

The Health, Financial and Relationship Wellbeing of Australian Couples: *Does Marriage Matter?*

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Overview

‘The case for marriage’ - background

Data source - *Growing Up in Australia*, the longitudinal study of Australian Children (LSAC)

Preliminary findings

- Wealth
- Health
- Happiness

Where to next...



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The case for marriage...

Research in the US is supporting the idea that marriage confers a range of benefits in terms of better health, greater satisfaction with life, and wealth (Waite & Gallagher, 2000)

Australian data neither confirm not refute the claims (Penman, 2004)



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The case for marriage...

Problems with existing research:

- Appropriate comparisons groups;
- Varying levels of commitment (for example Qu & Weston, 2001);
- Correlation and causation.

Evidence to suggest that engaged de facto couples resembled married couples (Ross, 1996)

But '.....*The devil is in the details*' (Huston & Melz, 2004)



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The Australian data...

However the data needed to allow the appropriate comparisons are not collected

LSAC data:

- Can identify married and de facto couples who have a biological child;
- information from both partners on couple satisfaction;
- links between aspects of the couple's relationship and children's outcomes.



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Research Questions....

Is there a case for marriage in Australia?

- Married parents vs De facto parents
- Parents of infants and Parents of toddlers
- Patterns of responses for Mothers and Fathers



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The LSAC study....

Growing Up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) - Wave 1 data

The project was initiated and is funded by the Department of Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), is managed by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and data is collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

Includes families with children born between:

- ◆ March 2003 – February 2004 (B cohort) N = 5,107 (Aged 0-1 years in Wave 1)
- ◆ March 1999 – February 2000 (K cohort) N = 4,983 (Aged 4-5 years in Wave 1)



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The LSAC study....

Collects information on a number of key research questions

Multiple respondents

Data covers areas of:

- Socio demographics
- Family functioning
- Child care
- Education
- Health
- Child functioning



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Who are we looking at...?

Intact couples in the Wave 1 LSAC sample (mothers & fathers)

Couples N = 4597 (B) and N = 4128 (K)

- living together in a relationship
(identified as either legal spouse or de facto partner)
- both biological parents of the study child

Compares relationship status (defacto and married) data for:

- B and K cohort (child aged 0-1 yrs and 4-5 yrs)
- mothers and fathers



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How do they look..?

B (0-1 years old)				
	DEFACTO (n = 892)		MARRIED (n = 3634)	
	MOTHERS	FATHERS	MOTHERS	FATHERS
Median age	29 years	31 years	32 years	34 years
Country of Birth				
Aust/NZ	83.7%	82.0%	76.0%	74.6%
Other	14.3%	18.0%	24.0%	25.4%
Number of years living together				
< 2 yrs	19.8%		2.7%	
2-10 yrs	68.4%		69.7%	
> 10 yrs	11.7%		27.6%	
Religion				
None	35.8%	41.7%	18.1%	24.0%
Christian	59.6%	53.9%	72.4%	66.8%
Other	4.6%	4.6%	9.4%	9.2%



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How do they look..?

K (4-5 years old)				
	DEFACTO (n = 424)		MARRIED (n = 3601)	
	MOTHERS	FATHERS	MOTHERS	FATHERS
Median age	33 years	35 years	35 years	37 years
Country of Birth				
Aust/NZ	80.1%	79.9%	72.8%	72.0%
Other	19.9%	20.1%	27.2%	28.0%
Number of years living together				
< 2 yrs	1.6%		0.1%	
2-10 yrs	63.7%		39.7%	
> 10 yrs	34.7%		60.3%	
Religion				
None	33.0%	41.9%	17.7%	21.9%
Christian	60.5%	53.8%	73.4%	69.6%
Other	6.5%	4.3%	8.9%	8.4%



This paper....

Compares intact couples on a range of measures of:

- Wealth
- Health
- Relationship happiness



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Wealth....

Are married couples wealthier than de facto couples?

Looked at various indicators of financial advantage for both mothers and fathers, including:

- Weekly income;
- Employment status;
- Occupation type (ASCO);
- Home ownership;
- House size (number of bedrooms);
- Location (SEIFA);
- Level of education.



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The findings.....

Employment, Income and Occupation

S = significant: NS = not significant

	B (0-1 yrs)		K (4-5 yrs)	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
<i>Employment, Income and Occupation</i>				
Employment (employed, unemployed, not in labour force)	S	S	S	S
Income (<500, 500-999, 1000-1999, 2000+)	S	S	NS	S
Occupation (ASCO) Managers, admin & professionals: Trade, labourers, product & transport: Clerical, sales and services.	S	S	S	S



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The findings.....

Housing and Tenure

S = significant: NS = not significant

	B (0-1 yrs)	K (4-5 yrs)
<i>Housing and tenure</i>		
Home ownership (<i>paying off, own outright, rent or rent/buy, other/none of these</i>)	S	S
SEIFA code of location - <i>quartiles</i>	S	S
Number of bedrooms (<i>1 or 2, 3, 4, 5+</i>)	S	S



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The findings...

Level of Education

S = significant: NS = not significant

	B (0-1 yrs)		K (4-5 yrs)	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
<i>Level of Education</i>				
Highest secondary school (<i>< Yr 11, = Yr12</i>)	S	S	S	S
Highest qualification (<i>graduate, undergraduate</i>)	S	S	S	S



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Health....

Are married couples healthier than de facto couples?

Looked at the following variables;

Mental Health

- Psychological distress (6 items - Kessler K6);
- Stress and coping (3 items) .

Physical Health

- Global health rating.



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The findings.....

Mental & Physical Health

S = significant: NS = not significant

	B (0-1 years)		K (4-5 years)	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
<i>Mental health</i>				
Nervous	NS	NS	NS	NS
Hopeless	S	NS	NS	NS
Restless/Fidgety	S	NS	S	S
Effort	NS	NS	NS	S
No cheer	S	NS	NS	S
Worthless	S	S	NS	S
<i>Coping</i>				
	NS	NS	NS	S
<i>Physical health</i>				
Global health	S	S	S	S



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Relationship Happiness.....

Are married couples happier in their relationship than de facto couples?

Looked at variables on;

- Satisfaction with couple relationship (6 items - RAS);
- Overall happiness in relationship (1 item - ADAS).

Also:

- Partner as a support and resource in raising children (3 items);
- Fair share of child rearing (1 item);
- Fair share of domestic tasks (1 item);
- Hostility (5 items).



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The findings...

Fair Share of Duties

S = significant: NS = not significant

	B (0-1 years)		K (4-5 years)	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
<i>Fair share</i>				
Child rearing	S	NS	NS	NS
Domestic tasks	S	NS	NS	NS



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The findings...

Partner Support & Resource

S = significant: NS = not significant

	B (0-1 years)		K (4-5 years)	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
<i>Partner Support and resource</i>				
In raising children (to you)	S	NS	NS	S
In raising children (to them)	S	NS	S	NS
Understands & supports your needs as a parent	S	S	S	S



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The findings...

Relationship Quality

S = significant: NS = not significant

	B (0-1 years)		K (4-5 years)	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
<i>Relationship</i>				
Disagree	S	S	S	S
Awkward conversations	S	S	S	S
Argue	S	S	S	S
Anger/hostility	S	S	S	S
Pushing/hitting	S	S	S	S



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The findings...

Overall Relationship Happiness

S = significant: NS = not significant

	B (0-1 years)		K (4-5 years)	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
Overall relationship happiness	S	S	S	S



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Some Implications...

Preliminary results reflect the findings in the literature

Married couples appear to be doing better in many of the wealth, health and happiness measures;

For some of the measures, there appears to be differences between;

- B and the K cohorts (age of the study child);
- mothers and fathers.



Limitations...

- Can't differentiate different levels of commitment for de facto couples (but they *do* have a child together and *are* living together);
- As critics have noted, to make a case for marriage, we need to repeat analyses for groups differentiated on a range of demographic variables to see whether the findings hold;
- Is marriage the cause? Can a case be made if only examine relationship status on its own? Are other factors as or more important?



Opportunities and directions...

Future analyses:

- Regression analysis to see how relationship status contributes to outcomes relative to other factors;
- Change in status between waves and impact on outcomes;
- Use couple data;
- Impact of relationship status on children's outcomes.

LSAC data:

- Sample size;
- Longitudinal data - every two years (W2, W3);
- Reports from both partners.



Applying for LSAC data

Log onto the LSAC website:

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/growingup/data.html>

Download and complete an application form and deed of license



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Thank you



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Wave 1 compared with 2001 ABS Population Census characteristics (%)

Characteristics	W1B	ABS	W1K	ABS	Characteristics	W1B	ABS	W1K	ABS
Male child	51.2	51.3	50.9	51.3	Both/lone parent work	47.9		55.5	
Couple	90.7	88.2	86.0	82.1	One works	40.8		32.8	
Lone	9.3	11.8	14.0	17.9	None works	11.3		11.6	
Only child	39.5	36.3	11.5	12.2	Mother- yr 12	66.9	56.6	58.6	48.3
1 sibling	36.8	35.8	48.4	46.2	Father –yr 12	58.5	50.2	52.7	45.3
2+ siblings	23.7	27.9	40.1	41.6	Income < \$800pw	31.7	41.2	29.2	40.6
Indigenous	4.5	3.5	3.8	3.5	Income \$800-\$1500pw	41.0	39.1	37.2	38.6
Language not English	14.5	16.8	15.7	17.6	Income > \$1500pw	27.3	19.7	33.6	20.8
					TOTAL	5,107		4,983	



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