	52.2	70.9	33.0	194.0	12.1
Could not pay electricity, gas or telephone bill on time	96.6	51.0	38.3	38.6	67.3	31.1	236.5	14.8
Could not pay mortgage or rent on time	34.6	18.3	13.0	13.1	31.8	14.8	87.4	5.5
Could not pay for car registration or insurance on time	31.1	16.4	21.0	21.2	27.2	12.7	110.1	6.9
Could not make minimum payment on credit card	14.0	7.4	9.8	9.9	18.6	8.7	74.6	4.7
Pawned or sold something for quick cash	38.7	20.5	14.8	14.9	12.9	6.0	32.8	2.1
Went without meals	28.9	15.3	6.7	6.7	10.3	4.8	13.8	0.9
Was unable to heat home	11.9	6.3	2.7	2.8	5.2	2.4	7.9	0.5
Sought financial help from families/friends	60.2	31.8	21.3	21.5	50.0	23.3	139.2	8.7
Sought assistance from welfare organisation	43.6	23.0	12.6	15.7	11.3	5.3	24.6	1.5
Total households in group ('000)	189.4	..	99.3	..	214.8	..	1,598.6	..

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Source: ABS General Social Survey 2002 confidentialised unit record file.

Paying bills on time posed a difficulty for many families. For example, about half of jobless one-parent households and one-third of employed one-parent households had been unable to pay electricity, gas or telephone bills on time in the last 12 months. Further, 15% of couple families with at least one adult employed were also unable to pay these bills on time. The ability to make minimum credit card repayments and to heat the home were less common sources of stress, with less than 10% of all family types having difficulty meeting these, although again one-parent jobless families had the most difficulty (see Chapter 2, Economic resources and security, in Section 2.3 Autonomy and participation).

Assistance for families

The Australian Government provides support for families in the forms of family assistance payments and income support payments (Box 3.1). Family assistance is designed to help middle- and low-income families with the costs of raising children, including recognising the indirect costs of reduced workforce participation by some families with young children. Higher assistance is targeted to families with low incomes. Income support in the form of Parenting Payment is available for sole parents with no income or a low income and for parents whose partner has no income or is on a low income.

There have been recent changes in support for new mothers. The Maternity Payment has replaced the Maternity Allowance and the Baby Bonus. This payment recognises the legal relationship between a mother and her newborn baby, the role of the mother in the birth of the baby and the extra costs associated with birth or adoption. The Maternity Payment is made as a lump sum and is not income-tested. It is intended to benefit the primary carer, who is most commonly the natural mother but who could also be an adoptive parent or a long-term foster carer.

Family assistance is available through the Family Tax Benefit (FTB) Part A and Part B. FTB Part A helps families with the cost of raising dependent children while FTB Part B provides extra assistance to families with only one main income earner, including sole parents.

Other assistance is available for families in special circumstances: a multiple birth allowance if three or more children are born at the same time, available until the children turn 6 years old; the large family supplement for four or more children, receiving Family Tax Benefit Part A; and the double orphan pension.

Research has shown that between 1997 and 2004 the average income of low-income families (those with a disposable income in the lowest 20%) rose by 18% (or \$87) in real terms (Macnamara et al. 2004). The rise was mainly attributable to increases in family payments in the 2000 tax package and 2004 federal budget. Without this assistance, the gap between low-income families and average families would have widened. The study revealed that benefits from the increase in family payments were not evenly distributed across different family types – low-income families with a child aged under 5 years, and large families, did better than those with dependent children aged over 16 years (who missed out on both the increases in family payments). As a result, many of the latter families suffered reduced living standards. For example, a low-income family with two older children received up to \$73 less per week in income support than a similar family with two preschoolers, despite the fact that it is more costly to raise older children.

Box 3.1: Australian Government family payments and tax relief

Family Tax Benefit Part A is paid to low- and middle- income families with dependent children under 21 years and/or dependent full-time students aged 21–24 years. It is paid for each dependent child in the family. The payment is subject to an assets test. The maximum rate is payable below a lower income threshold. For income above this threshold the payment rate reduces by 20 cents for every dollar until the base rate is reached. Payment continues at the base rate until the higher income threshold is reached. The payment rate is then reduced by 30 cents for every dollar until the rate is nil. Maximum rate of payment varies with the age of the child, with the payments increasing for teenagers aged 13–15 years.

Family Tax Benefit Part B provides additional assistance to single-income families, including single parents, with a child under 16 years or a child aged 16–18 years studying full-time. Higher rates are payable where families have a child under 5 years. The payment is not means-tested for single parents. For couple families, it is means-tested on the income of the partner with the lower income (secondary income).

Parenting Payment is an income support payment for low-income people with responsibility for caring for a child under 16 years of age. The two main streams are the Parenting Payment (single) paid to single parents with no income or a low income and the Parenting Payment (partnered) paid to the primary carer in a couple family where both parents have no income or a low income. The Parenting Payment is subject to income and assets tests.

Maternity Payment is a lump sum payment (currently \$3,079) to the primary carer for each new baby, adopted child or child in long-term foster care in the family, born on or after 1 July 2004.

Maternity Immunisation Allowance is a payment for children aged 18–24 months who are fully immunised or have an approved exemption from immunisation. It is currently \$213.60 per child.

Double Orphan Pension is paid for children whose parents are both dead, or one parent is dead and the other cannot care for the child, and for refugee children under certain circumstances.

Sources: FaCS 2004a; FAO 2005.

Trends in family assistance

The vast majority of FTB recipients receive assistance through fortnightly payments from Centrelink: 2 million people (91% of recipients) in 2002–03. Around 82,000 received Centrelink lump sum payments and another 109,000 were paid lump sums through the tax system as a tax offset (FaCS 2004a).

At June 2004, just over 1.8 million families with 3.5 million children received the FTB Part A as a fortnightly payment, a slight increase from 2001 (Table 3.11). In all years from 2001 to 2004, more than half of these families were paid more than the base rate – 57% in 2004.

Just over 1.2 million families with 2.3 million children received FTB Part B at June 2004. Almost half of those receiving the payment were sole parents – 49% in 2004. The number of sole parents receiving the maximum payment increased by 6% across the period. Around 209,000 families received the Maternity Allowance and 204,000 the Maternity Immunisation Allowance in 2004, much the same numbers as in previous years.

Between 2001 and 2004, over 600,000 people each year received the Parenting Payment – 626,000 in 2004. However, there were clear trends within the two groups receiving the payment. While the number of people receiving the Parenting Payment (partnered) declined by 14% over the 4-year period, the number receiving the Parenting Payment (single) increased by 8% (FaCS 2004a). This increase partly reflects growth in the number of single-parent families with children aged under 16 years in the general population.

Table 3.11: Recipients of family assistance, 30 June 2001 to 30 June 2004 ('000)

Type of payment ^(a)	Recipients				Children			
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2001	2002	2003	2004
Family Tax Benefit Part A								
Maximum rate (with income support payment)	509.8	485.9	475.8	473.4	962.2	914.8	894.7	886.7
Maximum rate (without income support payment)	127.2	134.4	139.4	142.4	243.8	253.7	258.7	258.9
Broken rate	406.1	431.6	427.5	423.5	874.7	927.7	919.7	912.8
Base rate	725.4	708.7	701.3	721.4	1,333.0	1,298.5	1,286.5	1,332.1
Below base rate	31.2	34.2	39.3	47.0	68.5	76.5	86.4	106.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,799.7</i>	<i>1,794.8</i>	<i>1,783.3</i>	<i>1,807.7</i>	<i>3,482.2</i>	<i>3,471.2</i>	<i>3,446.0</i>	<i>3,496.8</i>
Family Tax Benefit Part B								
Maximum rate (for sole parents)	559.4	570.7	583.5	595.0	951.2	965.2	986.4	1,004.7
Maximum rate (for couples)	290.0	300.4	322.4	298.8	622.7	638.8	685.7	637.1
Broken rate (for couples)	331.7	328.0	317.7	311.8	702.3	689.3	666.0	655.1
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,181.1</i>	<i>1,199.1</i>	<i>1,223.6</i>	<i>1,205.6</i>	<i>2,276.2</i>	<i>2,293.3</i>	<i>2,338.1</i>	<i>2,296.9</i>
Maternity Allowance^(b)	210.1	212.2	207.0	209.2	214.4	216.1	210.5	211.6
Maternity Immunisation Allowance^(b)	203.9	206.8	203.9	203.7	207.5	210.6	206.3	205.4
Double Orphan Pension	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.5
Parenting Payment (single)^(c)	416.7	427.8	437.0	449.3	..	..	..	..
Parenting Payment (partnered)^(c)	205.4	191.6	181.4	177.2	..	..	..	..

(a) The data on FTB recipients relate to those who claim fortnightly payments.

(b) The number assisted is the number who received a payment during the financial year.

(c) The number assisted is the number who received a payment in June (not at 30 June).

Sources: FaCS 2001; FaCS 2004a.

3.4 Adopted children

In Australia, each state and territory has responsibility for all aspects of adoption within its jurisdiction, including its own legislation, policies and practices in relation to adoption. The Institute is funded by the state and territory community services departments to collect and publish national data on adoptions. The data reported on

here were provided by the departments, in regard to adoptions that were finalised within their jurisdictions between 1999–2000 and 2003–04. The categories used to classify adoptions in the national collection are outlined in Box 3.2. For further information, see *Adoptions Australia* series (e.g. AIHW 2004a).

This section examines adoptions data from the last five years, while also making reference to important trends in the number of adoptions occurring in Australia over the last 30 years.

Box 3.2: Categories of adoption used in the national data collection

Placement adoptions: adoptions of children who are legally available and placed for adoption but who have had no previous contact or relationship with the adoptive parents. Placement adoptions are broken down into the following two categories:

- *local placement adoptions – adoptions of children who were born in Australia or who were permanent residents of Australia before the adoption; and*
- *intercountry placement adoptions – adoptions of children from countries other than Australia.*

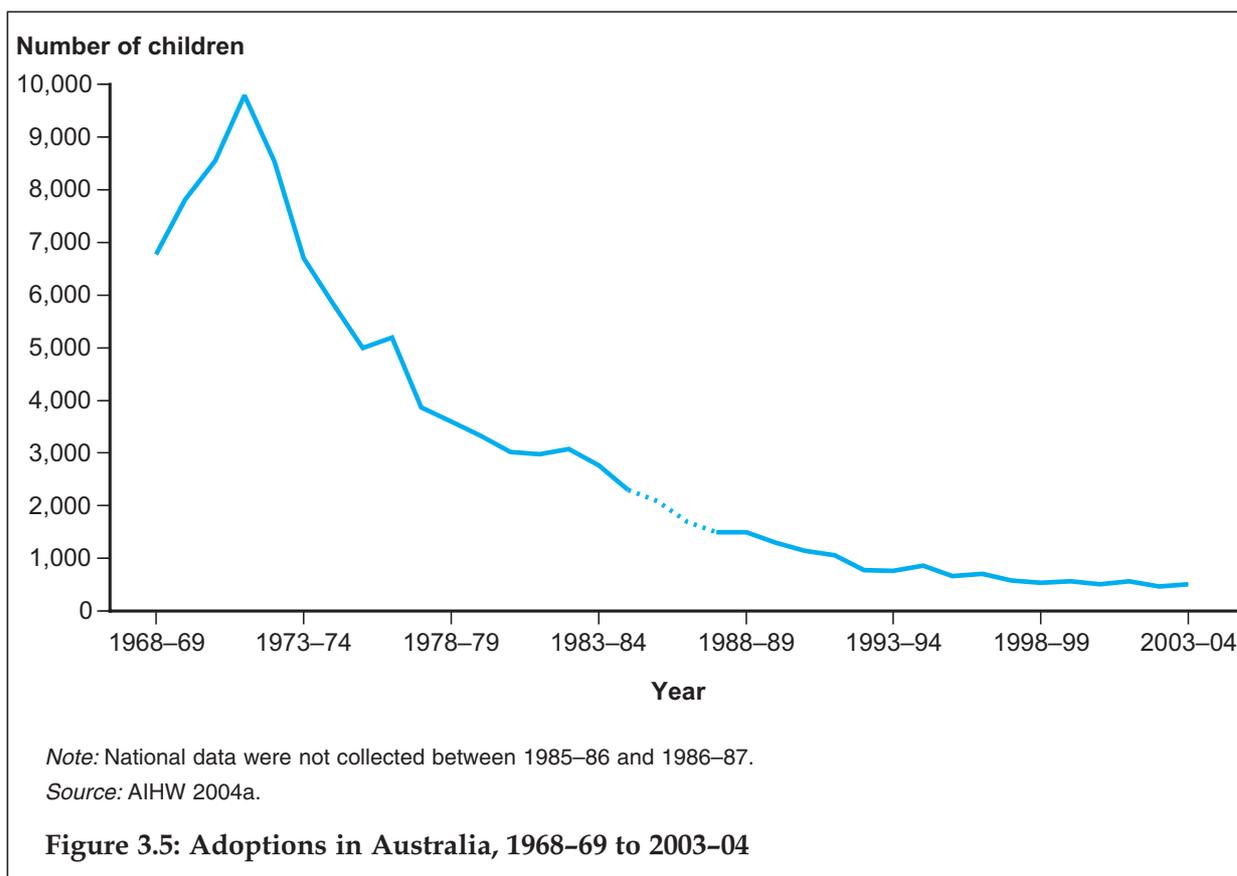
‘Known’ child adoptions: adoptions of children who have a pre-existing relationship with the adoptive parent(s) and who are generally not available for adoption by anyone other than the adoptive parent(s). ‘Known’ child adoptions include adoptions by step-parents, other relatives and carers.

Before 1998–99, adoptions were categorised as either relative or non-relative adoptions. The major difference between the categories used now and those used then is that adoptions by carers are now included with adoptions by step-parents and other relatives, rather than with adoptions by non-relatives.

Trends in adoption

Since the 1970s, the number of adoptions has declined along with declining fertility rates. Australia experienced a substantial fall in the number of adoptions between the early 1970s and the early 1990s, from almost 10,000 in 1971–72 to 764 in 1993–94 (Figure 3.5). After that, the number fluctuated and flattened out. The number of children adopted fell to a low of 472 in 2002–03, but increased slightly to 502 in 2003–04.

The long-term decrease is primarily due to the fall in the number of local adoptions and ‘known’ child adoptions and is reflective of the number of Australian-born children who are placed for, or require, an adoption. Factors that have contributed to this decrease since the 1970s include the availability of more effective birth control, and changed community attitudes that have coincided with increased levels of support available to single parents. Legislative changes introduced by state and territory departments over the last two decades have also facilitated a greater use of alternative legal orders, often replacing the need for adoption orders. These orders, such as permanent care orders in Victoria, transfer the guardianship and custody of a child to a person other than the parent—in most cases to relatives or carers that the child is currently living with.



As local adoptions continue to decrease, the proportion of intercountry adoptions has been increasing. In 1999–00, just over half (53%) of all children adopted were from countries other than Australia and by 2003–04 this figure had increased to 74% (Table 3.12).

Table 3.12: Adoptions in Australia, 1999–00 to 2003–04

	Local placement adoptions	'Known' child adoptions	Intercountry adoptions	Total
1999–00	106	159	301	566
2000–01	85	140	289	514
2001–02	107	160	294	561
2002–03	78	116	278	472
2003–04	73	59	370	502

Source: AIHW 2004a.

Local adoptions

Local adoptions continued the general trend of the last 30 years and declined in number by 31%, from 106 in 1999–00 to 73 in 2003–04 (Table 3.12). Although the number is decreasing, many characteristics of local adoptions have remained unchanged throughout the last few decades—the majority of local children placed for adoption are still born to unmarried mothers and the majority of children adopted continue to be under 1 year of age.

However, in other areas, such as the way in which local placement adoptions are conducted, significant changes have been made over the last two decades. For example, to a varying degree in different jurisdictions, adoption has changed from a guarded practice, where files were sealed and parties to the adoption had no contact with each other, to an open practice where each party to the adoption can have some say in what happens to the child. Out of all of the agreements made at the time of an adoption in 2003–04, only 7% included a clause of ‘no contact or information exchange’. The remaining 93% would be considered to be ‘open’ adoptions (AIHW 2004a).

Consequently, a large area of activity for community services departments is in assisting people who were party to an adoption prior to ‘open’ adoption practices, to gain information about their adoption. In all jurisdictions, people party to an adoption can apply for either identifying or non-identifying information regarding the adoption. This may lead to contact between the parties, for example between an adoptee and their birth mother. If a party to the adoption wishes to remain anonymous, some states and territories allow a veto to be lodged which makes it illegal for the other parties to either gain information and/or have contact. In 2003–04 there were 3,407 information applications lodged in Australia, compared with 63 contact and information vetoes (AIHW 2004a).

‘Known’ child adoptions

The number of ‘known’ child adoptions decreased significantly over the last 5 years, from 159 in 1990–00 to 59 in 2003–04 (Table 3.13). Most (66%) were by step-parents wishing to legally incorporate children into their new family. However, as the data show, this practice is becoming less common. Other types of ‘known’ child adoptions (those by other relatives or carers) are also significantly decreasing. In most states and territories, adoptions by carers and relatives other than step-parents are only allowed in exceptional circumstances, that is, when a guardianship or custody order would not adequately provide for the welfare of the child (AIHW 2004a).

Table 3.13: Relationship of adoptive parent(s) in ‘known’ child adoptions, 1999–00 to 2003–04

	Step-parent	Other relative	Carer	Unknown	Total
1999–00	114	2	43	—	159
2000–01	98	1	29	12	140
2001–02	103	5	52	—	160
2002–03	72	2	29	13	116
2003–04	31	3	25	—	59

Source: AIHW 2004a.

Adoptions by carers made up 28% of all ‘known’ child adoptions between 1999–00 and 2003–04. These adoptions would usually have been of children placed with their carers in long-term out-of-home care placements. For example, in Western Australia, new legislation introduced in 2003 specifies that adoptions by carers can occur only when the child has been in their full-time care for at least 3 years. These adoptions would also occur only where the parent has given their consent or the appropriate court dispenses with the parent’s consent.

There were 13 adoptions of children by relatives other than step-parents between 1999–2000 and 2003–04, representing 2% of all ‘known’ adoptions over the period. This low number is reflective of community services departments’ policies and practices that generally discourage adoption by relatives, because of the confusion and distortion that may occur to biological relationships. When children need to be placed in the care of relatives other than parents, most jurisdictions have policies that promote the use of guardianship or custody orders rather than adoption (Stonehouse 1992).

Intercountry adoptions

Over the last 5 years, intercountry adoptions rose by 23%, from 301 in 1999–00 to 370 in 2003–04 (Table 3.14). Two important developments in intercountry adoptions since the beginning of 1999 may have impacted on this overall increase.

Table 3.14: Intercountry adoptions, 1999–00 to 2003–04

Country of birth	1999–00	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04	Total
China	1	15	39	46	112	213
Colombia	17	15	9	7	7	55
Ethiopia	46	37	36	39	45	203
Fiji	5	3	5	—	1	14
India	37	40	40	33	29	179
South Korea	77	75	93	101	98	444
Philippines	29	18	12	18	29	106
Romania	36	22	2	1	—	61
Sri Lanka	3	4	2	2	2	13
Thailand	33	35	28	17	39	152
Other ^(a)	17	25	28	14	8	92
Total	301	289	294	278	370	1,532

(a) Other includes: Burkina Faso, Bolivia, Chile, Croatia, England, Guatemala, Hong Kong, Italy, Lebanon, Malta, Poland, Taiwan, Tonga, Uganda and the United States of America.

Source: AIHW 2004a.

First, in December 1998, Australia ratified the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoptions. The Hague Convention helps people who wish to adopt children from overseas by establishing uniform standards and procedures between countries (AIHW 2004a). More importantly, it also protects the rights of the children, by ensuring that their best interests are paramount in any intercountry adoption process. Since 1998, 38 additional countries have ratified or acceded to the Convention. In June 2005, a total of 66 countries were a party to the Convention (Hague Conference on Private International Law 2005).

Second, in December 1999, Australia entered into a bilateral agreement with China. This agreement has similar arrangements to the Hague Convention—in particular, it allows Australian residents to adopt children from China, with the adoption order being finalised there and automatically recognised in Australia (AIHW 2004a). Since the agreement was signed, the number of children adopted from China has increased

each year—culminating in 2003–04 with 112 children, more than from any other country (AIHW 2004a). A total of 213 children have been adopted from China since 1999 (Table 3.14).

Bilateral agreements which existed prior to the Hague Convention ratification remain in place, with the understanding that they will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they comply with the principles of the Convention. The most recent review, in 2004, recommended that the bilateral agreements with China, Fiji, Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan continue. This was endorsed by the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Council in July 2005. A further review will take place in 2009.

Overall between 1999–00 and 2003–04, the majority of children adopted from countries other than Australia have come from South Korea (29%), followed by China (14%), Ethiopia (13%), India (12%) and Thailand (10%).

Adoptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Adoptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are conducted in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, which outlines a preference for the placement of Indigenous children with Indigenous people when the children are placed outside their family (Lock 1997).

Between 1999–2000 and 2003–04, 15 Indigenous children were adopted in Australia. In 73% of these adoptions, the adoptive parents were Indigenous and/or relatives of the adopted child (AIHW 2004a).

3.5 Transitions from early childhood to school entry

Transition from home to care

In early childhood the first major transition for an increasing number of Australian children is their entry to child care. Child care can be either formal or informal, and can be provided in a family home, community or educational setting. Child care provides opportunities for development, education and socialisation, gives parents the opportunity to work, study and engage in other community activities, and provides additional support networks (CSMAC 2004). Formal child care services include long day care centres, family day care, occasional care, outside school hours care and vacation care. Many children also attend preschool, which provides additional education and developmental opportunities for those about to enter full-time schooling. Informal care is provided by grandparents and other relatives, babysitters and nannies. The definitions of the various types of formal child care services can be found in Box 3.3.

In 2002, almost half of Australia's 3.1 million children aged under 12 years used some form of child care. Two-thirds of the youngest children, aged less than 1 year, used no form of care. Of those who did use care, most used only informal care provided by grandparents (ABS 2003d). Use of child care increases with the age of the child and peaks among 4 year olds, 83% of whom were in formal care (including preschool) in 2002. This means that although the point of transition is different for each child, most children have experienced some type of formal care before beginning school.

Box 3.3: Child care and preschool services

Formal care is regulated care generally away from the child's home. The main types of formal care are long day care, family day care, occasional care, preschool and outside school hours care.

Informal care is non-regulated care, arranged by a child's parent/guardian, either in the child's home or elsewhere. It comprises care by (step) brothers or sisters, by grandparents, by other relatives (including a parent living elsewhere) and by other (unrelated) people such as friends, neighbours, nannies or babysitters. It may be paid or unpaid.

Centre-based long day care comprises services aimed primarily at 0–5 year olds that are provided in a centre usually by a mix of qualified and other staff. Educational, care and recreational programs are provided based on the developmental needs, interests and experience of each child. In some jurisdictions, primary school children may also receive care before and after school, and during school vacations. Centres typically operate for at least 8 hours per day on normal working days, for a minimum of 48 weeks per year.

Family day care comprises services provided in the carer's home. The care is largely aimed at 0–5 year olds, but primary school children may also receive care before and after school, and during school vacations. Central coordination units in all states and territories organise and support a network of carers, often with the help of local governments.

Occasional care comprises services usually provided at a centre on an hourly or sessional basis for short periods or at irregular intervals for parents who need time to attend appointments, take care of personal matters, undertake casual and part-time employment, study or have temporary respite from full-time parenting. These services provide developmental activities for children and are aimed primarily at 0–5 year olds. Centres providing these services usually employ a mix of qualified and other staff.

Preschool comprises services usually provided by a qualified teacher on a sessional basis in dedicated preschools. Preschool programs or curricula may also be provided in long day care centres and other settings. These services are primarily aimed at children in the year before they commence full-time schooling (that is, when children are 4 years old in all jurisdictions except WA, where children are 5 years old), although younger children may also attend in some circumstances.

Outside school hours care comprises services provided for school-aged children (5–12 year olds) outside school hours during term and vacations. Care may be provided on student-free days and when school finishes early.

Other services comprise government-funded services to support children with additional needs or in particular situations (including children from an Indigenous or non-English-speaking background, children with a disability or of parents with a disability, and children living in regional and remote areas).

Source: SCRCSSP 2005.

Data sources

The main sources of data for children's services are the ABS Child Care Survey, the FaCS Census of Child Care Services, Centrelink administrative data and data from the Report on Government Services (Box 3.4). Although there are many sources of data available, the comparability of data is limited as collections have different scopes and different definitions for variables. For example, the ABS Child Care Survey is a household survey on the use of child care services (including formal, informal and preschool) for children aged 0–11 years, while the FaCS Census collects information from Australian government-funded service providers on children aged 0–12 years. In addition, state and territory collections have different definitions of a preschool service, which limits the comparability of the data.

Box 3.4: Child care and preschool services data collections

The Australian Bureau of Statistics Child Care Survey is conducted every 3 years and is a supplement to the ABS Labour Force Survey. The latest survey was conducted in 2005. This is an Australia-wide household sample survey on the use of and demand for child care and preschool services.

The Australian Government Census of Child Care Services is a census of Australian Government-supported child care service providers, conducted by the Department of Family and Community Services. The census collects information from Australian Government approved service providers on their staff, the children and parents using the service and various other aspects of service provision. The latest census of these services was carried out in March 2004.

State and territory government data collections contain information about the child care and preschool services that these governments fund and/or license. There are, however, great variations in the nature and extent of these collections. The best source of these data is the Report on Government Services (SCRCSSP 2005), produced annually, and available online at <<http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/reports/rogs/2005/>>.

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey is a longitudinal survey that began in 2001. It collects information about child care use that can be related to other aspects of the survey, including household structure, family background and formation, education, employment history, current employment, income, health and wellbeing and housing. The survey was initiated and funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Family and Community Services. For more information, see <<http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/>>.

Growing Up in Australia, the Longitudinal Study of Australia's Children, explores family and social issues relevant to children's development, and addresses a range of research questions including non-parental child care and education. It will examine the impact of non-parental child care on a child's developmental outcomes over time, and the impact of various risk factors such as multiple care arrangements, type of care and age of entry into child care. The first report was released in May 2005. The study was initiated and funded by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services as part of its Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. For more information, see <<http://www.aifs.gov.au/growingup/home.html>>.

Many of these issues will be addressed by the Children's Services National Minimum Data Set (CS NMDS), which is being developed by the AIHW, in consultation with the Children's Services Data Working Group of the NCSIMG. The CS NMDS is designed to collect data from all government-funded and/or licensed child care and preschool services. It will provide nationally comparable and consistent data on children who use child care and preschool services, the workers who provide care and the services themselves. Data items have been pilot tested in two stages, most recently during 2004 in every jurisdiction, and strategies for implementation are currently under discussion. The implementation of the CS NMDS will provide data which fill the existing knowledge gaps, as well as giving a consistent, national picture of children's services.

Need for child care and preschool services

With 3.5 million children aged 12 years and under in Australia, the potential demand for children's services is very large. However, the demand is influenced not only by the number and age of children in the population, but also on trends in social factors such as family structure, employment patterns and population mobility. For example, the growing number of one-parent families (discussed in more detail in Section 3.3) has increased the need for child care services. An analysis of HILDA data showed that lone-parent families are more likely to use formal care (NATSEM 2005). This may be due to a lack of informal care options (e.g. two sets of grandparents), or because lone parents lack a partner to share household responsibilities with, and thus need more hours of child care in order to complete tasks such as shopping, banking or attending appointments.

Current trends in the participation in the labour force of both couple and single parents suggest an expanding need for child care services, particularly as children get older (see Section 3.3). However, participation in employment is not by itself an accurate indicator of the level of need for child care services, because many parents use child care for study, personal reasons or for the benefit of the child (ABS 2003d).

Moving—especially interstate—can weaken support networks of family and friends. These are the people who provide most informal child care and, without them close at hand, the need for formal child care services may increase. Child care and preschool provide opportunities for establishing new support and social networks and so can contribute to the social wellbeing of families who use formal care when they move. Between 1996 and 2001, 42% of the population aged 5 years and over (more than 6 million people) changed address (ABS 2004c). Most people who moved were aged 20–34 years, and many of these had young children. Of those who moved, 20% were less than 15 years of age (Figure 3.6).

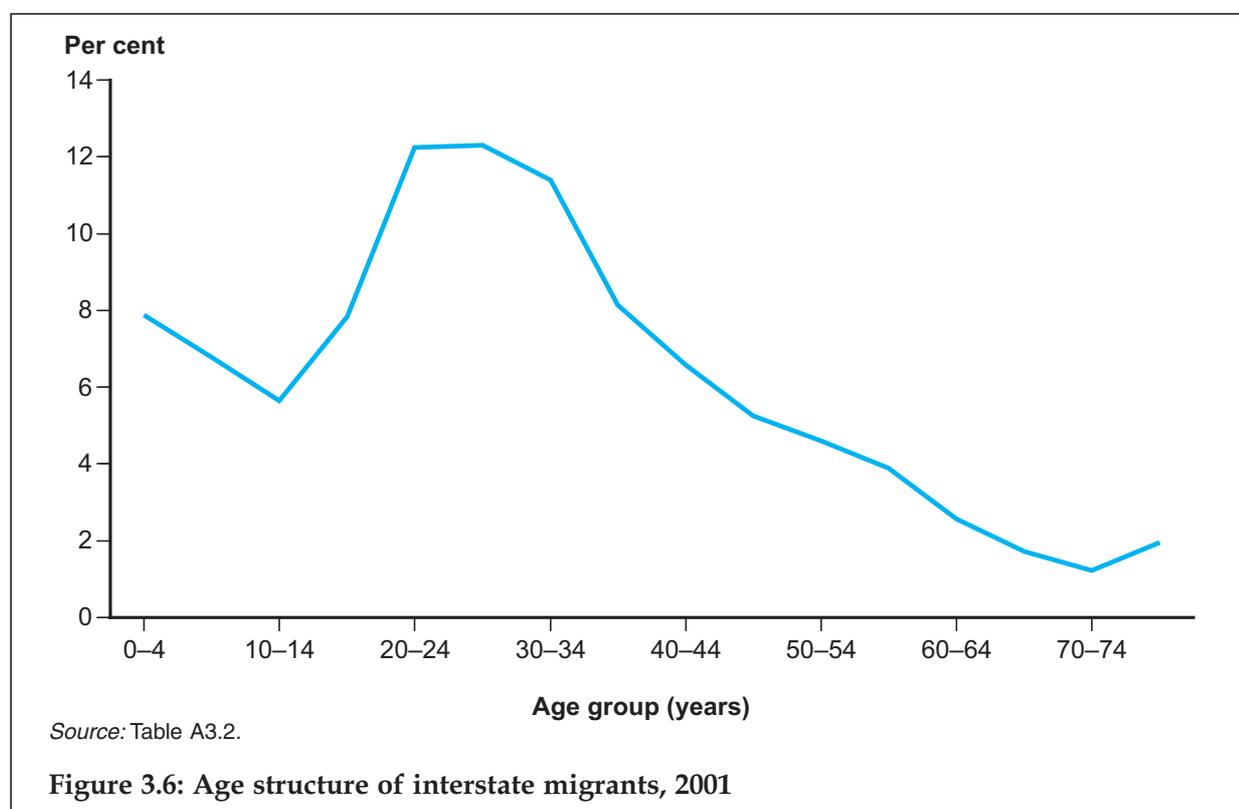
Policy context of child care and preschool service provision

Under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) supports the provision of formal child care services through the Child Care Support Program (CCSP) (Box 3.5). The CCSP incorporates a range of strategies to promote the supply, accessibility, flexibility, quality and affordability of child care services (FaCS 2004b).

The policies put forward in the CCSP have generated a number of other programs. The Australian Government funds two programs aimed at improving access to services for children with special needs (McIntosh & Phillips 2002). These are the Supplementary Services Program and the Special Needs Subsidy Scheme. The Supplementary Services Program funds the employment of trained people who educate child care workers in the appropriate care of special needs children. They also assist in creating programs for special needs children, serve as relief workers and provide information materials. The Special Needs Subsidy Scheme is similar to the Supplementary Services Program except that it is aimed at supporting individual high needs children, instead of improving the overall capacity of child care services to care for special needs children.

In addition to the funding that children's services can receive under the CCSP, the Australian Government provides a number of other payments. These can include establishment grants, set-up grants, equipment grants, and capital assistance (McIntosh & Phillips 2002). Some child care services receive a disadvantaged area subsidy which aims to improve access to work-related child care for those in rural and remote locations. Private providers are encouraged to support rural and remote communities by setting up new long day care centres which attract funding from the government for two years.

The Jobs, Education and Training Child Care program is primarily designed to help those receiving the Parenting Payment to enter or re-enter the workforce. It provides advice, training and employment opportunities, as well as arranging child care places (McIntosh & Phillips 2002). This program can also be utilised by those people on the work for the dole program.



Box 3.5: Australian Government child care support

Prior to 2004, a Child Care Support Broadband (CCSB) was in place which was designed to provide funding to child care services. Funding for services covered areas such as training, operational subsidies, funding for children with special needs and set-up grants. In 2001, FaCS was asked to redevelop the CCSB in response to the Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council's report (CCCAC 2002).

In June 2004, after extensive consultation, outcomes from the CCSB redevelopment were announced, and the new Child Care Support Program (CCSP) was officially launched. The CCSB was redeveloped so that funding arrangements could keep pace with current priorities identified in the child care sector. The priorities identified by the Australian Government at the commencement of the redevelopment were:

a need to better support those services that are marginal, in rural and regional areas or struggling to combine viability with flexible service delivery, to better support families and children with additional needs and also to focus on the need for a quality early learning and development experience for all children accessing formal child care services.

Consequently, funding under the new CCSP is targeted at supporting child care services, particularly in high-need rural, regional and Indigenous communities, and ensuring that children with additional needs can be provided with quality child care.

The Child Care Support Program has four strategic priorities:

- 1. **Quality Support:** Programs that promote quality child care, including training and professional development and quality accreditation measures (\$26m in funding for 2004–05).*
- 2. **Inclusion Support:** Programs to support access to quality child care for families and children with additional needs (\$60m in funding for 2004–05).*
- 3. **Community Support:** Programs to support access to child care for children and families in areas or in circumstances where the market would otherwise fail to provide child care services (\$138m in funding for 2004–05).*
- 4. **Program Support:** Planning, monitoring, evaluation and communication measures to support the government's investment in child care (\$2m in funding for 2004–05).*

The total funding for these priorities during 2004–05 is \$226 million.

Source: AIHW 2003; FaCS 2004b; 2004c.

State and territory governments, as well as local governments, provide additional funding and support to child care services (McIntosh & Phillips 2002). State and territory governments are responsible for providing preschools and the licensing of services. They also provide information and support for providers and parents. Local governments contribute land and administrative support to community centres.

Preschool services are those that are primarily aimed at children in the year before they commence full-time schooling (SCRCSSP 2005:14.2–14.3). They provide children with educational and developmental opportunities and are usually staffed by a qualified teacher.

Preschool services are provided by state governments, private bodies and within long day care centres. The funding for these services varies across jurisdictions. Private preschools attract varying levels of subsidies, and preschools within child care centres are funded differently to stand-alone services and those attached to government schools (ACT Department of Treasury 2004:140). In New South Wales and Victoria, preschool is seen as part of the community services portfolio, rather than the educational system as in other jurisdictions. This means that preschools are not provided free of charge, with parents incurring a small fee (AEU 2001). Because the provision of preschool services to the community is so complex, it is difficult to collect consistent data on the numbers of places offered and who uses them. Preschool services are discussed below under ‘Use of child care’.

Australian Government-supported child care services

During 2004, the Australian Government supported more than 10,100 agencies across Australia. Most of these services were owned and operated by either community organisations or private-for-profit organisations (Table 3.15). Of the long day care centres that received support, almost 70% were owned by private-for-profit organisations. In contrast, almost all family day care, outside school hours care and occasional care services were owned by community-based bodies.

Table 3.15: Australian Government-supported child care services, 2004 (per cent)

	Long day care centres	Family day care ^(a)	Outside school hours care ^(b)	Occasional /other care ^(c)
Private-for-profit	69.4	5.1	7.7	0.0
Community-based ^(d)	30.6	94.9	92.3	100.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total number of agencies	4,484	409	5,091	142

(a) Family day care coordination units. Also includes family day care schemes offering in-home care, and stand-alone in-home care services.

(b) Includes before and after school care and vacation care.

(c) Includes occasional care centres and multifunctional Aboriginal children’s services.

(d) Includes services operated by community groups, religious organisations, charities, local governments, and by or in state government premises.

Source: FaCS 2004 administrative data.

Between 1991 and 2004, the number of Australian Government-supported child care places increased markedly (Figure 3.7). The largest growth was in places for outside school hours care, which was four times higher than in 1991, with most of the increase since the late 1990s. The large increase between 1997 and 1998 was mainly due to the inclusion of some Australian Government-supported places not previously recorded in the database, and to changes in the counting methodology. The number of places in

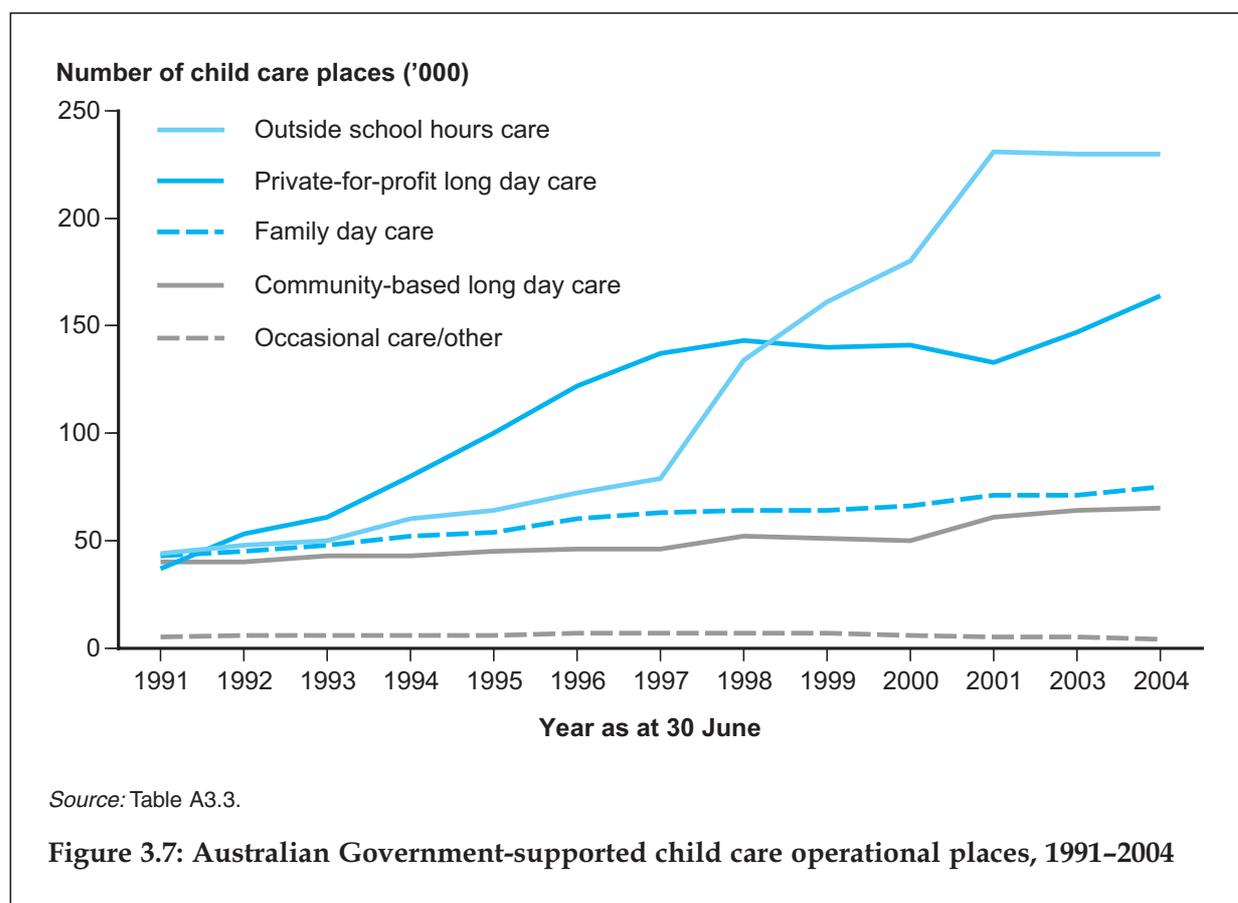
private-for-profit long day care centres increased three and a half times to 164,300 over the period. Places for other types of care grew more moderately, with occasional care the only type to register a small decline of 20%.

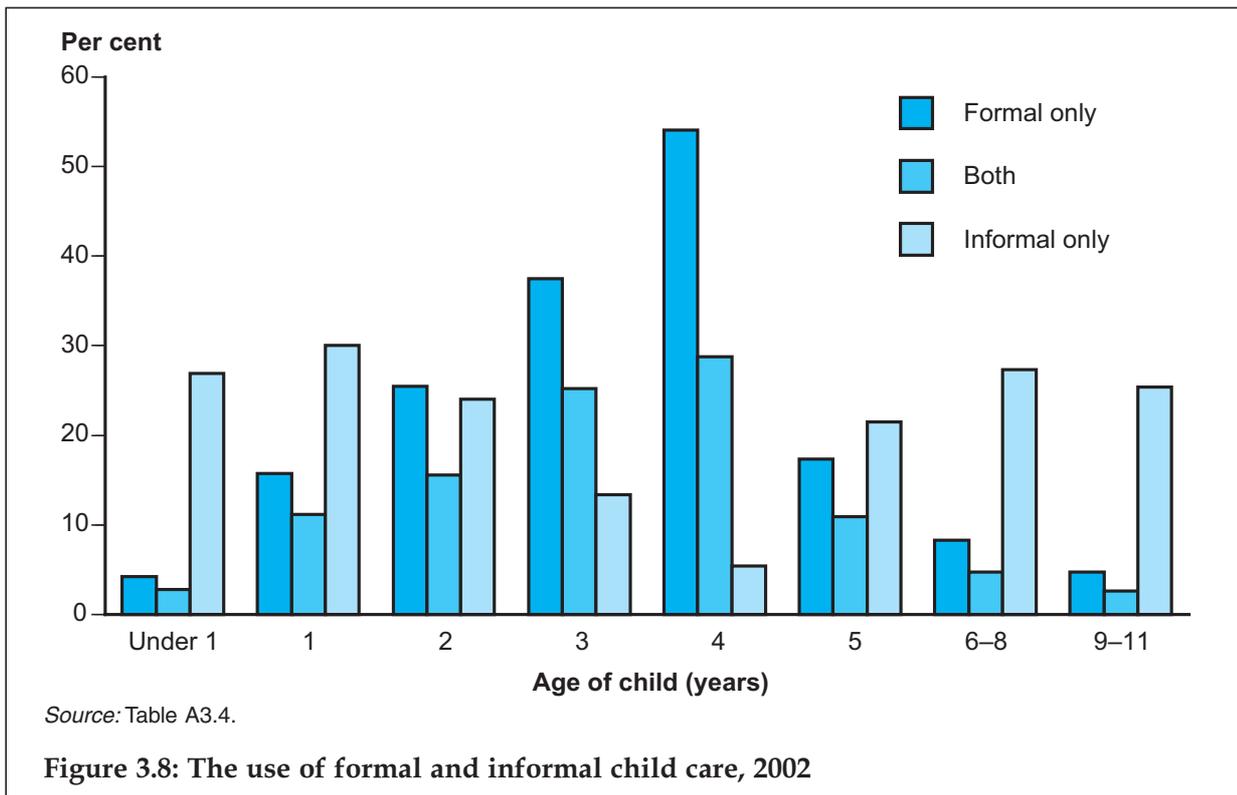
Use of child care and preschool

Formal and informal care

According to the latest ABS Child Care Survey, in 2002 about half the children aged under 12 years used some type of child care (ABS 2003d). Over the last decade this figure has not changed. However, the proportion of children using formal care—regulated care that takes place away from the child’s home, including preschool—gradually increased, from 19% in 1993 to 25% in 2002. At the same time, the proportion using informal care decreased from 38% to 33%. Informal care is unregulated care provided by relatives, friends or nannies. Grandparents provided 58% of informal care to children aged under 12 years.

The use of formal and informal child care also varied across age groups (Figure 3.8). Children aged 3 and 4 years are more likely to use formal child care due to their attendance at preschool. In contrast, children aged 1 year or younger, or over 5 years, were more likely to use informal child care. About half the children aged under 12 years did not use any type of care—formal or informal, with the highest proportions among the youngest (66% of children less than a year old) and oldest (67% of 9–11 year olds).





Patterns of use for informal and formal care vary by household type and employment status of parents. Research based on the Household Income and Labour Dynamics of Australia (HILDA) survey has shown that one-parent families were more likely to use formal care, or a combination of formal and informal care, than other family types (NATSEM 2005). Another analysis of HILDA data showed that of families who worked either full or part-time, 15% did not use any formal child care (Mance 2005). Those families who were employed part-time used more informal care than those employed full-time, while those families who were employed full-time most often used a mixture of formal and informal care. Single working mothers used twice the amount of formal child care than the number of hours worked. For example, a single mother working approximately 16 hours per week used 31 hours of formal child care, compared to mothers in couple families, who worked 22 hours per week and used 28 hours of formal child care. This suggests that single mothers use formal care for non-work-related reasons such as study, shopping, appointments and personal time, whereas a couple can share the care of children in these circumstances.

Although most of this section focuses on formal child care services, the above discussion highlights the importance of informal child care in Australia. Many state, territory and Australian Government agencies are currently working on projects to improve the collection of data on the use of informal care to assess its contribution to the Australian community.

Australian Government-supported child care

The number of children using Australian Government-supported child care services more than doubled between 1991 and 2004, from 262,200 to 646,800 (Table 3.16).

Over this period, the number of children attending long day care centres almost tripled, to 383,000, while the number attending outside school hours care more than tripled to 160,800. Paralleling this trend, the use of vacation care services has also increased markedly.

Of the children who used formal child care during 2004, 59% attended long day care centres; 14% family day care. Children who attended outside school hours care (18%) are likely to overlap with those who attended vacation care (16%).

It is important to note that the data from the FaCS Census of Child Care Services may not be strictly comparable from year to year. For example, the large increase in outside school hours care places between 1997 and 1998 was mainly due to the inclusion of some Australian Government-supported places not previously recorded in the database, and to changes in the counting methodology.

As noted above, age is a key factor in the use of informal and formal care. It is equally important in the type of care that children use (Table 3.17). The most common type of Australian Government-supported child care used children under 4 years of age was long day care. However, only 8% of the 253,000 children aged under 1 year in 2004 used an Australian Government-supported formal care service, mainly long day care. Three year olds were the largest group using long day care, but these centres continued to care for many 4 year olds, as they provide preschool services within the centre. Once attending full-time school, children most commonly used outside school hours care and vacation care.

The Australian Government provides specific funding to assist parents and children with special needs to access services (see the section on policy context). The groups eligible for this support are children from one-parent families, children and/or parents with a disability, children of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, children from culturally diverse backgrounds and children at risk of abuse or neglect (FaCS 2004d) (Table 3.18). During 2004 children from one-parent families accounted for the majority of special needs children using Australian Government-supported child care services. The next largest group were children from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Some caution should be used in interpreting these data. For example, multifunctional children's services are mostly located in rural and remote areas where the population is too small to support specialised services (FaCS 2002). Recent data on disability in children indicate that there is a higher rate of disability in areas outside of capital cities (AIHW 2004b), which may partially account for the high rate of special needs children in this type of service.

Preschool services

At present the ABS Child Care Survey is the most reliable source of information about the use of preschool services across Australia. Its drawbacks are that it is only collected every 3 years, has a high relative standard error for the smaller states, cannot provide information about rural and remote areas, and does not identify preschool programs run within long day care centres.

Table 3.16: Number of children in Australian Government-supported child care services, 1991–2004

	Long day care	Family day care	Outside school hours care	Vacation care	Other formal care ^(a)	Total ^(b)
1991	135,400	61,000	46,800	..	19,000	262,200
1992	158,400	66,100	50,700	..	26,500	301,700
1993	190,600	78,800	53,500	..	20,900	343,800
1994	227,300	88,700	63,900	n.a.	16,800	396,700
1995	251,000	85,600	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1996	n.a.	n.a.	96,400	24,300	19,100	n.a.
1997	294,700	85,000	99,500	31,000	n.a.	n.a.
1999	301,500	83,100	107,400	69,300	16,100	508,200
2000	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2001	n.a.	95,800	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2002	367,100	97,100 ^(c)	148,000	103,600	11,600	623,900
2003	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2004	383,000	92,500	160,800	101,700	10,400	646,800

(a) Includes occasional care centres, multifunctional Aboriginal children's services (MACS) and other multifunctional services.

(b) Components may not add to totals due to rounding to the nearest 100. Vacation care places are not included in the total to reduce the amount of double-counting.

(c) Includes in-home care.

Notes

1. These data measure occurrences of care and include some double-counting where children attend more than one service. Totals for 1999 and 2002 exclude children in vacation care, since many of these children would also have been attending before/after school care.
2. Figures for 1991–94 are estimates based on previous years Census data. Figures for 1995–97 are from the CP Census conducted in August of each year and are weighted for non-response. However, not all service types were surveyed in each of these years. Figures for 1999 and 2002 are from the Census conducted in May in each of those years and are weighted for non-response.

Sources: AIHW 1999; FaCS unpublished data.

Table 3.17: Age distribution of children using Australian Government-supported child care services, 2004

Type of service	Age of children (years)							Total
	<1	1	2	3	4	5	6+	
Long day care centres	14,463	50,921	88,205	108,865	88,498	16,130	15,937	383,021
Family day care	4,664	14,664	18,445	16,891	12,505	4,942	17,187	89,300
Before/after school care	—	2	1	85	3,353	20,724	136,626	160,791
Vacation care	—	7	7	38	1,148	11,078	89,432	101,710
Occasional care/other ^(a)	772	2,253	3,363	3,440	2,012	493	1,311	13,642
Total	19,899	67,847	110,021	129,319	107,515	53,367	260,495	748,464

(a) Includes occasional care centres, multifunctional Aboriginal children's services, multifunctional children's services and in-home care services.

Source: FaCS 2005.

Table 3.18: Children with special needs as a proportion of all children using Australian Government-supported child care services, 2004 (per cent)

Type of special need	Long day care centres	Family day care	Occasional care	Multi-functionals, MACS, in-home care	Before/after school care	Vacation care	All services ^(a)
Children from one-parent families	18	25	13	30	27	n.a.	21
Child with disability	1	3	2	10	2	4	2
Parent with disability	1	<1	1	3	<1	<1	<1
Child at risk of abuse/neglect	<1	1	1	3	<1	<1	<1
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	2	1	2	24	1	1	2
Culturally diverse background	13	9	11	3	11	10	12
Total number of children in care	383,021	89,300	7,586	6,056	160,791	101,710	646,754

(a) Total excludes children in vacation care, since many of these children would also have been attending before/after school care.

Notes

1. Data on family type were not collected for vacation care services.
2. Some children may be included in more than one special needs category.
3. These data are weighted for agency non-response.

Source: FaCS 2005.

In June 2002, 239,100 children in Australia were attending preschool. Of these, 62% (148,000) were aged 4 years. Almost 20% of children attending preschool were aged 3 years, with another 18% aged 5 years. The median amount of time per week spent at preschool was 10 hours; 54% of those attending preschool spent between 10 and 19 hours per week there. Two-thirds of children attended 2 or 3 days per week; 18% went 1 day per week.

Outcomes

The aims and objectives of government support for child care are to provide services that are accessible, affordable and of high quality, and that allow parents to participate in the labour force and undertake other activities. As a condition of government funding and regulation, these services must promote and enhance children’s emotional, intellectual, social and physical development (see Box 3.7).

The discussion in this section, however, focuses on service rather than client outcomes, in terms of accessibility, affordability and quality.

Accessibility

The accessibility of child care services is a major concern for both parents and governments. Unmet demand is an important indicator of accessibility. One direct measure of unmet demand comes from the 2002 ABS Child Care Survey, which asked

parents whether they wanted to use either some formal child care or additional formal care, but did not do so (ABS 2003d:30). In these terms, about 6% of children aged under 12 years needed additional formal care, well below the level of 16% in 1993. Unmet demand decreased the most for preschool services (83%) and occasional care (80%) (Table 3.19).

Even so, this amounted to 174,500 children requiring additional formal care in 2002. Of this group, 27% required after school hours care, 27% required long day care and 22% occasional care. Unmet need was higher among children aged 0–4 years (9%) than those age 5–11 years (4%).

Table 3.19: Children under 12 years of age for whom parents required some or more formal care, 1993, 1999 and 2002 ('000)

Main type of (additional) formal care required	1993	1999	2002
Before/after school care	125.1	62.6	47.8
Long day care centres	63.8	45.4	46.3
Family day care	60.2	24.5	29.1
Occasional care	191.8	43.7	37.6
Preschool	30.0	11.2	*5.1
Other formal care	18.3	13.7	8.6
Total children who required (additional) formal care	489.2	201.1	174.5

Note: Although some changes were made to the survey between 1999 and 2002, they do not affect the questions on unmet need.
Source: ABS 2003d.

Table 3.20: Carers reporting difficulties in accessing child care during the last 12 months, 2001 (per cent)

Type of difficulty	Carers reporting no difficulties	Carers reporting difficulties
Finding care for a sick child	63.7	36.3
The cost of child care	73.6	26.4
Finding the right person to take care of child	76.5	23.5
Getting care for the hours needed	77.4	22.6
Finding good quality care	78.9	21.1
Finding a place at the child care centre of choice	77.0	23.0
Finding a child care centre in the right location	81.0	19.0
Juggling multiple child care arrangements	80.5	19.5
Finding care during the holidays	82.0	18.0
Finding care the child/ren are happy with	85.7	14.3
Finding care for a difficult or special needs child	88.8	11.2

Notes

1. Proportions exclude those who did not answer the question. The proportion of those who did not answer the question varies from item to item.
2. Items are considered a problem if the carer rated them 7 or above on a 10 point scale where 0 meant 'not a problem at all' and 10 meant 'very much a problem'.

Source: AIHW analysis of Wave 2 HILDA data.

Many of the reasons given for not using the required formal care related to access. Over 61,000 children could not access services because all the places at the service were booked; 30,000 children could not access services because of the expense of these services; and 22,000 children could not access child care services because there were no services available in the area (ABS 2003d).

A more specific barrier was finding care for a sick child (NATSEM 2005). Over one-third of carers reported that this was an issue for them in accessing child care, making this the most common difficulty reported. Supporting the findings of the ABS Child Care Survey, the second most common difficulty was the cost of child care, identified as an issue by 26% of carers. Although finding care for a difficult or special needs child was the least problematic of the 11 items, 11% of carers reported difficulties in this area.

Both surveys point to a number of areas where carers are encountering barriers to accessing child care and preschool services. Even though accessibility is increasing, there are still many obstacles to overcome before all carers can access services to their satisfaction. The Australian Government has gone some way towards addressing these needs by providing extra places in outside school hours care and family day care (FaCS 2004a).

Affordability

The cost of children's services is an issue that can affect access to and use of children's services. If the Child Care Benefit (Box 3.6) does not keep up with rising costs in child care, parents will be faced with an increasing cost burden. Recent wage rises awarded to some child care staff may result in higher child care costs if they are passed on to parents.

Trends in the affordability of selected child care services have been monitored since 1991, by calculating the cost of child care services as a proportion of the disposable income of five different family types (ABS 2002; AIHW 2001; AIHW analysis of 2002 data) (Table 3.21). Since 2000, the cost of child care as a proportion of disposable income has increased for all family types except couple families with high incomes. Although the cost decreased between 1998 and 2000, it has risen again in more recent years to a level similar to that of 1998 (Figure 3.9).

Over the last 15 years, policy changes have had a clear impact on trends in affordability of child care. Most recently, the Australian Government Child Care Benefit (CCB), introduced in 2000, resulted in greater affordability of child care services for many families. This is evidenced by the 'dip' in the trend graph for 2000. Other policies which have had an impact on affordability include the availability of the Child Care Cash Rebate (as it was known then) to high-income families after 1994, and the subsequent reduction of this rebate in 1997 (AIHW 2001).

Figure 3.9 shows the impact of these policy changes on affordability of child care for three family types using private long day care. Sole parents who were not working, but who were receiving the Parenting Payment, spent the highest proportion of their disposable income on child care of all the family types examined. In 2004, the cost of child care was 15.1% of disposable income for this group. Since 1991, the proportion of disposable income spent on child care by couple families with two incomes earning 1.75 the national average weekly earnings has been higher than that spent by working sole parents.

Box 3.6: Australian Government Child Care Benefit (CCB)

For children who are using approved care, the Australian Government funds the Child Care Benefit (CCB) which entitles the families of children to a reduced cost of care, dependent on income. For families with incomes of \$31,755 or less, the maximum rate of CCB (\$137 per week) is applied. This rate is for one child who is not at school, and who is in care for 50 hours per week. The rate under these conditions is equivalent to \$2.74 per hour. If families earn more than \$31,755, the CCB tapers down to a minimum rate of \$23.00 per child for 50 hours of care per week – or \$0.46 per hour. If a family has an income greater than \$91,035, they are eligible for only the minimum rate. The rate of CCB for children at school is 85% of that payable for children not at school. Families with more than one child in care are paid a loaded (additional) rate of CCB.

In addition to this, families can also claim the minimum rate of CCB if their child is attending registered care. Registered care may be provided by grandparents, relatives and friends as well as some private preschools, kindergartens, outside school hours care services and occasional care centres as long as they have been registered through the Family Assistance Office (FAO).

Families using approved care can choose to have their CCB paid to the child care services (i.e. directly reduce the fees that they pay) or can receive it in the form of a lump sum from the FAO at the end of the financial year. Families using registered care can claim CCB from the FAO during the year by submitting the child care receipts within 12 months of having the care provided.

The amount of CCB for the standard hourly rate for approved care rose by \$0.30 between 2000–01 and 2003–04, while the amount for registered care rose by \$0.05.

In January 2005, a Grandparent Child Care Benefit was introduced. Under this benefit, the normal work, training and study test is waived. This means that grandparents who are primary carers of their grandchildren can receive CCB for up to 50 hours a week, regardless of whether or not they are working or studying.

Sources: Centrelink 2001, 2004.

Policy changes have also affected child care affordability for other family types. Couple families with two incomes who earn 2.5 times the national average weekly earnings (i.e. high-income earners) were the only group to have experienced an increase in the affordability of child care over the 1991–2004 period (see Table 3.21 and AIHW 2001). The cost of child care was similar for working sole parents, couple families with one income and couple families with two incomes (1.75 AWE).

Data from more recent years show a steady decline in the affordability of child care services in four out of the five family types (Table 3.21). As noted earlier, 20 hours is the average number of hours per week that a child is in centre-based long day care or family day care services.

Between 2000 and 2004 the affordability of community-based and private long day care centres declined for all family types except couple families earning 2.5 times AWE.

Sole-parent families receiving the Parenting Payment pay a higher proportion of their disposable income on long day care services than other family types. Over the same period, the affordability of family day care services declined for all family types. These services were previously free for sole-parent families, but in 2004 were still more affordable than long day care for this group.

Although these data are helpful as an indicator of the affordability of child care services, they do not fully show the impact of the costs of child care on different families. In particular, sole-parent families on the Parenting Payment have very low disposable incomes. Once child care is paid for, less money is available for other necessities such as food, shelter and clothes than for families with higher disposable incomes. Note that the figures are based on the cost of child care for a single child. Many families have more than one child using child care services and each child may attend different types of service depending on their age and parental employment status (Bowes et al. 2003; Qu & Wise 2004). This would increase the cost of child care for a family.

A further limitation of these data is that they assume that families receive every possible government or tax benefit available to them. The systems for obtaining these benefits can be complex and confusing, so not all families may be accessing all the payments they are entitled to. Affordability in these cases may be even more of an obstacle to obtaining care.

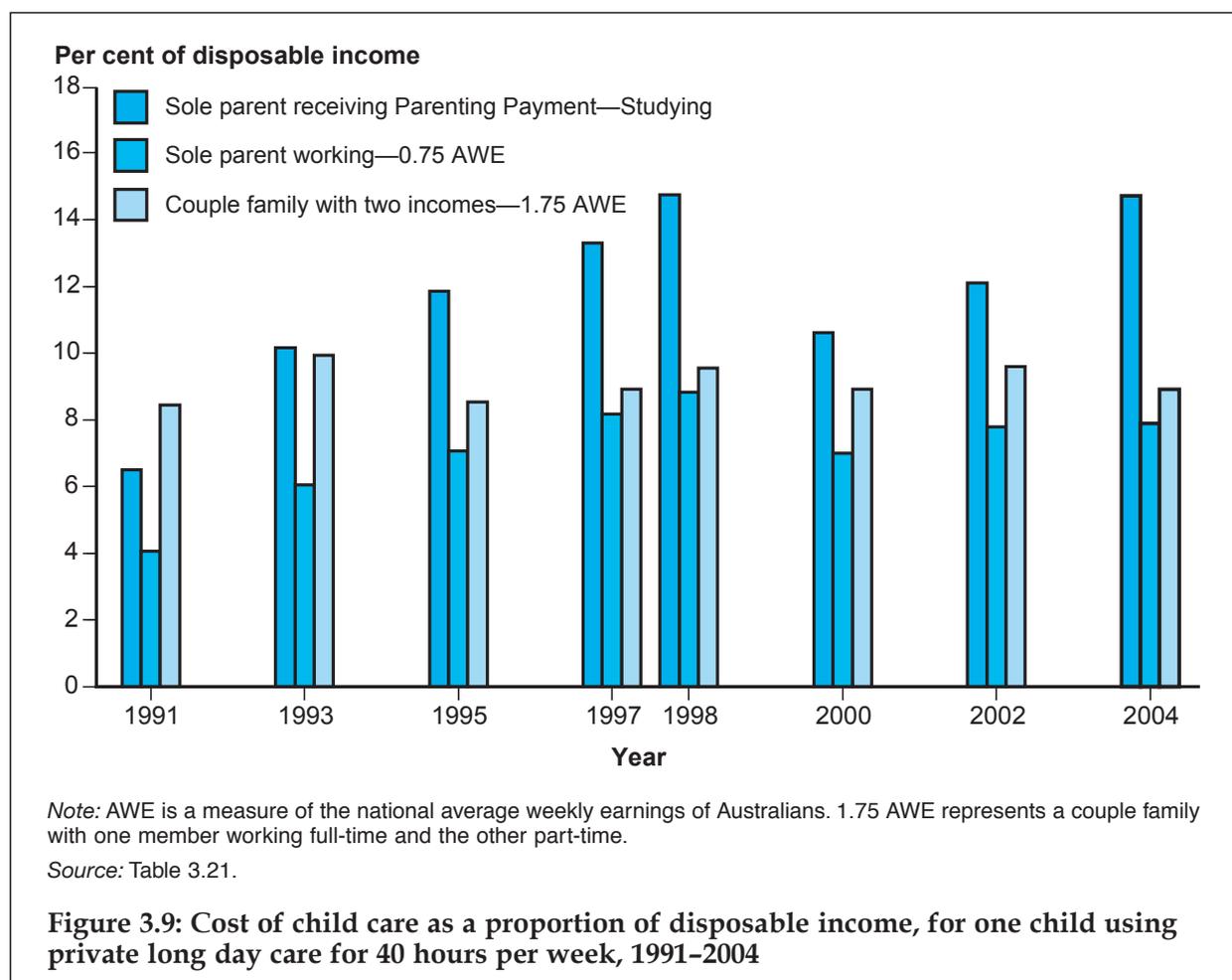


Table 3.21: Cost of child care as a proportion of disposable income, July 2000 to May 2004 (per cent)

Type of service, family type and income level	20 hours			40 hours		
	2000	2002	2004	2000	2002	2004
Community-based long day care centres						
Sole parent receiving Parenting Payment—Studying	4.8	5.1	6.1	12.5	13.0	15.1
Sole parent working—0.75 AWE	3.2	3.3	3.3	8.3	8.4	8.1
Couple family with one income—AWE	3.6	3.8	4.0	8.6	9.0	9.1
Couple family with two incomes—1.75 AWE	4.5	4.7	4.4	9.6	10.0	9.0
Couple family with two incomes—2.5 AWE	4.9	5.0	4.1	9.9	10.2	8.3
Private long day care centres						
Sole parent receiving Parenting Payment—Studying	3.9	4.6	5.9	10.6	12.1	14.7
Sole parent working—0.75 AWE	2.6	3.0	3.2	7.0	7.8	7.9
Couple family with one income—AWE	3.0	3.5	3.9	7.5	8.5	9.0
Couple family with two incomes—1.75 AWE	4.2	4.6	4.3	8.9	9.6	8.9
Couple family with two incomes—2.5 AWE	4.6	4.9	4.0	9.4	9.9	8.2
Family day care services						
Sole parent receiving Parenting Payment—Studying	—	—	0.3	—	—	2.8
Sole parent working—0.75 AWE	—	—	0.1	—	—	1.5
Couple family with one income—AWE	0.8	0.9	1.6	1.7	2.1	4.0
Couple family with two incomes—1.75 AWE	3.0	3.3	3.3	6.0	6.6	6.8
Couple family with two incomes—2.5 AWE	3.9	4.1	3.6	7.4	8.4	7.2

Notes

1. Taxable income includes any earned income and Centrelink payments and allowances which are considered taxable (e.g. Parenting Payment). Gross income includes income, payments and allowances (including non-taxable items). Net income is gross income minus tax and Medicare levy, taking into account any tax offsets such as low-income earners rebate.
2. In couple families with one income, one parent is working, the other studying. In other couple families, both parents are working.
3. For couple families with two incomes, the taxable income split is assumed to be 1:0.75.
4. Average weekly earnings (AWE) at July 2000 were \$646.90.
5. Average weekly earnings (AWE) at November 2002 were \$688.40.
6. Average weekly earnings (AWE) at May 2004 were \$952.50.

Sources: ABS 2002; AIHW 2001; AIHW analysis of 2004 data.

Quality

Legislative regulations and accreditation systems are the two mechanisms for ensuring quality in the child care sector. The regulations specify the minimum standards which must be met in order for the service to operate. Accreditation processes, on the other hand, focus on measuring the quality aspects of the services that are delivered (NCAC 2003).

All states and territories license and regulate centre-based long day care and occasional care services. Family day care schemes and/or providers are licensed and regulated in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, while outside school hours care services are licensed and regulated in Queensland, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. Since child care licensing regulations vary across jurisdictions, in the early 1990s sets of national standards for long day care centres, family day care and outside school hours care services were developed by the Australian Government and state and territory governments and endorsed by the (then) Community Services Ministers Conference.

The Australian Government is responsible for accrediting all Australian Government-supported long day care centres, family day care schemes and outside school hours care services. It does this through the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QAIS) administered by the National Child Care Accreditation Council (NCAC) (Box 3.7). All of the above-mentioned services must participate in the QAIS in order to be approved for the Child Care Benefit funding through the CCSP as well as any other Australian Government funding (NCAC 2003).

The NCAC regularly publishes statistics on the accreditation status of long day care, family day care and outside school hours care services. Although the total number of accredited long day care services increased from 3,683 in June 2003 to 3,819 in June 2004, the proportion that were accredited declined slightly (Table 3.22). The proportion not accredited remained stable, while the proportion undergoing the process of accreditation increased slightly throughout the 2001 to 2004 period.

Box 3.7: Quality improvement systems

The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QAIS) began in 1994 as a way to provide accreditation to long day care centres that meet certain quality standards, and to indicate areas for potential improvement in these services. Since 1998, the QAIS has used 10 quality areas to form its underlying structure. Each quality area contains several principles. The quality areas and principles are intended both as a guide for long day care centres in improving their performance, and as a measurement tool for assessing centres for their accreditation status.

The 10 quality areas are: relationships with children; respect for children; partnerships with families; staff interactions; planning and evaluation; learning and development; protective care; health; safety; and managing to support quality. The principles within these areas cover such items as the equitable treatment of children, good teamwork of staff, the maintenance of records of children's learning and wellbeing, and the maintenance of appropriate health and safety standards. Contained within the areas and principles of the QAIS are the minimum standards required for state and territory government licensing of centres.

In order to gain accreditation through the QAIS, a centre must progress through five steps – registration, self-study, validation, moderation and accreditation. Accreditation currently lasts for two and a half years, at which time a service will be reassessed against the relevant criteria.

Source: NCAC 2003.

Workforce issues

The lack of qualified staff is part of a larger concern regarding the child care services workforce and quality of care issues. Many sources cite critical shortages and lack of retention of staff in the child care workforce as major problems facing the sector (CCCAC 2002; NSWCCYP 2002; SPRC 2004a). Child care workers are generally poorly paid and their jobs undervalued. The sector is characterised by limited career paths, poor working conditions and high workloads. As a result, many skilled workers move to other occupations (Tasman Economics 2001). Although it has been recognised that

higher pay would be beneficial, many services feel that they cannot offer increases as this would result in a similar increase in the cost of providing the service, which would then be passed on to parents (NSWCCYP 2002).

Associated with these workforce issues is the recognition that quality of child care service is strongly related to the training and experience of staff (Brennan 1998 cited in SPRC 2004b; Fleer 2002:39). In 2004, the proportion of staff with qualifications varied greatly depending on the type of service (FaCS 2005). During 2004, about 60% of the staff at long day care centres were appropriately qualified. This compared with 25% of family day care providers, 40% of outside school hours care and vacation care workers, and 47% of occasional care workers. In all service types, except family day care, less than 25% of staff had 3 or more years of experience in the child care sector (see Appendix Table A3.5).

In-service training is offered by many services as part of licensing requirements, with a high proportion of staff participating in such training during the 12 months prior to the census. The number of qualified workers in the child care sector may be bolstered due to legal requirements as to the ratio of qualified workers to children.

Many services rely on unpaid workers such as volunteers, work experience students, parents and trainees (Table 3.23). Although the proportion of unpaid workers in Australian Government-supported services is relatively small, this group plays an important role in the provision of services. However, little is known about unpaid workers, since most reports on the child care workforce have focused solely on its paid sector.

The information available on unpaid workers shows that they are present in all child care services types. The number of workers has fluctuated over time, ranging from 3,721 in 1997 (5% of the workforce) to 2,492 in 2004 (3%). Since 1999 the number of unpaid workers has declined. In 2004, unpaid workers were most highly represented in occasional care and other care services, with 7% of all staff being unpaid.

The second ABS survey of community services (ABS 2001) found that there were approximately 4,000 volunteers working in direct provision of child care services in 1999–2000. The number of volunteers has declined by 28% since 1995–96. This could be attributed to the increasing difficulty and expense of obtaining police checks and personal accident and/or public liability insurance for volunteers (Volunteering Queensland 2004), as well as the need to closely supervise volunteers.

Table 3.22: Accreditation status of Australian Government-supported long day care centres 1997–2004

Accreditation status	June 1997		July 1999		April 2001		June 2003		June 2004	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Accredited	2,799	68	3,584	87	3,669	91	3,683	87	3,819	85
Plan of action—not accredited	283	7	269	6	205	5	270	6	216	5
Undergoing process ^(a)	1,052	25	289	7	149	4	300	7	430	10
Total	4,134	100	4,142	100	4,023	100	4,253	100	4,465	100

(a) Includes in self-study, in review and in moderation or awaiting council decision.

Source: NCAC various years.

Table 3.23: Estimated number of paid and unpaid child care workers, 1997–2004

Type of service	1997		1999		2002		2004	
	Paid	Unpaid	Paid	Unpaid	Paid	Unpaid	Paid	Unpaid
Long day care centres	36,779	2,675	35,722	3,113	40,787	2,549	46,471	1,622
Community-based	13,703	841	12,173	1,009	17,069	1,162	18,124	669
Private-for-profit	23,076	1,834	23,549	2,104	23,718	1,387	28,347	953
Family day care coordination unit staff	1,663	53	1,580	31	1,693	36	1,770	33
Family day care providers ^(a)	14,039	..	12,691	..	13,047	..	12,018	..
Before/after school care	7,633	452	7,746	323	10,457	411	11,531	291
Vacation care	3,514	320	6,732	499	9,950	445	10,998	459
Occasional /other care ^(b)	1,494	221	1,296	185	1,581	129	1,105	87
Total^(c)	65,122	3,721	65,767	4,151	77,515	3,570	83,893	2,492

(a) Family day care providers are not categorised as paid/unpaid.

(b) Includes occasional care centres, multifunctional Aboriginal children's services, multifunctional children's services and also in-home care services in 2002.

(c) Totals do not include workers in vacation care, since many of these would have also been working in before/after school care services.

Note: Data are from the FaCS Census of Child Care Services and are adjusted for service provider non-response (weighted).

Source: FaCS Census of Child Care Services, various years.

3.6 Pathways from education to employment

The pathways that young people take from school to further education to employment, from family life to independent living and adulthood, have changed significantly since the 1980s, when less than half of school students went on to higher education. Typical pathways of those who were in Year 10 between 1986 and 1988, and who did not go on to higher education, were to take up full-time work immediately (20%), or after a brief interruption (24%), complete training such as an apprenticeship and then enter full-time work (13%), or undertake full-time study and then gain employment (12%). Almost one-third spent a considerable portion of their post-school years unemployed, working part-time or out of the labour force (ABS 2003c:96). Although many pathways were possible, they tended to be simple and linear in that people moved directly from education to work.

Since then the proportion of young people who complete Year 12 has more than doubled and the transition from education to employment is generally longer and may involve several steps. Of students who were in Year 9 in 1995, 79% completed Year 12. Almost half of these went on to higher education. For those who did not, the transition from school to full-time work took many forms, including intermittent casual or part-time employment, further study, periods of job searching and unemployment. Of those who did not complete Year 12, 11% were unemployed in 2000, while the most common experience was working full-time in 2000. For both those who completed Year 12 and those who did not, combining part-time study with full-time work was relatively common (22% and 28% respectively) (ABS 2003c:96). Australia's open education system means that young people have many options available to them in terms of combining work and study, and moving from work back to study. This section examines the trends in educational retention, participation and employment of young people.

Education

Education is important for the overall wellbeing of young people as well as the productive capacity of society. An educated workforce contributes to a prosperous society. Education and training increase young people's chances of making a successful transition into the workforce. More broadly, all educational institutions including schools, technical and further education colleges and universities provide opportunities for social interaction. Participating in education promotes feelings of connectedness to the school community and has flow-on effects to the academic side of schooling as well (Fullarton 2002). This section presents an overview of student achievement at different points in their education, retention rates and participation rates of children and young people in school and post-secondary settings.

Literacy and numeracy

Proficiency in literacy and numeracy is regarded as essential to being able to participate in the daily routines of life and successfully undertake further education, development or training. In Australia, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) has established national benchmarks for reading, writing and numeracy (Table 3.24), which represent minimum standards of performance below which students will have difficulty progressing satisfactorily at school.

One use of these benchmarks is to identify children who are at risk and target intervention strategies to improve their chances of educational success. The data show that most children in Australia are achieving the minimum standard. (See also Chapter 2, Section 2.3.)

Table 3.24: Students in Years 3 and 5 meeting national benchmarks, 1999–2002 (per cent)

	Reading				Writing				Numeracy			
	1999	2000	2001	2002	1999	2000	2001	2002	1999	2000	2001	2002
Year 3 students												
Males	87.9	90.9	88.4	90.6	90.0	87.4	86.4	91.8	n.a.	92.7	93.7	92.5
Females	92.0	94.3	92.3	94.1	93.9	92.6	92.7	95.5	n.a.	92.8	94.3	93.1
Year 5 students												
Males	83.4	85.2	87.8	87.2	91.4	90.2	91.9	91.5	n.a.	89.4	89.5	89.9
Females	88.4	89.6	92.0	91.5	95.4	94.9	96.2	95.7	n.a.	89.5	89.8	90.2

Source: MCEETYA 2002b.

In addition to national benchmarking, Australia participates in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which measures students' reading, mathematics and science literacy across OECD countries. It aims to assess the extent to which students, who are generally in their final year of compulsory schooling, have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society, to reveal factors that influence the development of these skills at home and at school, and to examine what the implications are for policy development (DEST 2004).

Australian students did very well in both the 2000 and 2002 testing. In 2002, only Korea and Japan performed significantly better. Australian students did as well as or better than the OECD average on all but one of the items on the test. The very best of the

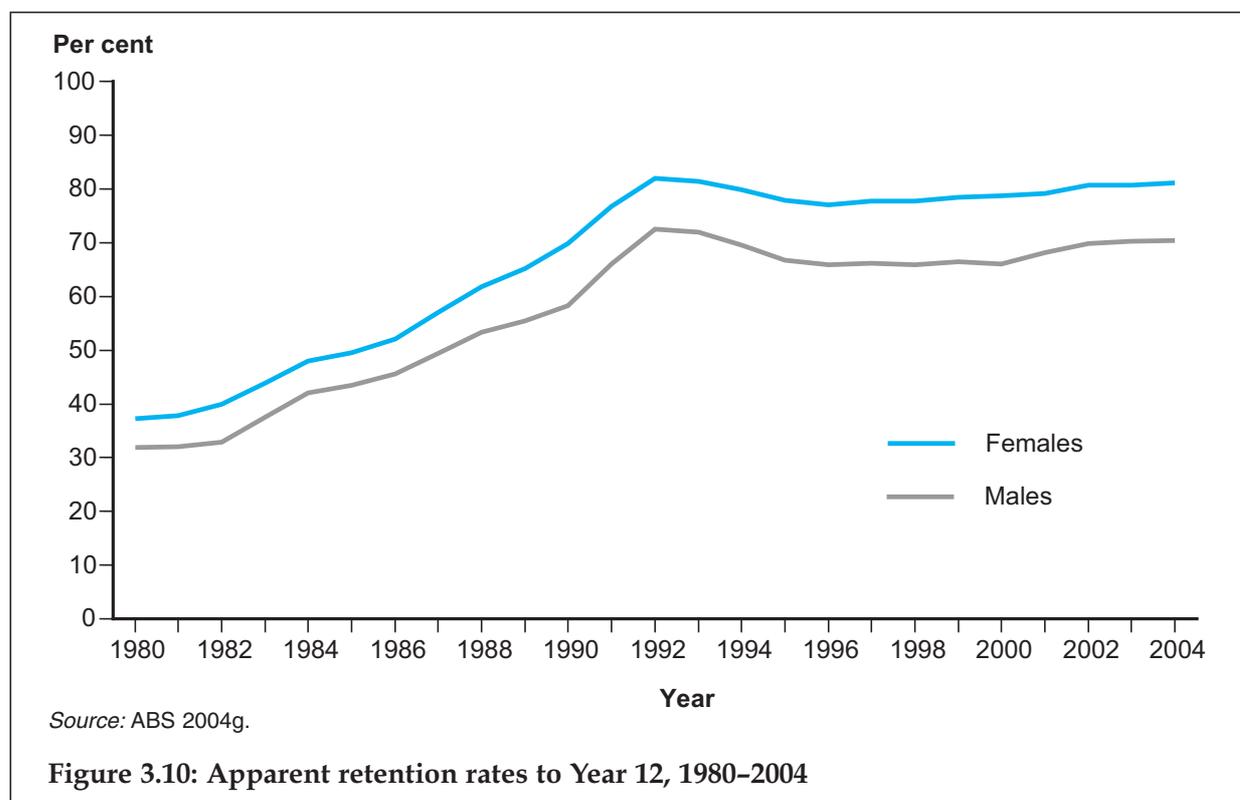
Australian students did as well as the very best from other countries and the spread of scores for the top 75% of Australian students was less than the OECD average. However, for the lowest achieving 25% of students the range of scores was similar to the range across the OECD for these lower achieving students.

The PISA results highlighted a number of areas of concern for Australia: Indigenous students performed poorly in all three areas of testing; boys did not perform as well as girls; and children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds did not perform as well as those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. In contrast, countries such as Finland, Korea and Canada have both a high average performance and a narrow range of scores. Further, the correlation between student social background and student performance was much lower in Korea and Finland. Both these findings suggest that it is possible to achieve both quality and equity in educational outcomes (McGaw 2002).

Retention rates

It is becoming increasingly important for young people to complete Year 12. Those who leave school before completing Year 10 or Year 12 limit their chances of getting a job as employers increasingly require post-secondary qualifications (DSF 2002). Even so, other options exist for young people who do not complete Year 12, such as post-school training or apprenticeships.

The apparent retention rate measures the proportion of students who remain in secondary school from the start of Year 7 until the completion of Year 12 (see Section 2.3 in Chapter 2). Nationally, apparent retention rates increased rapidly during the 1980s, and more gradually from the mid-1990s (Figure 3.10). In 1980, 32% of males and 37% of females completed Year 12, compared to 70% of males and 81% of females in 2004.



The trend was interrupted by a period of high unemployment and fewer job opportunities in the early 1990s which led to a peak in the proportion of young people remaining at school. Throughout the period retention rates remained higher for females than males. The difference between their rates was 5% in 1980. This gender gap has since widened to 11% in 2004.

Participation rates

The shift in Australia to a greater emphasis on lifelong learning means that it is useful to examine participation in education beyond compulsory schooling. Education participation rates of young people have been steadily increasing over the last decade (Table 3.25). These rates measure participation in school and post-secondary school studies for young people aged 15–24 years. They include full and part-time studies at school, TAFE, colleges and tertiary institutions.

The education participation rates of 15–19 year olds increased from 73.1% in 1994 to a peak of 77.3% in 2000. Since then they have fallen slightly to 75.2% in 2004. Over the same period, education participation rates for the 20–24 age group followed a similar trend, with a peak of 37.8% in 2002. Overall, participation was 10% higher in 2004 than in 1994.

Table 3.25: Education participation rates for young people, 1994–2004 (per cent)

Age	1994	1996	1998	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
15–19 years	73.1	72.8	77.0	77.3	76.7	76.0	76.9	75.2
20–24 years	26.8	30.2	31.7	34.3	35.1	37.8	37.6	36.4

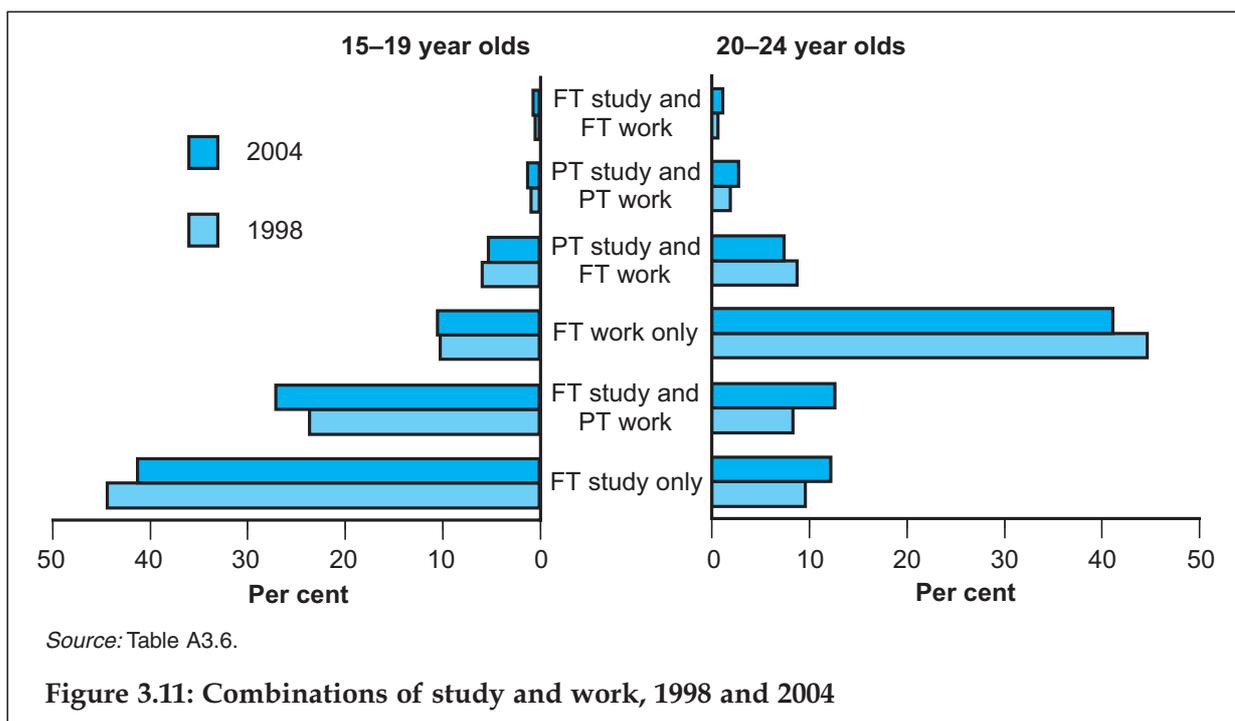
Source: ABS 2004h.

It is becoming increasingly common for young people to combine work and study, starting from their schooldays. Overall, 29% of young people aged 15–24 combined work and study in some way in 2004 (Figure 3.11). However, the combination of part-time work with part-time study was uncommon, suggesting that either work or study takes precedence. In 2004, one-third of 15–19 year olds combined work and study. Between 1998 and 2004 the proportion who were studying full-time and working part-time increased from 24% to 27%. Although the most common experience of this group was full-time study alone, the proportion choosing this option fell from 44% to 41%.

The patterns changed quite markedly as people left school and moved into their early twenties. One-quarter of people aged 20–24 years combined work and study in 2004, increasing from 20% in 1998. Those working full-time were still the largest group (45%) but the size of this group had declined. This suggests that many young people are extending the period spent in study of some kind, either full- or part-time, and delaying taking up full-time work.

Participation in employment

The patterns described above are consistent with longer term trends in the youth labour market. The most notable change has been an increase in participation in education and a consequent deferral of entry into the full-time, long-term labour market. Associated with this has been an increased participation in part-time work.



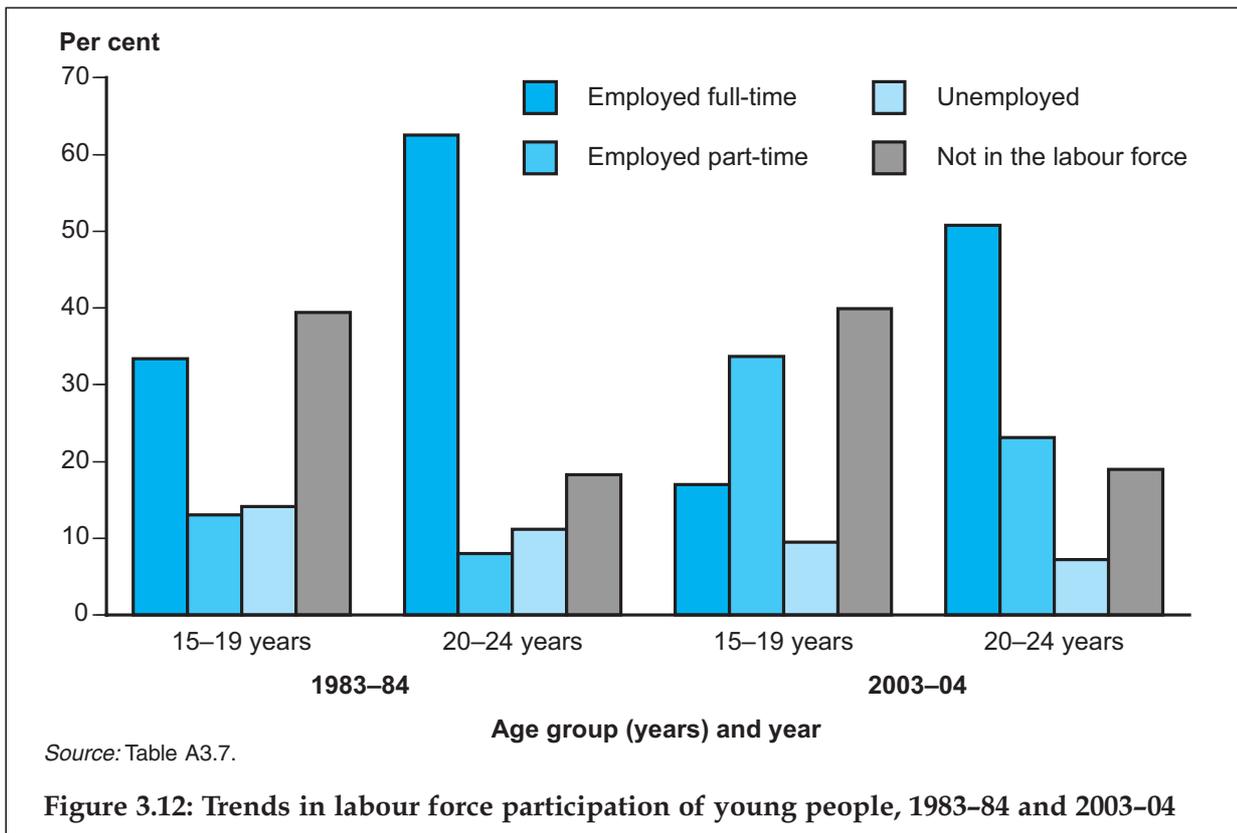
Young people are more likely to be employed than 20 years ago. Between 1983–84 and 2003–04, the proportion of young people aged 15–24 years who were employed increased from 59% to 62% (Figure 3.12). However, the most notable change was in the hours that young people worked. Between 1983–84 and 2003–04, the proportion of young people in full-time employment declined, halving for those aged 15–19 years, from 33% to 17%, and falling from 63% to 51% for young people aged 20–24 years. Over the same period, the proportion employed part-time increased from 13% to 34% for 15–19 year olds, and from 8% to 23% for 20–24 year olds. Over the 10 year period, the proportion of young people who were unemployed also fell slightly, from 14% to 9% for those aged 15–19 years, and from 11% to 7% for those aged 20–24 years.

In the face of these quite substantial changes, the proportion of young people not in the labour force has remained virtually the same – about 40% of 15–19 year olds and 19% of 20–24 year olds. Many of those not in the labour force were in full-time education or, for young women aged 20–24 years, looking after their own children.

3.7 Risks associated with childhood and youth

There is much evidence that the health and wellbeing of children can be dependent on the environment they grow up in. A child who is raised in a supportive, nurturing environment will more likely have better social, behavioural and health outcomes. The reverse is true as well (Tennant et al. 2003).

Child protection services in each jurisdiction provide assistance for some of the more vulnerable children in society. This may be due to child abuse or neglect, or the parent’s inability to care for the child. The services range from advice to family support to out-of-home care.



There are well-developed relationships between the welfare of a child and criminal offending later in life. In fact, neglect is considered to be one of the strongest predictors of later youth offending (Weatherburn & Lind 1997).

This section discusses children and young people in the child protection system and also young people in the juvenile justice system. Children and young people as victims of crime are also discussed.

Child protection and out-of-home care services

Child protection is the responsibility of the community services department in each state and territory. Children who come into contact with the department for protective reasons include those:

- who have been, or are being, abused or neglected or otherwise harmed; and
- whose parents cannot provide adequate care or protection.

The aim of child protection services is to protect children and young people who are at risk of harm within their families, or whose families do not have the capacity to protect them. The services include:

- receiving and responding to reports of concern about children and young people, including investigation and assessment where appropriate;
- providing support services (directly or through referral) where harm or a risk of significant harm is identified, to strengthen the capacity of families to care safely for their children;

- initiating intervention where necessary, including applying for a care and protection order through a court and, in some situations, placing children or young people in out-of-home care to secure their safety;
- ensuring the ongoing safety of children and young people by working with families to resolve protective concerns;
- working with families to reunite children (who were removed for safety reasons) with their parents as soon as possible; and
- securing permanent out-of-home/alternative care when it is determined that a child is unable to be returned to the care of his or her parents, and working with young people to identify alternative supported living arrangements where family reunification is not possible (SCRCSSP 2005:15.2–15.3).

This section examines trends in these services over the last 5 years. Some data on trends for Indigenous children are also provided.

Data sources

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has collected the national child protection data since the early 1990s. The data cover four main areas of child protection, namely:

- child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations (formerly referred to as child abuse and neglect);
- children on care and protection orders;
- children in out-of-home care; and
- Intensive Family Support Services.

The national child protection data were extracted from the administrative systems of the state and territory community services departments according to definitions and counting rules agreed to by the departments and the Institute. For more information about child protection processes, see *Child Protection Australia 2003–04* (AIHW 2005b).

Children who are in need of protection

The purpose of child protection services is to respond to reports of concerns about children and to identify those who are in need of protection from abuse, neglect or harm. Concerns about children can be brought to the attention of the community services departments by parents, other relatives, children themselves, by people outside the family or by professionals who have contact with children and families.

Many families involved with community services departments have complex needs and experience a range of problems. These may include financial difficulties, limited social support networks, domestic violence, emotional health problems, health issues and problems with unsafe, unsanitary or uninhabitable housing (Layton 2003).

For example, a 2002 Victorian study examined the characteristics of parents of children in substantiated cases of abuse or neglect. It found that 73% of these parents had at least one issue or problem in addition to the child protection concern. Of these, 52%

experienced domestic violence, 33% substance abuse, 31% alcohol abuse, 19% had a psychiatric disability, 4% a physical disability and 3% an intellectual disability. Two or more of these problems were experienced by 44% of the parents (VicDHS 2002).

The findings above are similar to those of an audit of 150 children under the guardianship of the Minister in the Australian Capital Territory. The audit found that 56% of parents used drugs and/or alcohol excessively; 49% had repeated incidences of domestic violence; 38% had a parent with diagnosed mental illness or personality disorder; and 15% of families had a parent with a criminal history or a parent currently in gaol (Murray 2004).

Socioeconomic status is another important factor related to child abuse and neglect. Available data indicate that children in the child protection system are most likely to be from families with low socioeconomic status. While data are not available on this at the national level, studies in a number of jurisdictions demonstrate the link between child protection and economic disadvantage.

For example, the Social Health Atlas of Young South Australians (Tennant et al. 2003) investigated the correlation of substantiated child protection cases with a number of social indicators. The study found a strong relationship between substantiations and children living in dwellings with no motor vehicles, dwellings rented from SA Housing Trust, low-income families and single-parent families.

The high rates of Indigenous children in the child protection system are consistent with these findings. The national child protection data show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are nearly 10 times more likely than other Australian children to be the subject of a child protection substantiation, and are over six times more likely to be in out-of-home care (AIHW 2005b). The generally lower socioeconomic status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is likely to be a key reason for this over-representation.

Family disruption appears to be another important factor associated with involvement in the child protection system. The national child protection data show that children from one-parent families and from step or blended families form a higher proportion of substantiated cases than the children in other family types (AIHW 2005b).

Use of child protection services

This section provides information on notifications, investigations and substantiations (Box 3.9).

Notifications, investigations and substantiations

Table 3.26 shows rates of notifications, investigations and substantiations by state and territory over the 5 years from 1999–00 to 2003–04. Trends in these rates are not simple to present or interpret. The data are a measure of the activity of the community services departments, so are influenced by legislation, policies, practices and data systems. The area is constantly evolving, so even comparing one year's data to the next within a jurisdiction can be very misleading.

Increases in notifications may be due to more children requiring a child protection response, for example, due to an increase in the incidence of child abuse and neglect or

inadequate parenting causing harm to a child. However, changes in the data from year to year are more likely to be a result of:

- increased reporting by professionals as a result of the mandatory reporting provisions in most jurisdictions;
- increased community awareness due to media and departmental campaigns about child abuse and neglect and the role of community service departments in this area; or
- changes to policies, practices and data reporting methods.

Box 3.9: Definitions for notifications, investigations and substantiations

***Notification** – a contact made to the authorised department by persons or other bodies making allegations of child abuse and neglect, child maltreatment or harm to a child. The data on child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations in the national data collection relate to those notifications received by community services departments between 1 July and 30 June of the relevant financial year.*

***Investigation** – the process whereby the community services department obtains more detailed information about a child who is the subject of a notification and makes an assessment of the degree of harm or risk of harm for the child. After an investigation is completed, a notification will either be ‘substantiated’ or ‘not substantiated’.*

***Substantiation** – a notification will be substantiated where it is concluded after investigation that the child has been, is being or is likely to be abused or neglected or otherwise harmed.*

Not all notifications are investigated. Some do not warrant investigation. Some are dealt with by other means, such as family support or referral to another service, and some are unable to be investigated as the information is incomplete or the child is unable to be located.

Examination of national data indicates that the rate per 1,000 children who were the subject of a notification, investigation or substantiation has steadily increased over the past 5 years. National trends, however, mask the different trends that have occurred in each state and territory. Increases in numbers of children in the child protection system in one jurisdiction can cancel out decreases in another, so that what has occurred in each jurisdiction can vary significantly from the national patterns.

In particular, policy changes within jurisdictions can have a major impact on the number of children in the child protection system. For example, between 1999–00 and 2003–04 the rate per 1,000 children of child protection notifications in New South Wales increased considerably, from 16.4 to 46.7. However, this increase is not necessarily due to increases in the level of child abuse and neglect in New South Wales. In December 2000, the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* was proclaimed. This

Act introduced a central intake system and also broadened mandatory reporting requirements in New South Wales. While the rate of notifications did increase during the period 2000 to 2002, the department's data system did not have the capacity to record the new policies and practices correctly. This changed in 2002–03, when the KiDS system was implemented. The new system recorded the activity of the department more accurately, making notifications appear to have doubled, when in fact this simply reflected more accurate reporting.

Over the same period, substantiations did not increase to the same extent as notifications, but this is mainly because a new category – carer/family concerns – was introduced for those years. About 5,000 cases were included in this category in both years. This category was removed in 2002–03, and those cases are again recorded as substantiations. This example illustrates how changes to the administrative recording systems impact on the quality and reliability of the time series, with New South Wales being an obvious case in point. These types of issues should be taken into consideration when interpreting trend data for each state. Such changes in recording practices and policies make comparison of data within states from year to year very difficult and comparison of differences among states almost impossible.

Another interesting example is in Tasmania. Prior to 2003–04, notifications were made to individual area offices and further examination was conducted before the call was recorded on the system as a notification. This changed in 2003–04 when a central intake system was introduced. Now all calls relevant to child protection concerns are recorded as a notification and as a result it falsely appears that notifications have increased 10-fold (from 4.8 to 47 per 1,000).

It is also not possible to compare across the states and territories, given the differences in policies and practices. The wide range in the rates per 1,000 of children in each category is more an indication of how each jurisdiction defines these practices, rather than a true variation in the levels of abuse and neglect in each jurisdiction. For more information on these differences, see Bromfield 2005.

Care and protection orders and out-of-home care

Children on care and protection orders

At any point in the child protection process (from notification, through investigation to substantiation), the community services department can apply to the relevant court to place the child on a care and protection order. Such action is usually taken only as a last resort in situations where the department believes that continued involvement with the child is warranted. This may occur in situations where supervision and counselling are resisted by the family, where other avenues for resolution of the situation have been exhausted, or where removal of a child into out-of-home care requires legal authorisation.

There was a 15% increase in the number of children on care and protection orders across Australia between 30 June 2000 and June 2003 – from 19,262 to 22,130 (Figure 3.13). The number continued to rise between 2002–03 and 2003–04 in all of the states and territories that provided data (AIHW 2005b). Increases were particularly large in the Northern Territory, where the number increased by 26%, in the Australian Capital Territory (25%), and in Queensland (19%) (AIHW 2005b:33).

Table 3.26: Children aged 0–16 years who were the subject of a substantiation, investigation or notification, 1999–00 to 2003–04

Year	NSW ^(a)	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Rate per 1,000 children who were the subject of a notification									
1999–00	16.4	24.9	16.9	5.2	28.5	2.1	13.0	20.3	17.9
2000–01	20.7	25.7	18.8	5.7	21.4	2.7	9.2	20.9	19.5
2001–02	25.3	25.9	21.9	5.9	23.3	4.0	9.2	23.5	21.9
2002–03	43.3	26.0	24.4	4.7	27.0	4.8	20.2	24.6	28.8
2003–04	46.7	25.6	27.5	4.9	29.9	47.0 ^(b)	37.5	29.6	32.0
Rate per 1,000 children who were the subject of an investigation									
1999–00	8.0	10.2	9.3	4.7	11.4	1.9	10.4	10.0	8.6
2000–01	10.8	10.7	11.0	4.8	11.9	2.0	7.0	11.7	10.0
2001–02	13.3	10.4	12.3	4.8	12.7	3.3	6.2	13.4	11.1
2002–03	11.8	10.2	14.7	3.9	13.8	3.8	9.0	12.3	11.1
2003–04	n.a.	9.9	19.3	4.2	14.2	6.2	11.6	16.5	n.a.
Rate per 1,000 children who were the subject of a substantiation									
1999–00	3.9	6.3	5.6	2.3	5.1	0.7	2.6	6.2	4.7
2000–01	4.4	6.3	7.4	2.5	5.0	1.9	2.8	5.8	5.3
2001–02	4.8	6.5	8.3	2.4	5.3	1.4	2.7	5.8	5.6
2002–03	7.5	6.3	10.1	1.9	5.8	1.8	3.6	5.7	6.8
2003–04	n.a.	6.4	14.0	2.0	5.9	3.0	6.7	8.7	n.a.

(a) NSW was unable to provide data on investigations and substantiations for 2003–04 due to ongoing implementation of a new data system.

(b) Data for 2003–04 and previous years should not be compared because of a change in recording practices due to the centralisation of the intake service, known as the Child Protection Advice and Referral Service.

Sources: AIHW 2005b; AIHW unpublished data.

Children in out-of-home care

While children may be placed in out-of-home care as well as on a care and protection order, the two data collections are separate (see Box 3.10 for definitions). The trend in out-of-home care was of increasing numbers of children using the services. Between June 2000 and June 2004 the number of children in out-of-home care increased from 16,923 to 21,795, an increase of 29% (Table 3.27; Figure 3.13). The rate rose from 3.6 children per 1,000 in 2000 to 4.5 per 1,000 in 2004 (AIHW 2003). Growth in the use of out-of-home care occurred in all jurisdictions over the period (Table 3.27). There were particularly large increases in Queensland (68%), and New South Wales and the Northern Territory (30% and 47%, respectively).

There are several reasons for the rise in the number of children on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care from 2000 onwards. At the broad level, it indicates an increasing number of children in families who are considered unable to adequately care for them. This may be due to growing pressures on families through, for example, increases in joblessness, family disruption, substance abuse or family violence. It may also reflect changing community standards in relation to child safety. The increase corresponds to the growing number of child protection notifications that occurred in most jurisdictions during the same period.

Table 3.27: Number of children aged 0–17 years in out-of-home care, at 30 June 2000–04

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
2000	7,041	3,867	2,634	1,326	1,131	548	200	176	16,923
2001	7,786	3,882	3,011	1,436	1,175	572	215	164	18,241
2002	8,084	3,918	3,257	1,494	1,196	544	224	163	18,880
2003	8,636	4,046	3,787	1,615	1,245	468	277	223	20,297
2004	9,145	4,309	4,413	1,681	1,204	487	298	258	21,795

Source: AIHW 2005b.

Box 3.10: Care and protection orders and out-of-home care

Care and protection orders are legal or administrative orders or arrangements which give community services departments some responsibility for a child's welfare. The level of responsibility varies with the type of order or arrangement. These orders include guardianship and custody orders; supervision and other finalised orders; and interim and temporary orders.

Out-of-home care is defined as out-of-home overnight care for children and young people under 18 years of age where the state or territory makes a financial payment. It includes residential care, foster care and relative/kinship care. Children in out-of-home care can be placed in a variety of living arrangements or placement types. The following categories are used in the national data collection:

Home-based care – where placement is in the home of a carer who is reimbursed for expenses incurred in caring for the child. This category is further divided into:

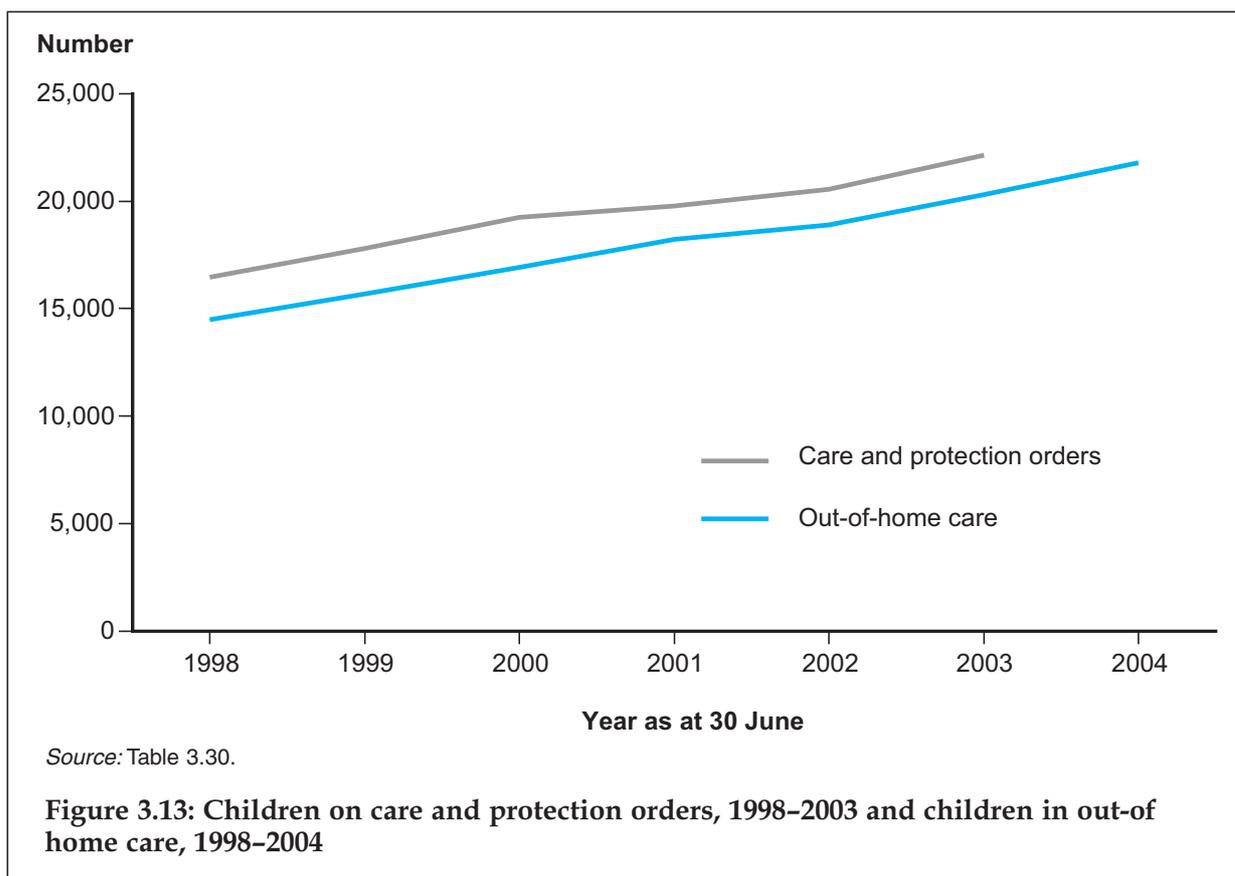
- relative/kinship care – where the caregiver is a family member or a person with a pre-existing relationship to the child;*
- foster care – where care is provided in the private home of a substitute family which receives a payment which is intended to cover the child's living expenses;*
- other home-based care – care in private homes that does not fit into the above categories.*

Residential care – where placement is in a residential building whose purpose is to provide placements for children and where there are paid staff.

Family group homes – these provide short-term care in departmentally-owned homes. These homes do not have salaried staff but are available rent free to approved carers, who receive board payments to reimburse them for the cost of looking after the children in their care.

Independent living – where young people are living independently, such as those in private boarding arrangements and lead-tenant households.

In the national data, the number of children on orders and the number of children in out-of-home care are counted at 30 June of the relevant year and are therefore a prevalence measure.



Types of out-of-home care

Between 2000 and 2004 a number of changes occurred in the proportion of children placed in different types of out-of-home care. The number of children in residential care decreased over the period, falling from 1,222 to 1,037 (this number includes children in family group homes) (Table 3.28). This decrease continues the longer term trend towards the deinstitutionalisation of children that began in the late 1960s (Johnstone 2001). Residential facilities nowadays are generally small, with less than 10 children living together. They can enable large sibling groups to be placed together and cater for children with complex needs. The children in residential care also tend to be older. This is a far cry from the institutions used in the past. A parliamentary inquiry was held during 2004 to examine the use of these institutions and the outcomes for people who accessed these services during the early part of the 20th century (Box 3.11 on page 115).

Over the same period, there was an increase in the number of children who were in home-based care arrangements. The proportion of children living in home-based care increased from 90% in 2000 to 94% in 2004 (Table 3.28). The trend towards more home-based care reflects policies of placing children, particularly young children, in a home-based rather than residential environment where possible.

In the last 5 years, the proportion of children in different types of home-based care has changed. Foster care is still the main type of out-of-home care, with the proportion of children placed in it relatively stable at just over 50%. The proportion of children living with relatives/kin on the other hand has increased – from 38% at 30 June 2001 to 40% at 30 June 2004.

Table 3.28: Children in out-of-home care, 30 June 2000–04

Type of care	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
	Number				
Foster care	n.a.	9,429	9,668	10,348	11,589
Relative/kinship care	n.a.	6,940	7,439	8,069	8,618
Other home-based care	n.a.	192	164	217	268
<i>Total home-based care^(a)</i>	<i>15,169</i>	<i>16,561</i>	<i>17,271</i>	<i>18,634</i>	<i>20,475</i>
Family group homes ^(b)	..	..	..	..	67
Residential care	1,222	1,177	1,057	1,063	970
Independent living ^(b)	208	203	221	210	221
Other ^(c)	324	300	331	390	62
Total	16,923	18,241	18,880	20,297	21,795
	Per cent				
Foster care	n.a.	52	51	51	53
Relative/kinship care	n.a.	38	39	40	40
Other home-based care	n.a.	1	1	1	1
<i>Total home-based care</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>92</i>	<i>94</i>
Family group homes ^(b)	..	..	..	..	—
Residential care	7	6	6	5	5
Independent living ^(b)	1	1	1	1	1.0
Other ^(c)	2	2	2	2	0.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100

(a) Data on type of home-based care could not be provided by all jurisdictions in 2000.

(b) Included with 'Residential care' prior to 2003–04.

(c) Includes unknown living arrangements.

Source: AIHW Child Protection Australia, various years.

National Plan for Foster Children, Young People and their Carers 2004–06

The National Plan for Foster Children, Young People and their Carers was developed for the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference (CDSMC) by the Australian and state and territory governments. This plan was developed in recognition of the importance of foster carers and the impact they have on the lives of children in the out-of-home care system. The plan centres on children in foster care and on improving their wellbeing and life chances (CDSMC 2003). There are four main areas of focus: training, research, uniform data collection, and support. National standards for foster care are being developed, and the intention is to incorporate these into the jurisdictions' own guidelines. Also, the AIHW has been invited by the states and territories to aid in the development of a data collection on foster carers and relative/kin care.

Trends for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system is well documented. For example, in 2003–04 the rate of

substantiations in Indigenous families was 10 times higher than for other families in Victoria and around 8 times higher in Western Australia and South Australia (AIHW 2005b). This section includes trends of Indigenous children subject to child protection substantiations, on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care.

The quality of the data on Indigenous status is one of the major issues to be considered when analysing trends for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children since data quality varies across jurisdictions and over time. Increases in the recorded number of Indigenous children in the child protection system over time may therefore be due to improvements in the quality of the data.

Substantiations

The available data indicate that the rate per 1,000 Indigenous children aged 0–16 years who were the subject of a substantiation increased in all jurisdictions except Western Australia between 1999–00 and 2003–04 (Table 3.29).

Care and protection orders and out-of-home care

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on care and protection orders increased considerably between June 2000 and June 2003, from 3,861 to 4,803 (24%). The number of other children on care and protection orders rose by only 13% over the same period (Table 3.30). The number of Indigenous children in out-of-home care also increased, from 3,496 in 2000 to 5,059 in 2004 (a 45% rise). In comparison, the number of other children in out-of-home care increased by 25%.

Box 3.11: Forgotten Australians – a report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children

On 30 August 2004 the Senate Community Affairs Committee tabled the report, Forgotten Australians. The report focused on children who were in institutional and out-of-home care, mainly from the 1920s, until deinstitutionalisation in the 1970s began to see large institutions replaced by smaller residential homes, foster care or other out-of-home care options. Upwards of, and possibly more than, 500,000 Australians experienced care in an orphanage, home or other form of out-of-home care during this period. The report included information on the role of governments and churches in placing children in care, the treatment of children in care and the long-term effects of experiences while in care. The issues of responsibility, acknowledgement and reparation were also canvassed, as were issues relating to the accessing of records and information, and the provision of wide-ranging services for care leavers, which are critical to ensuring that they and their families can improve their quality of life.

A second report, Protecting Vulnerable Children: A National Challenge, was tabled on 17 March 2005. This report focused on contemporary foster care issues, children in care with disabilities and the contemporary government and legal framework in which child welfare and protection issues operate.

The processes for preparing a response to the recommendations in both reports are currently underway.

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle outlines preferences for the placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children when they are placed outside their immediate family (Lock 1997:50):

- with the child's extended family;
- within the child's Indigenous community; then
- with other Indigenous people.

All jurisdictions have adopted the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle either in legislation or policy. The impact of the Principle is reflected in the relatively high proportions of Indigenous children who were placed either with Indigenous caregivers or with relatives in many jurisdictions (Figure 3.14).

At 30 June 2004, the proportion of Indigenous children who were placed in accordance with the Principle ranged from 81% in Western Australia to 40% in Tasmania. The relatively low proportion of children who were placed with an Indigenous carer or relative/kin in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory is probably related to the small size of the Indigenous population as well as issues related to the identification of Indigenous status in that state (AIHW 2003).

Table 3.29: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–16 years who were the subject of a substantiation, 1999–00 to 2003–04 (per 1,000 children)

Year	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas ^(a)	ACT ^(a)	NT
1999–00	13.2	48.5	9.3	11.9	31.6	0.5	3.7	7.7
2000–01	14.9	50.9	12.4	12.6	29.4	0.3	12.1	6.8
2001–02	15.4	48.4	14.3	13.6	31.8	0.3	6.6	9.7
2002–03	31.9 ^(b)	55.3	15.6	9.6 ^(c)	32.0	2.5	19.4	8.6
2003–04	n.a. ^(d)	57.7	20.8	11.2	39.9	1.6	25.3	16.2

(a) Rates from Tas and ACT should be interpreted with care due to small numbers. Any fluctuation in numbers of children has a large impact on rates.

(b) The data for 2002–03 and previous years should not be compared. NSW implemented a modification to the data system to support legislation and practice changes during 2002–03 which would make any comparison inaccurate.

(c) The decline in number of substantiations is due to decreased number of notifications.

(d) NSW were unable to provide data due to ongoing implementation of the data system.

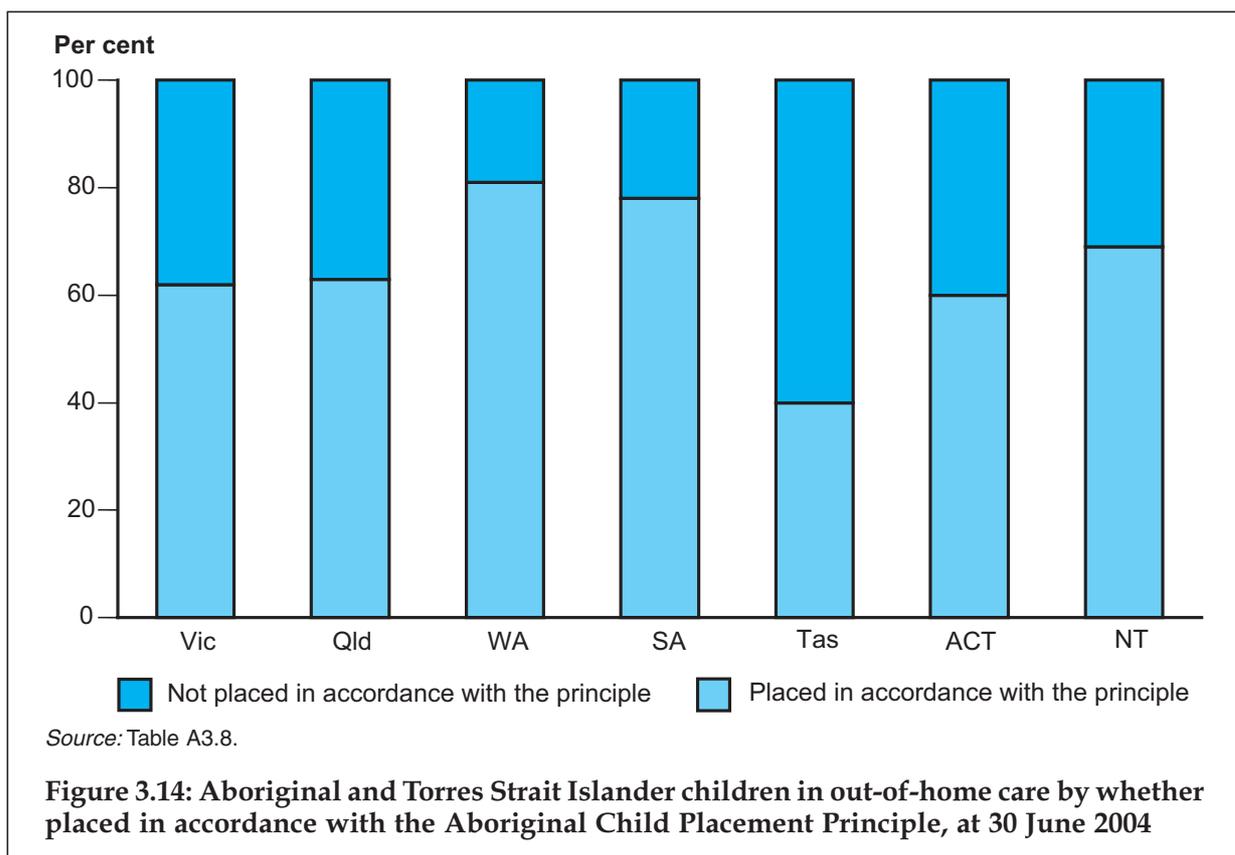
Source: AIHW 2005b.

Table 3.30: Children on care and protection orders and children in out-of-home care, June 2000 to June 2004

	Children on care and protection orders			Children in out-of-home care		
	Indigenous	Other children	Total	Indigenous	Other children	Total
2000	3,861	15,401	19,262	3,496	13,427	16,923
2001	4,146	15,637	19,783	4,037	14,168	18,205
2002	4,264	16,293	20,557	4,199	14,681	18,880
2003	4,803	17,327	22,130	4,750	15,547	20,297
2004	n.a. ^(a)	n.a. ^(a)	n.a. ^(a)	5,059	16,736	21,795

(a) National totals could not be calculated because data were not available from NSW in 2003–04 due to ongoing implementation of the data system.

Source: AIHW 2005b.



Data developments

There are significant gaps in the current national data on child protection. Apart from the intensive family support services data, there are no other data at the national level on the support services used by children in need of protection and their families. Work is currently being undertaken by National Child Protection and Support Services (NCPASS) to broaden the scope of the national data collection and to improve comparability. A new national framework has been developed to count responses to calls received by community services departments in relation to the safety and wellbeing of children, including responses that occur outside the formal child protection system. Data elements such as the provision of advice and information, and assessment of needs, as well as general and intensive family support services, are incorporated into the new framework. National reporting will be aligned to this framework over the next few years.

Juvenile justice

The responsibility for juvenile justice in Australia rests within the community services sector, rather than the correctional sector. There are well-established connections between the welfare of young people and their involvement in juvenile offending. Several welfare issues are consistently related to youth offending, including:

- poor parental supervision of the child, parental rejection of the child, child's rejection of the parent, low parent-child involvement, harsh and authoritarian discipline, parental conflict (Farrington 1995; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber 1986);

- physical abuse and neglect (Stewart et al. 2002; Weatherburn & Lind 1997);
- high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage (Lynch et al. 2003); and
- substantiated child protection notifications (Lynch et al. 2003).

Neglect is considered to be one of the strongest predictors of later youth offending (Weatherburn & Lind 1997). Factors leading to child neglect include economic hardship, housing inadequacy, poor social support networks, poor family functioning, and parental and child characteristics (Salmelainen 1996).

A survey of young people in detention in New South Wales found that they experienced a range of health problems, including alcohol consumption in the hazardous/harmful range, injecting drug use, intellectual disability, symptoms of psychiatric disorders, symptoms of personality disorders, psychosocial problems, suicide and self-harm. These factors combine with low levels of accessing health care outside the juvenile justice system (Allerton & Champion 2003).

The juvenile justice system seeks to reduce youth offending. A major part of this process is to address the risk factors associated with offending. Many of these risk factors are welfare related, and as such, the juvenile justice system becomes an important vehicle for the provision of welfare services to young offenders.

During childhood, some young people will have an encounter with the criminal justice system. Most episodes of juvenile offending behaviour are relatively minor and transient in nature, confined to one-off events (Carcach & Leverett 1999). A very small proportion of children have more serious interaction with the juvenile justice system leading to outcomes such as community service orders or sentences involving detention in custody. It is these children who are most vulnerable to continued and more serious offending later in life (Makkai & Payne 2003).

How the juvenile justice system operates

The juvenile justice system is responsible for dealing with young people who have committed or allegedly committed an offence while considered to be a 'juvenile'. Juvenile justice is a state and territory responsibility and each has its own legislation that dictates the policies and practices of juvenile justice within its jurisdiction. While this varies in detail, the intent of the legislation is very similar across Australia. For example, key principles of juvenile justice in all jurisdictions include: diversion of young people from court where appropriate; incarceration as a last resort; victim's rights; the acceptance of responsibility by the offender for his or her behaviour; and community safety.

One of the ways in which the legislation varies across states and territories is in the definition of a 'juvenile'. In Queensland, juvenile justice legislation applies to those people aged 10–16 years at the time of offence. However, in most other jurisdictions those who were aged 10–17 years are included as juveniles. Victoria's legislation was previously similar to Queensland's, but from July 2005, it applies to juveniles aged 10–17 years. Victoria also has a sentencing option for adult courts which allows 17–20 year olds to be sentenced to detention in juvenile justice facilities where appropriate.

The juvenile justice system in each state and territory comprises several organisations, each having a different primary role and responsibility in dealing with young offenders:

- the police, who are usually the young person's first point of contact with the justice system;
- the courts (usually a special children's or youth court), where matters regarding the charges against the young person are heard. The courts are largely responsible for decisions regarding bail (and remand) and sentencing options if the young person admits guilt or is found guilty by the court; and
- the juvenile justice departments, which are responsible for the supervision of juveniles on a range of community-based orders and supervised bail. They are also responsible for the administration of juvenile detention centres.

Police

Police may administer cautions and warnings to juveniles, which may be either formally recorded or informal. Cautions are used in all jurisdictions in Australia, and may have voluntary or mandatory conditions attached, such as attendance at a program or community service. Currently there are no national data available on the use of, or outcomes associated with, police cautions. In some jurisdictions, the police may use conferencing to divert juveniles from proceeding to court.

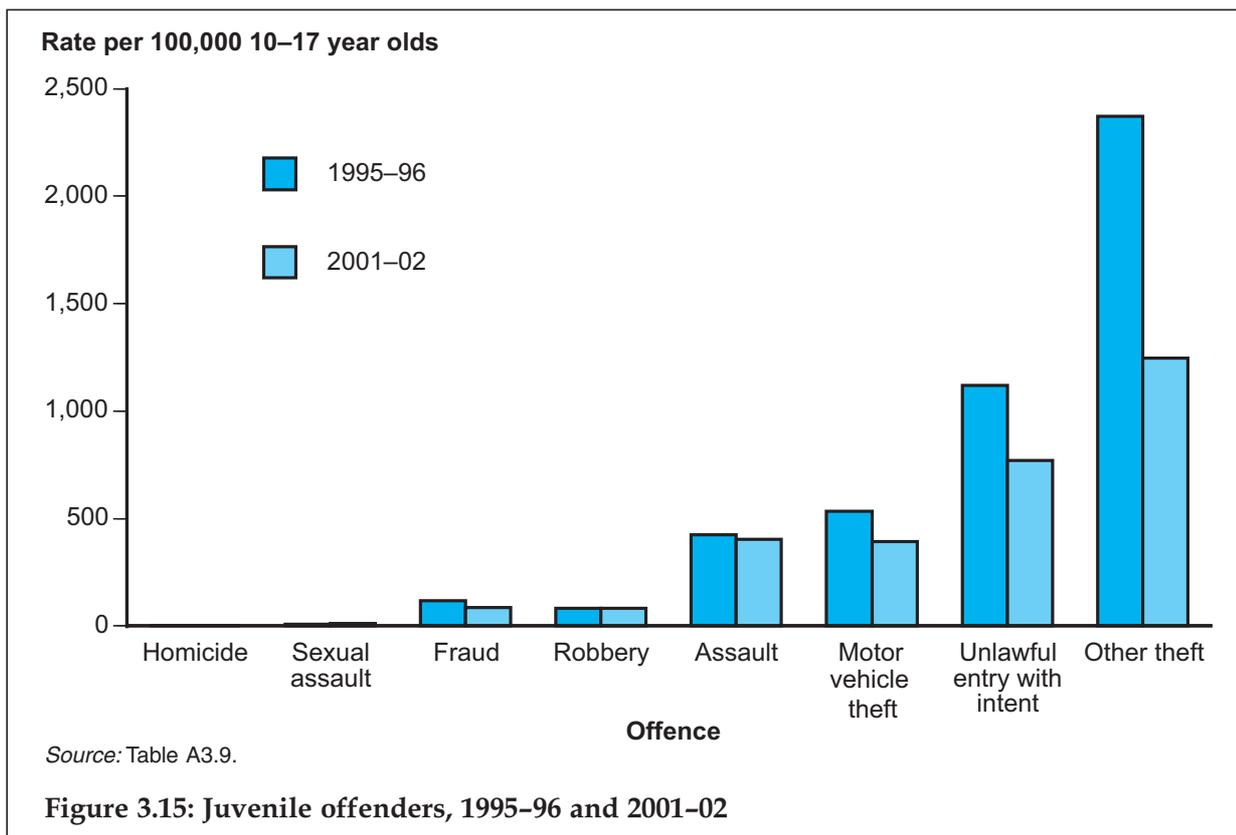
In 2001–02, juveniles accounted for one-fifth of the total offender population as measured by police apprehensions in Victoria, South Australia and Queensland (AIC 2003). Offending rates for juveniles are almost twice as high as those for adults. The disparity has lessened in recent years, with a trend to declining rates for juveniles. Between 1995–96 and 2001–02, the rate of juvenile police apprehensions declined from 4,664 to 3,003 per 100,000 juveniles. During this period, the rate of adult apprehensions declined slightly.

Juvenile offenders are most commonly apprehended for property-related offences such as theft. Following the trend of declining rates of juvenile apprehension by police, the rates of property-related offences (motor vehicle theft, unlawful entry with intent, other theft) by juveniles decreased between 1995–96 and 2001–02 (Figure 3.15). The most substantial decline was in the rate of other theft, which fell by 47% over this period (AIC 2003).

Diversions

In recent years, several jurisdictions have reported high levels of young people on remand (being held in custodial facilities prior to sentencing), with many of them afterwards receiving non-custodial sentences (Polk et al. 2003). In response to this, programs have been established which seek to provide alternatives to remand. These have included bail programs with intensive supervision, and hostels for those with accommodation difficulties.

A range of other diversionary programs exist throughout the juvenile justice system, which include both voluntary and involuntary participation, and programs focusing on rural areas and Indigenous young people. These programs target family relationships, employment and skills, arts and drug rehabilitation.



Conferencing

All Australian jurisdictions now include conferencing in their juvenile justice systems. Conferencing may occur at various stages of the criminal justice system, and be the responsibility of police, courts or the juvenile justice department. The restorative justice principles on which many conferencing models are based focus on a group of people coming together to discuss an offence and its impact, and to agree on sanctions or reparations. The attendees are the young offender (who must have admitted the offence) and their supporters (often including parents or guardians), the victim/s and their supporters, a police officer, and the conference convenor. Conferencing is designed to be less stigmatising and adversarial than the court system and to provide better opportunities for both the offender and the victim to discuss the offence and its impacts.

The increasing popularity of conferencing and restorative justice practices has been accompanied by outcome research in a number of Australian jurisdictions. These studies have focused on results from the point of view of both the offender and the victim, with mixed results. Studies on re-offending and re-conviction rates for conferenced offenders versus those going on to court have ranged from moderate reductions following conferences (Luke & Lind 2002), to no difference. Victims have been found to have high levels of satisfaction with the conferencing process (Polk et al. 2003).

Formal sanctions

The vast majority of young offenders who are not diverted from the formal juvenile justice system are supervised within the community rather than in detention centres (Figure 3.16). At 30 June 2004, between 83% and 95% of juvenile justice clients were in the community.

As these data are collected at a point in time, care should be taken in interpreting them, particularly for jurisdictions with smaller populations where a small change to the number of young people in detention can make a significant difference to the proportion of the population. Additionally, it is important to note that the proportion of juvenile justice clients who are 18 years and over varies between jurisdictions, and that the data presented in the following figures do not include these clients.

The number of young people being held in detention throughout Australia has decreased over the last 22 years (AIC 2004). Since 1981, the Australian Institute of Criminology has collected data on young people in detention on the last day of each quarter. Between June 1981 and June 1989, the number of young people in detention declined by 44%, from 1,352 to 759. Since then the number has fluctuated while showing a general decline, with a low of 545 on 30 June 2002. There were 640 young people in detention in Australia on 30 June 2003.

As with the adult criminal justice system, Indigenous persons are over-represented in the juvenile justice system. Over the last 10 years, the rate per 100,000 of juveniles being detained has fallen for Indigenous persons by 22% and for other Australian persons by 34%. However, the level of over-representation of Indigenous persons has not improved (Figure 3.17). During the last 10 years, Indigenous young people have remained approximately 15–20 times more likely than other Australian young people to be in juvenile detention (AIC 2003).

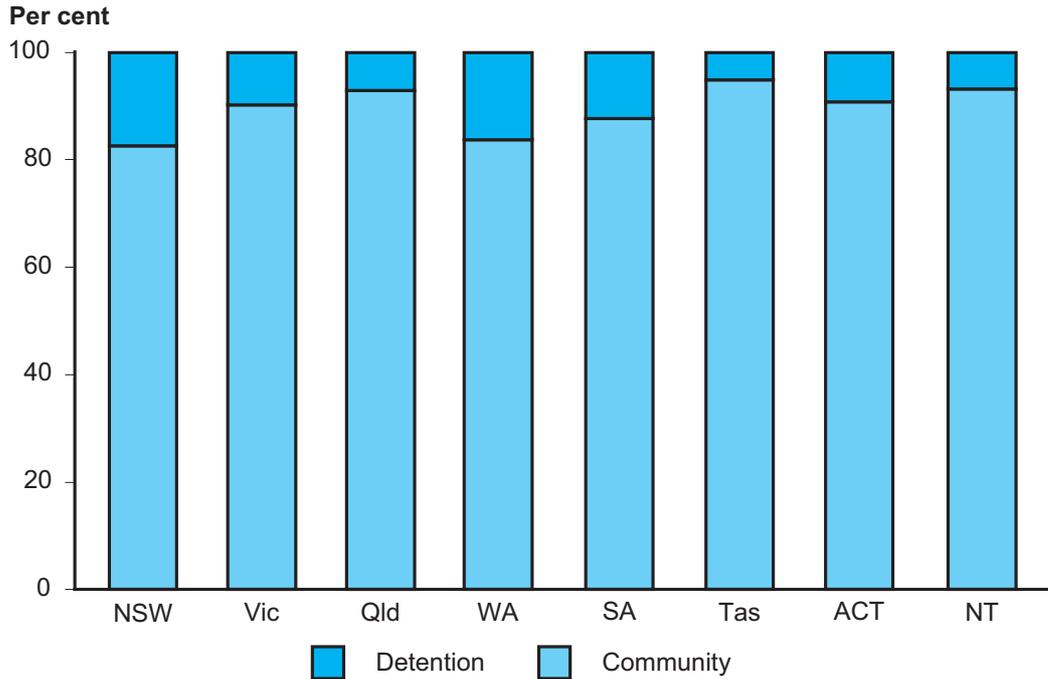
Data developments

In 2000 the AIHW began development of a Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set (JJ NMDS) on behalf of the NCSIMG and the Australasian Juvenile Justice Administrators (AJJA). Each state and territory department responsible for the management of juvenile justice in their jurisdiction contributed to the development, along with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Queensland Criminal Justice Commission (now the Crime and Misconduct Commission).

Comprehensive field and pilot testing concluded in 2003. With the agreement of the AJJA, the JJ NMDS has been implemented as an ongoing data collection, with the AIHW as the data custodian. The NMDS provides a unique source of information on the flow of young offenders through juvenile justice supervision over time, and from one form of 'intervention' to another, including both community- and custody-based supervision. The foundation of this is the concept of the 'juvenile justice episode'. Each client can have multiple episodes in any one supervision period. The first report of the JJ NMDS, with data from 2000–01 to 2003–04, is due for publication in early 2006.

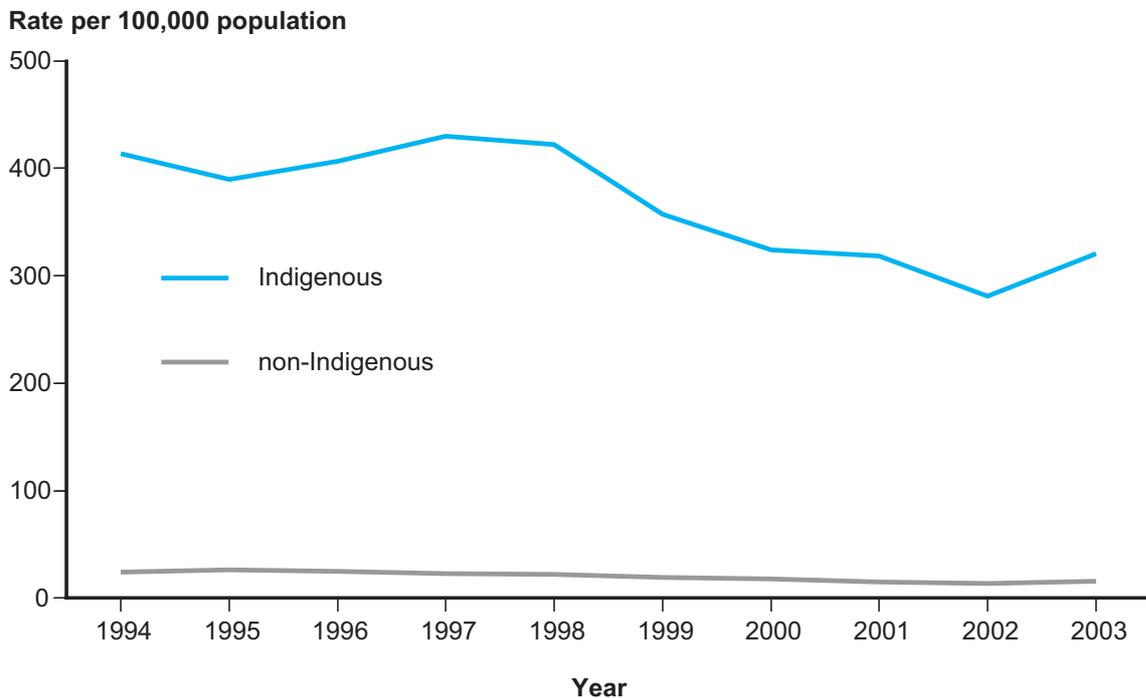
Children and young people as victims

Victims of violence are often reluctant to report crimes to the police and therefore the actual level of crime experienced by children is likely to be underestimated. The reasons victims have given for not reporting crimes include their belief that the police cannot do anything, or that the violence they have experienced is too trivial to be reported (Carcach 1997; Williams & Bryant 2000). Children and young people, in particular, may feel intimidated and reluctant to report personal crimes if the perpetrator is known to them or is in a position of power (perhaps because the perpetrator is older or is an authority figure).



Source: Table A3.10.

Figure 3.16: Juvenile justice clients aged 10-17 years, supervised in the community and in detention centres, at 30 June 2004



Note: Rate (based on ABS high series Indigenous population estimates) as at 30 June each year. Rates exclude Tasmanian figures between 30 Sept 1996 and 31 Dec 2002 as data are unavailable.

Source: Table A3.11.

Figure 3.17: Rates of Indigenous and other Australians aged 10-17 years in juvenile detention, 1994-2003

While crime victim surveys are used to measure the extent of unreported or hidden victimisation, no Australian surveys currently include children aged under 15 years in their sample (ABS 2004i). The two main sources of information about criminal victimisation of children are administrative data sets: recorded crime statistics and substantiations of child abuse. Since 1993, the ABS has published an annual report of recorded crime statistics collected by the police in each state and territory, according to standard offence classifications. These data are used below to present a picture of child and youth victimisation.

Children and young people are more vulnerable than adults to being victims of crimes of violence, although there are notable differences between males and females (Table 3.31). Young people are more likely than adults to be victims of sexual assault and kidnapping/abduction, with females at a higher risk than males.

Table 3.31: Victims of violent crime, 2003

Age group (years)	Murder	Attempted murder	Driving causing death	Assault	Sexual assault	Kidnapping /abduction	Robbery	Blackmail /extortion	Number
Males									
0–9	10	11	2	2,161	1,200	50	60	4	
10–14	2	3	2	5,369	621	47	806	1	
15–19	17	15	23	12,848	457	40	3,293	31	
20–24	15	42	1	12,976	173	40	2,177	21	
<i>All males (0–75+)</i>	<i>201</i>	<i>235</i>	<i>111</i>	<i>90,688</i>	<i>3,255</i>	<i>260</i>	<i>11,429</i>	<i>229</i>	
Females									
0–9	13	13	3	1,326	2,480	79	22	1	
10–14	4	2	1	3,431	3,189	78	123	—	
15–19	6	9	13	9,592	3,496	111	749	11	
20–24	14	12	6	9,574	1,445	58	791	15	
<i>All females (0–75+)</i>	<i>94</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>66,445</i>	<i>14,892</i>	<i>447</i>	<i>4,988</i>	<i>103</i>	
Rate per 100,000 persons									
Males									
0–9	0.7	0.8	—	162	89.9	3.7	4.5	—	
10–14	—	—	—	760.1	87.9	6.7	114.1	—	
15–19	2.4	2.1	3.3	1,825.6	64.9	5.7	467.9	4.4	
20–24	2.1	6.0	1.6	1,852.8	24.7	5.7	310.9	3.0	
<i>All males (0–75+)</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2.4</i>	<i>1.1</i>	<i>918.8</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>2.6</i>	<i>115.8</i>	<i>2.3</i>	
Females									
0–9	1.0	1.0	—	104.7	195.8	6.2	1.7	—	
10–14	—	—	—	510.7	474.7	11.6	18.3	—	
15–19	—	—	1.9	1,425.6	519.6	16.5	111.3	1.6	
20–24	2.1	1.8	n.p.	1,415.5	213.6	8.6	117	2.2	
<i>All females (0–75+)</i>	<i>0.9</i>	<i>1.1</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>663.9</i>	<i>148.8</i>	<i>4.5</i>	<i>49.8</i>	<i>1.0</i>	

Source: ABS 2004j.

Assault is the most commonly reported crime for both men and women. The 15–19 year age range begins a time of increased vulnerability to assault, with males at higher risk than females (Figure 3.18). The likelihood of being assaulted is highest for those aged 15–24 years, but the risk period continues until 44 years of age. Overall, just over 70% of assaults occur during the 15–44 year age range for both males and females (ABS 2004j).

Reported sexual assault is much less common than assault. However, in 2003, eight out of ten victims were girls and women and seven out of ten victims were young – aged under 25 years (Figure 3.19). Children aged 10–14 years and young people aged 15–19 years were three times more likely to be a victim of sexual assault than the rest of the population (ABS 2004j:5).

Outcomes of victimisation

Victims of assault and sexual assault not only experience harm in the short term, but are at risk of further harm or harming others later in life. A key concern is that children who are victimised are at a greater risk of later victimising others (Lauritsen et al. 1991; Weatherburn & Lind 1997). Other research suggests that victimisation can lead to diminished educational attainment and wide-ranging effects on socioeconomic attainment in early adulthood (Macmillan & Hagan 2004). Adverse outcomes for young victims of violent crime can range from injuries to suicidal ideation and behaviour (Simon et al. 2002), and depression (Arboleda-Florez & Wade 2001). A large body of international research suggests that physical and sexual abuse have multi-faceted short- and long-term negative effects on childhood development (Paolucci et al. 2001). The overlap between victim and offender populations, and instances of intergenerational family violence, are cited as evidence of the cycle of violence, and of the need to break that cycle through the prevention of child abuse (Regoeczi 2000:494).

Children in homeless families

Children may experience adverse educational, social and health consequences as a result of being homeless. Homeless children spend less time in school have lower immunisation rates, and experience psychological problems such as depression and low self-esteem (Efron et al. 1996; Molner et al. 1990). Parents in homeless families are also likely to be suffering from depression or stress, which may mean they are unable to give their children adequate attention or affection. A high proportion of homeless children may also have witnessed or experienced domestic violence and are at a greater risk of becoming a victim of crime or involved in criminal activities themselves (AIHW 2004c; NCP 1999). Indeed, domestic violence was the most common reason (two-thirds of all support periods) for client groups with children seeking assistance from SAAP services (AIHW 2004c).

A high rate of family homelessness has meant a significant proportion of Australia's homeless population are now children. In 2003–04, 52,500 children aged 0–17 years accompanied a parent or guardian who sought assistance through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). This equates to a rate of nearly 11 children per 1,000 in the general population (Table 3.32). Of these children, 45% were aged under 5 years, a rate of 18.6 per 1,000. In comparison, the rate for 10–14 year olds was 5.9 per 1,000. Clients with children made up 27% of SAAP support periods in 2003–04 (AIHW 2005c).

The majority (81%) of these clients were single women with children, 13% were couples with children and 6% were single men with children.

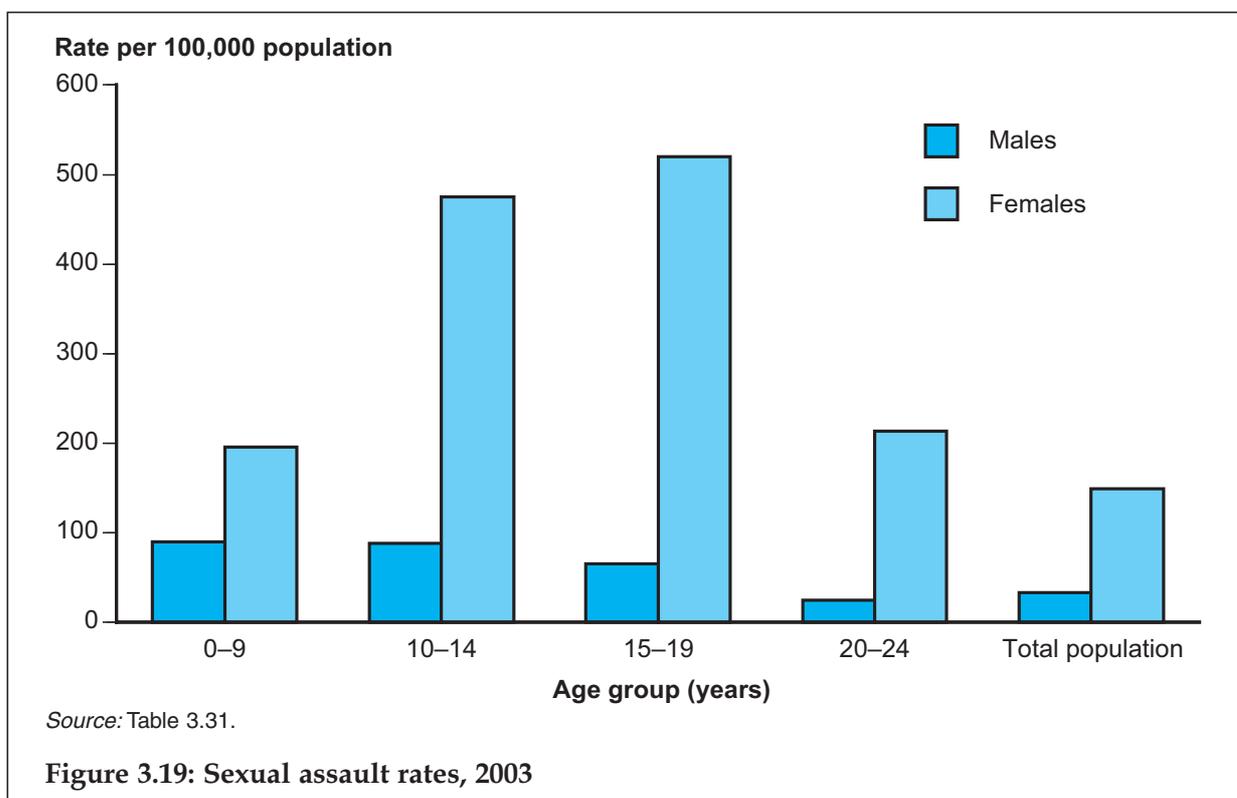
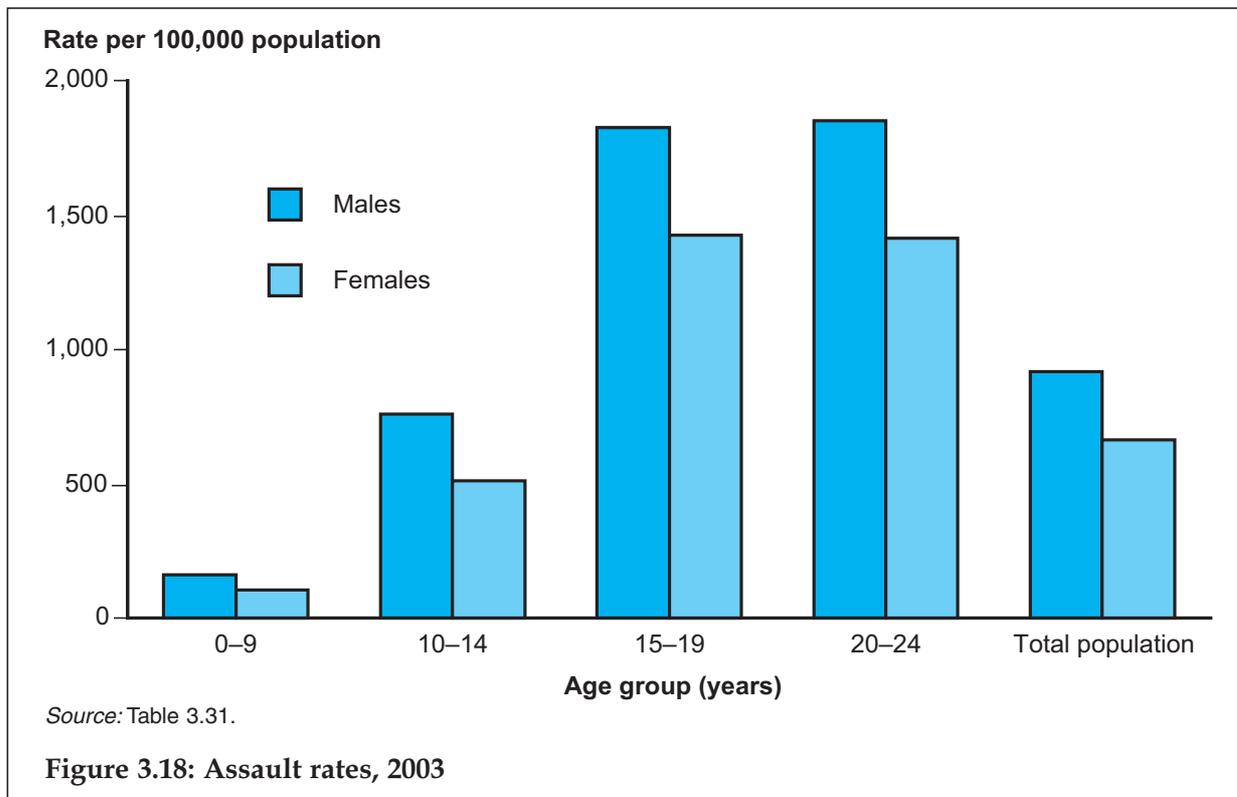


Table 3.32: SAAP accompanying children, 2003–04

Age group	Number	Rate per 1,000 children
0–4 years	23,500	18.6
5–9 years	22,600	10.4
10–14 years	4,800	5.9
15–17 years	1,700	3.1
Total	52,500	10.6

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 226.
2. The numbers do not add to the total due to rounding.
3. Table excludes high-volume records because not all items were included on the high-volume form.
4. 'Per 1,000 population' shows how many children out of every 1,000 in the general population aged 17 years and under accompany SAAP clients. The rate is estimated by comparing the number of SAAP clients with the estimated resident population in the designated age group as at 30 June 2003 (final estimates).
5. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Source: AIHW 2004c.

Measuring homelessness

Obtaining an accurate count of homeless people is difficult for practical reasons. People often move in and out of homelessness and may never be counted. One method of estimation is to count the number of people seeking assistance from a SAAP agency. As SAAP services are provided not only to clients but also to the children who accompany them, these data are valuable in attempting to measure childhood homelessness (Table 3.32). However, a major limitation in using SAAP data as a measure of homelessness is that they do not include homeless people who do not seek SAAP assistance or those who are turned away from SAAP. For example, in 2003–04 the chance of a child receiving accommodation requested was just over one in three, or 37% (AIHW 2004d).

In an attempt to better count homeless people, changes were made to the ABS Australian Census of Population and Housing, making it possible to count homeless people staying temporarily with others and those in improvised dwellings or sleeping on the street. In a recent analysis of 2001 Census data combined with SAAP data, it was estimated that on census night 9% of homeless households were families, and homeless families made up one-quarter of the homeless population. There were 9,941 homeless children under 12 years, making up 10% of the homeless population and 0.3% of the Australian population under 12 years of age (ABS 2003e). See Chapter 7 for more information on homelessness.

3.8 Conclusion

Families continue to be the cornerstone of Australian society. They provide the environment in which children learn and develop and young people are supported as they move into adulthood. All the indications are that families are continuing to do well in fulfilling these responsibilities. Across early childhood, school, later education and employment most children and young people are making successful transitions. However, families are inevitably affected by the many changes occurring within Australian society.

In June 2004 there were about 4 million children aged 0–14 years and 2.8 million young people aged 15–24 years. Although the proportion of children in the population has been gradually declining as the population ages, the number of children has been increasing slowly over the last decade. Trends in family formation and dissolution mean that children today are growing up in a wider variety of family types than 30 years ago. Even so, seven out of ten children still live in intact families with their natural parents. About two out of ten children live in a lone-parent family and the rest in step or blended families. The number of dependent and independent young people living in the family home has grown substantially, although the increase has been greater in couple families.

The role that grandparents play in caring for grandchildren is of growing importance. Many grandparents provide informal care for young grandchildren whose parents are working. There are also a small number of grandparent families raising grandchildren whose parents are unable to care for them.

Changes in patterns of participation in employment continue to affect families. Over the last decade the number of couple families where both parents were employed has increased while the traditional male wage-earner family type has declined. The picture is somewhat different for lone-parent families with over half of mothers in lone-parent families, and 43% of fathers, not employed.

The majority of families in the community undoubtedly continue to function well in the face of these macro-level changes in family structures and employment patterns. However, these changes do have implications for the wellbeing of some families and children. In 2002–03, 854,000 children lived in households with incomes in the lowest quintile, placing them in a position of risk in terms of both current wellbeing and future successful outcomes. The Australian Government provides support for families, as family assistance payments and income support payments, mainly aimed at middle and lower income families.

There has been a gradual shift from informal to formal child care over the last 10 years and about half of children aged under 12 years currently use some form of formal care, including preschool. The biggest increases in formal care have been in long day care and outside school hours care, as the Australian Government has increased the number of places available. The affordability of child care services remains an issue, particularly for sole parents who are not working. Overall, the cost of child care as a proportion of disposable income has increased for almost all family types since 2000, in spite of the initial improvement when the Child Care Benefit was introduced.

Across the years of compulsory schooling there is strong evidence that the majority of children and young people fare well both in the national and international arenas. About eight out of ten young people complete Year 12 and half of these go on to higher education. However, the pathways that young people take in the transition from education to work are more varied and complex than in the past and often extend over longer periods. It is increasingly common to combine work and study through this period. Associated with this trend is the growing number of young people who work part-time.

While most young Australians are doing well, a small group are in greater need of help and support. Difficulties that arise are often associated with circumstances such as poverty, unemployment, discrimination, a shortage of adequate and affordable housing in the community, and personal problems such as domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and relationship and family breakdown. Child protection services provide assistance for the more vulnerable children – those who are abused or neglected, or whose parents are unable to care for them. In the past 5 years, there have been inquiries into the child protection departments in a number of jurisdictions which have initiated improvements in service delivery. This is a dynamic area where the constant changes in policies and procedures make it difficult to interpret long-term trends in the data. However, it is clear that the number of children in the child protection system is increasing.

During childhood and adolescence, some young people have an encounter with the criminal justice system. For most, this is usually for relatively minor and transient offences, confined to one-off events, but a very small proportion of young people have repeated or more serious offending which results in supervision by a juvenile justice department such as community service orders or detention in custody. Although juvenile offending rates are almost twice as high as for adults, they have declined over recent years and offending often decreases or ceases entirely after early adulthood. Of serious concern is the continuing over-representation of Indigenous people in the juvenile justice system.

Homelessness can affect educational, social and health outcomes of children and young people. In 2002–03, 52,000 children under 16 years of age accompanied a parent or guardian in seeking support from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). Forty-six percent of these children were under 5 years of age.

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