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Family and household types



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Family and household types

Australian families come in many shapes and sizes. Furthermore, the shape and size of a person's family changes over their life course. We can even define our own family differently from different vantage points. From one vantage point our family might consist of our immediate family living in the one household while from a different vantage point it consists of family members scattered across a number of different households and generations. This diversity makes it difficult to talk about "the" Australian family.

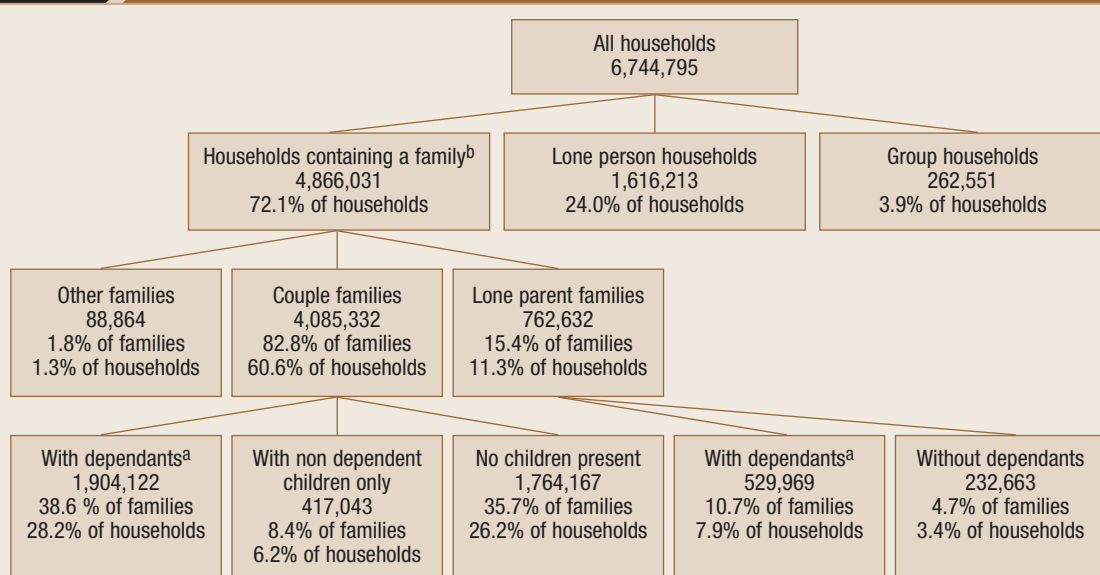
This chapter describes some of this diversity. It also examines today's family types within a wider historical context to see how today's family types differ from those in the past. The main focus of this chapter is on families within the one household. However, it must be stressed that many families extend beyond a particular household. Extended family networks can be highly dispersed. The family of children whose parents have separated will extend beyond the one household. On the other hand, not all households contain a family. People who live alone, or those living in group households are examples of non family based households.

Care must be taken when reading family statistics because the base on which percentages are calculated can vary depending on the analysis. Some

statistics are reported as percentages of all *families*; others as the percentage of families with dependent children while other statistics are reported as the percentage of *households*. Yet other statistics report the percentage of *individuals* that live in particular family or household types. Throughout this chapter statistics are reported for these different units so care should be taken when reading exactly what unit the statistics refer to.

The diversity of families reflects a range of factors. Some families include children while others are in the pre-child or post-child phase. Other families will remain childless. Many families are couple families but even couple families come in a variety of forms. Many couples are legally married but an increasing proportion live together in a cohabiting relationship. Some are based on two parents of the children in the household, and the children are natural brothers and sisters. Most couples are heterosexual but a small proportion are homosexual. Other couple families are "reconstituted" families which involve step children. An increasingly common family form is the lone parent family. Both couple and lone parent families vary depending on whether the children are dependants, students or financially independent yet still living in the family household.

Figure 1.1 Family and household types, Australia 2001



^aMay also include non dependants.

^bThere are 4,866,031 households containing 4,936,828 families. Some households contain more than one family. Per cent of family in this diagram are based on total number of families not the number of family households.

Source: 2001 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002a).

Table 1.1 Some characteristics of Australian families and households, 2001

Household or family characteristics	Per cent	Household or family characteristics	Per cent
Of all households		Of all lone parents with dependants	
Family	72.1	Lone mother	83.3
Lone person	24.0	Lone father	16.7
Group	3.9	<i>Total</i>	100.0
<i>Total</i>	100.0	Parent is not employed	54.0
Of all household families		Parent is employed part time	21.0
Couple families	82.5	Parent is employed full time	25.0
Lone parent	15.4	<i>Total</i>	100.0
Other	1.8	Of all families with dependent children (including dependent students)	
<i>Total</i>	100.0	Lone parent families	24.7
One family	97.0	Couple families	75.3
Multifamily	3.0	<i>Total</i>	100.0
<i>Total</i>	100.0	Of all persons	
Step	1.8 ^b	Aged 0–14	20.6
Blended	1.5 ^b	Aged 15–64	66.9
Of all couples		Aged 65 and over	12.5
Registered married	87.6	<i>Total</i>	100.0
Cohabiting	12.4	Of all persons aged 15–24	
<i>Total</i>	100.0	Living with parents	65.9
Heterosexual	99.5	Living independently of parents	34.1
Same-sex (Census, 2001)	0.5 ^a	<i>Total</i>	100.0
Same-sex (Australian Study of Health and Relationships), ages 16–59	2.2	Dependent students living with parents	38.0
<i>Total</i>	100.0	Non dependent children living with parents	27.9
Of couples with dependent children		Own family (partnered and/or parent)	13.2
Both parents employed full time (2002)	22.0	Living alone	3.9
Both parents employed but at least one not full time (2002)	34.3	Group household	9.1
Only one parent employed (2002)	36.7	Other	7.9
Neither parent employed (2002)	7.0	<i>Total</i>	100.0
<i>Total</i>	100.0	Children aged 0–14	
Intact (both biological parents of all children in household)	90.1	Living in lone parent families	19.0
Step family	5.5 ^b	Living with two parents	81.0
Blended family	4.4 ^b	<i>Total</i>	100.0
<i>Total</i>	100.0	Registered married	
Registered married	91.1	De facto married	
De facto married	8.9	<i>Total</i>	
<i>Total</i>	100.0	<i>Total</i>	

Sources: Unless otherwise specified figures are from 2001 census.

^a Based on self-identifying de facto same-sex couples in same household in 2001 Census

^b Data derived from HILDA, 2001 (FaCS 2002a)

How typical are couple families with dependent children?

Figure 1.1 provides a graphical outline of some of the most common household and family types in Australia. Clearly within any one of the types outlined in this diagram, further distinctions could be made.

Table 1.1 shows how common a variety of different family and household arrangements are in Australia.

In 2001, there were 6,744,795 private dwellings in Australia of which 72.1 per cent (4.86 million) consisted of a family. The typical family household (97 per cent) consisted of just one family.

After the family household, the lone person household is the second most common type of household. The lone person household makes up 24 per cent of all households. While a significant proportion of

households consist of just one person and are therefore not classified as a family for statistical purposes, many people who live alone have lived in a family household for much of their life. The death of a partner and marriage breakdown are the main reasons for living alone (p. 103).

Furthermore, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2002a), most people in lone person households are part of wider family systems and will be supported by and provide support to other family members (p. 69–72).

The third most common type of household is the group household (3.7 per cent of all households in 2001). A group household consists of unrelated individuals, none of whom are living in a marriage-like relationship. These households mainly consist of young men and women.

How many families consist of couples?

Despite changing patterns of family formation and demographic change, couple families are still by far the most prevalent type of family in Australia and certainly the main family type in which children live all or most of their childhood. Most families include a couple (82.8 per cent). Some of these also include dependent children, some include non dependent children and many include no children at all. The large majority of couples (83.6 per cent) are married couples but 12.4 per cent are cohabiting. In the following sections, no distinction is made between married and cohabiting couples.

What types of couple families are there?

There is a variety of couple families. One distinction among couple families is between those with children and those with no children in the household. In 2001, 2.3 million families consisted of a couple with children and a further 1.8 million consisted of a couple with no children.

Of couple families with children in the household a further distinction is frequently made between those containing dependent children¹ (including full time students under the age of 25) and non dependent children. According to the 2001 Census, 46.6 per cent of all couple families had dependent children while 10.2 per cent contained only non dependent children. The balance (43.2 per cent) of couple families contained no children.

These couple families without children fall into three groups – those who have not yet had children (pre-child couples), those whose children have left the household (post-child couples) and the couples who are and will remain childless (p. 18-21). In the 2001 Census, 70 per cent of people in couple households without children in the household were aged over 45. These couples are mainly those whose children have left home but some have never had children (Chapter 2).

Other couple families contain children from previous relationships. These couple families are called step families or blended families (see chapter 5). A step family consists of a couple with at least one child under the age of 18 who is a step child of one

of the couple and the biological child of the other partner. A step family does not contain biological children of the *couple*.

The 2001 Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA) found that 1.8 per cent of *all* families were step families and 4.4 per cent of *couples with children* under the age of 18 were step families. Blended families are those consisting of a couple with at least two children where one child under 18 is a step child of one of the couple and the biological child of the other partner. In addition, at least one child in a blended family will be the biological child of the couple. In 2001, 5.5 per cent of couples with children under the age of 18 children were blended families. This means that of couple families with children under the age of 18 almost 10 per cent were in a step or blended family in 2001. (See Chapter 5 for more detailed discussion of step and blended families.)

Couples can also be distinguished according to whether they are legally married or whether they are cohabiting. All western countries including Australia have seen a rapid rise in the proportion of couples that live together for at least part of their relationship (p. 115). In 2001 just over 12.4 per cent of all couples were cohabiting. A much larger number of couples will have at some point lived together in a cohabiting relationship, but many eventually marry. In 2001, 72 per cent of people who married, lived together before they married (ABS 2002d).

However, most cohabiting relationships are for a limited duration and less than 1 in 5 last for more than 5 years (p.122). Very few couple relationships are long term cohabiting relationships. For example, of couples who began to cohabit in the early 1980s just 2.3 per cent were still cohabiting by 2001 (p. 123).

One further distinction to be made is between heterosexual and homosexual couples. Only limited national data are available regarding the number of same-sex couples. The 2001 Census provides estimates based on an indirect methodology for identifying same-sex couples and the 2001 Australian Study of Health and Relationships provides national estimates for 16-59 year olds using a different methodology (see Chapter 7).

Table 1.2 Family Types, Australia, 1976-2001

	1976 %	1981 %	1986 %	1991 %	1996 %	2001 %
Lone parent family with dependent children	6.5	8.6	7.8	8.8	9.9	10.7
Couple only	28.0	28.7	30.3	31.4	34.1	35.7
Couple with dependent children	48.4	46.6	44.8	44.4	40.6	38.6
Couple with non dependent children	11.1	10.0	10.9	9.5	9.0	8.4
Other families	5.9	6.0	6.2	5.9	6.4	6.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001a, 2002a).

According to the Census methodology, of all couples living together just under half of one per cent were same-sex couples – 0.26 per cent were male couples and 0.21 per cent were female couples (see Chapter 7)². Most homosexual couples did not have children living in the household. Of the female couples 19 per cent included children living in the household while just 4.6 per cent of male couples included a child. Based on the Australian Study of Health and Relationships 2.2 per cent of all partnered people aged 16-59 were living with a same-sex partner in the same household.

Is the traditional nuclear family still the dominant family type?

Family and household structures change over time along with changes in fertility patterns, longevity and social attitudes. Declining fertility and increased childlessness result in more couple families without children in the household (p. 190). Increased longevity increases the proportion of couple only and lone person households. Increases in the rate of relationship breakdown and remarriage can lead to the formation of more one parent families and step and blended families. Changing values and economic conditions can also affect fertility. Voluntary childlessness is an acceptable option and living together without being married is permissible. The broader social changes affect and reflect the shape of families and the prevalence of different family and household forms in Australia. Even over a relatively short period of 25 years there have been considerable changes in the prevalence of particular family types in Australia (Table 1.2).

How common are lone parent families?

While couple families are the most common family type, lone parent families have become an increasingly common family type in recent decades. Between 1986 and 2001 the number of lone parent families (including those only with non dependent children) increased from 499,300 to 762,600 (ABS 2003k) – a 53 per cent increase. In percentage terms lone parent families with dependent children increased from 6.5 per cent of all families in 1976

to 10.7 per cent in 2001. (See Chapter 4 for more details).

The growth in lone parent families and couples without children means that couple families with children (the traditional nuclear family) make up a smaller proportion of all families. In 1976, couples with children in the household made up 59.5 per cent of all families but by 2001 they made up just 47 per cent of families.

The growth in lone parent families is largely due to the increasing rate of relationship breakdown and the decreasing tendency of divorced people to remarry (p. 177). In 1997 the Australian Bureau of Statistics Family Characteristics Survey revealed that 63 per cent of lone parent families with dependent children were the result of marriage breakdown; 7 per cent were due to widowhood; and in 30 per cent were families in which the parents had never legally married. Of these 30 per cent we do not know what proportion were cohabiting relationships that subsequently broke down. (ABS 1998a). Between 8 and 11 per cent of lone parent families are currently formed as a result of a lone woman having a child outside of a couple relationship (p. 135).

Being a lone parent family is not a long term arrangement for all lone parent families – for some it will be a short phase while for others it will be a recurring status as the parent forms relationships that subsequently break down. Estimates from the HILDA survey indicate that, of children who ever live in a lone parent family, the average duration of living in such a family is 6.2 years by the time they turn 18. The same survey also indicates that, for children born between 1976 and 1983, 26.8 per cent spent some time living in a lone parent family by the time they were 18 years of age (de Vaus and Gray, 2003a).

How small are families becoming?

Families and households in general are becoming smaller (Table 1.3). The growth in lone person households now means that 24 per cent of all households contain only one person. A third of households contain just two people (couples without children, lone parent with one child and

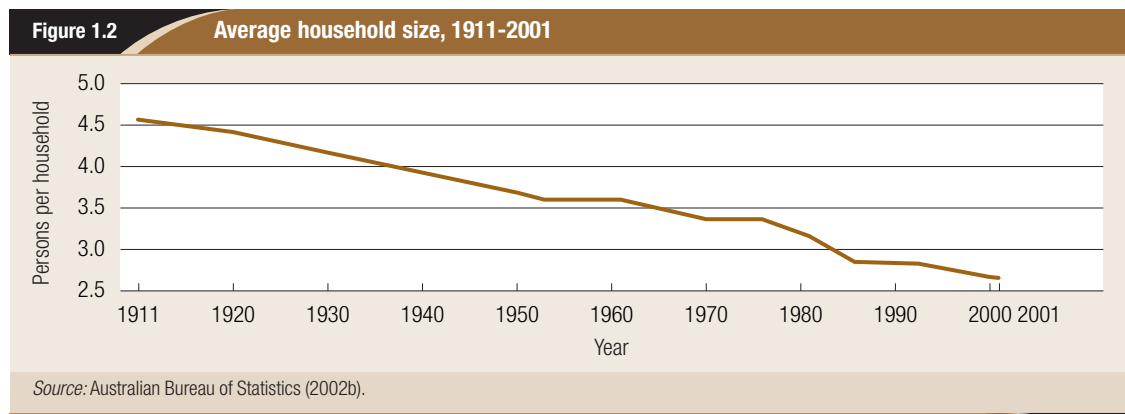


Table 1.3 Changes in household size, 1981-2001

Household size	1981 %	2001 %	% change 1981-2001
1	18.0	24.6	36.7
2	29.2	33.3	14.0
3	16.9	16.2	-4.1
4	19.1	16.0	-16.2
5	10.5	7.3	-30.5
6+	6.4	3.3	-48.4

Sources: 1981, Australian Bureau of Statistics (1993a, 2003c).

small group households). A further third of households consist of either three or four people. Only 10.6 per cent of households consist of more than four people.

There can be little doubt that families and households are becoming smaller. Figure 1.2 provides a long term overview of the steadily declining household size (including adults and children) in Australia over the 20th century. In 1911, the average household size was just over 4.5 but this had declined to 2.6 by 2001 (Figure 1.2). This decline reflects the rise in lone person households, one parent families and fewer children per family.

This decline in household size is predicted to continue. By 2011, the average household size is predicted to be 2.4. (ABS 1999b). By 2021, it is anticipated that the average household size will be about 2.2.

Couple families, not surprisingly, are typically larger than lone parent families. In 2001, of lone parent households:

- 41.9 per cent contained just one child.
- A further third had two children.

Of couple households with children:

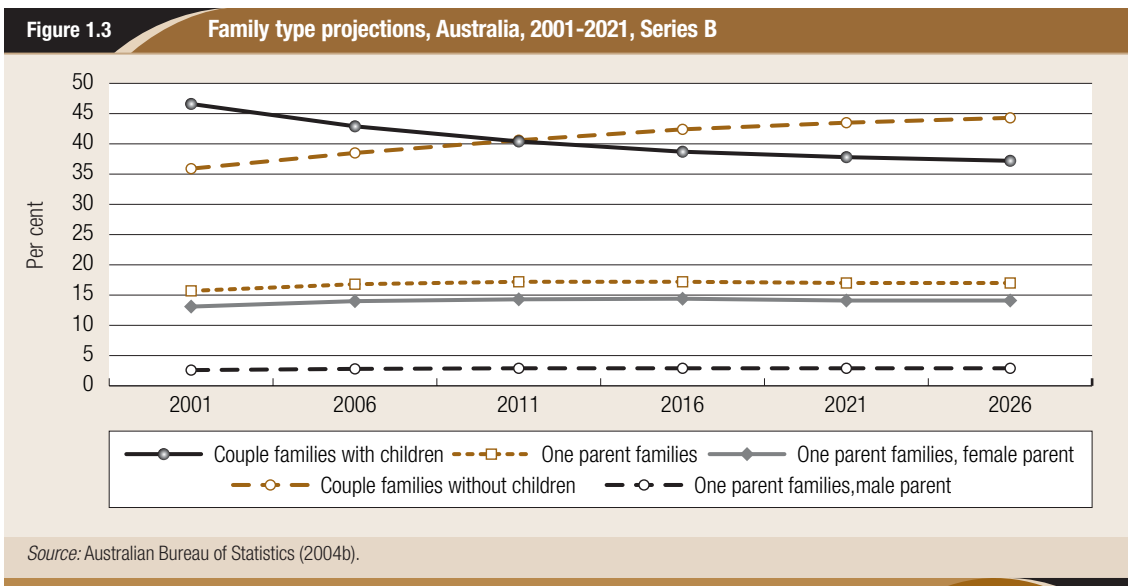
- A quarter (25.5 per cent) contained just one child.
- 41.3 per cent had two children.
- 33.2 per cent contained five or more household members (normally two adults and three or four children).

How common are couple only families?

One of the notable changes in family types since the 1970s has been the decline in the percentage of families with dependent children. In 1976, 48.4 per cent of all families consisted of couples with dependent children. By 2001 this had declined to 38.6 per cent – a 20 per cent decline. This decline was mirrored by an increase in couple only families from 28 per cent in 1976 to 35.7 per cent of families in 2001 – a 27 per cent increase.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has projected an increase in couple families *without* children so that by 2016 couple only families will become the most common family type (see Chapter 2). Couple families with children are projected to continue to decline over the same period (Figure 1.3). Another anticipated trend is that while the *number* of lone parent families is projected to increase by between 29 to 63 per cent by 2026 (depending on the projection assumptions), the *proportion* of lone parent families is likely to remain stable at about 17 per cent of all families (ABS 2004b).

A further prediction by the ABS is that lone person households will increase more than any other household type by 2026. The *number* of lone person families is projected to increase by between 57 per cent and 110 per cent (depending on the projection assumptions). As a proportion of all households, lone person households are predicted to increase from 24.5 in 2001 to 30.2 in 2026 – a 23 per cent increase (ABS 2004b).



What are the family living arrangements of individuals?

The statistics discussed so far have mainly outlined how many *families* or *households* fall into particular family and household types. Since family and household types contain different numbers of individuals, these statistics can give a misleading impression in terms of the living arrangements of *individuals*.

Table 1.4 describes the family and household living arrangements of individual Australians. It shows that:

- While 24 per cent of all households are lone person households, only 9.1 per cent of individuals live in lone person households.
- 51.2 per cent of individuals live in a couple household containing children.
- Although 38 per cent of families are couple only families, just 19.7 per cent of individuals live in a couple only household.
- 11.3 per cent of individuals live in a lone parent household.
- 3.4 per cent of individuals usually live in an institution of one sort or another.

How do family living arrangements change over the life course?

Over a lifetime most people will live in a variety of family and household types. The living arrangement at any particular time will depend on many factors including age, relationship history and fertility. While it is predicted that by 2026 couples *without* children will be more common (3,108,100) than couples *with* children (2,610,300), this does not mean that the “typical” nuclear family of “mum, dad and the kids” is declining (ABS 2004b). As a means of rearing children this family form is likely to remain the dominant family form.

We can get a sense of the major transition points for individuals between household and family forms by examining the proportion of each age group living in a particular type of family or household.

Where do children live?

Figure 1.4 shows the percentages of children at various ages who live with their parents and the types of family in which these children live.

This graph shows that in 2001:

- Most children under the age of 15 (81 per cent) lived in a couple family (85 per cent of 0-4 year olds and 79 per cent of 5-14 year olds).
- Of children aged under 15, 19 per cent lived with a lone parent (15.4 per cent of 0-4 year olds and 20.6 per cent of 5-14 year olds).

Living arrangement – type of family or household	Per cent
Couple with dependent children	43.7
Couple with non dependent children only	7.5
Couple only	19.7
One parent with dependent children	8.5
One parent with non dependent children only	2.8
Group household	3.3
Lone person	9.1
Non private dwelling	3.4
Other	1.9

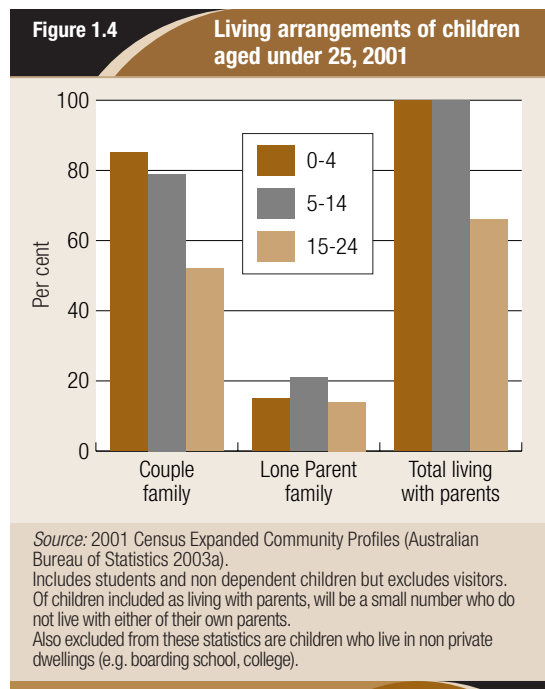
Source: Derived from 2001 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002a).

- 52 per cent of children aged 15-24 continued to live with two parents (not necessarily both their natural parents). A further 14 per cent lived with a lone parent.
- Almost two thirds of children aged 15-24 lived with at least one parent.

How does the family type of adults change over their life course?

The type of family or household in which a person lives continues to change over the adult life course. Figure 1.5 maps changes in the number of family and household types at different stages of their life. It does not include those living in institutions. Details of the proportion of older people living in institutions is discussed in Chapter 16 (p. 253).

The living arrangements of different age groups in 2001 shows substantial differences in their living arrangements. While it is certainly the case that



the living arrangements of individuals change as they move through the life course, the figures below do *not* describe these changes. That is, we cannot conclude from these figures that the living arrangements of those in their twenties in 2001 were the same types of living arrangements experienced by those now in their forties when they were in their twenties.

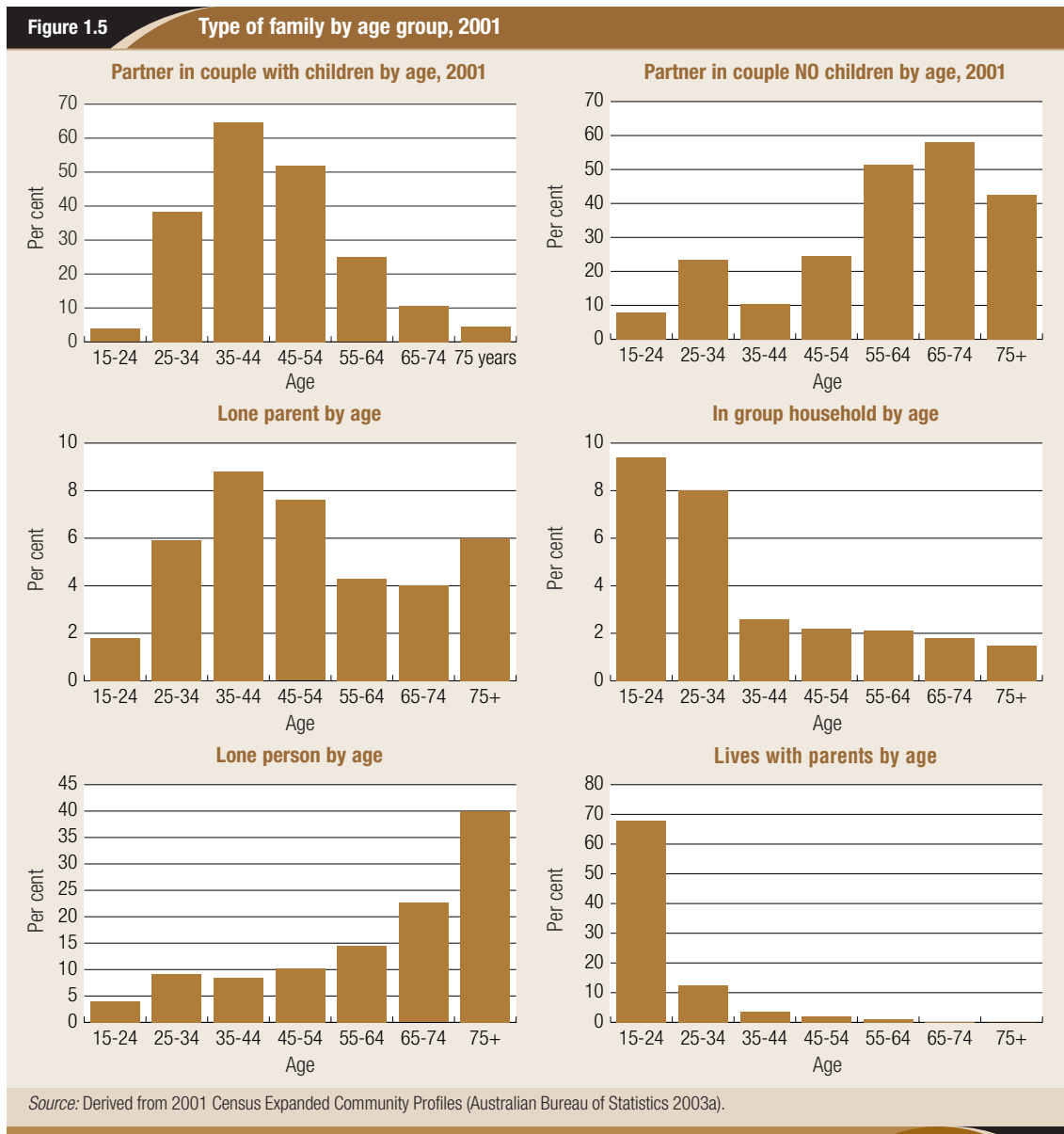
Figure 1.5 shows the living arrangements of people aged 15 or over.

15-24 year olds: While 65.9 per cent of 15-24 year olds live with parents, 34.1 per cent have moved out of home. Since Figure 1.5 combines 15-19 year olds with 20-24 year olds it masks the fact that there are important transition points within this age band (see Chapter 12). In fact, only 10 per cent of those aged 15-19 have left home. However among the 20-24 year olds, 49 per cent have left home (p. 144).

More people (9 per cent) in this 15-24 year old age group live in a group household than in any other age group. More often than not, group living is a transition between living with parents and living with a partner.

In 2001, only a very small percentage of 15-24 year olds were living with a partner – 8 per cent were living with a partner and an additional 4 per cent had a child and a partner.

25-34 year olds: Those aged 25-34 have substantially different living arrangements to those aged 15-24. This is the time when many people are now making a major transition away from the parental home, with only 12 per cent still living with their parents. Group households are marginally less popular than among the younger group with only 8 per cent living in group households. The majority of 25-34 year olds (61 per cent) live with a



partner and 44 per cent are parents. Relatively few (9 per cent) live on their own but 6 per cent are lone parents.

35-44 year olds: More of this age group than younger age groups are parents. (Chapter 14). There are fewer couples without children – just 10 per cent compared to 23 per cent of those aged 25-34. The percentage of couples in the 35-44 age band with children is 65 per cent compared with 38 per cent of 25-34 year olds. Relationship breakdown means that lone parenthood peaks at 9 per cent of people aged 35-44. Very few of this age group live with their parents or in a group household and only 8 per cent live on their own.

45-54 year olds: A proportion of this age group is in the post-parenting phase. Fewer people, especially those in their early fifties, have dependent children and more have no children at all in the household (Chapter 2). The percentage of couples with children in the home drops from 65 per cent of 35-44 year olds to 52 per cent. The percentage of lone parents drops marginally from 9 per cent to 8 per cent. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of this age group are couples without children in the home – up from 10 per cent among 35-44 year olds. The percentage of people living on their own is greater among the 45-54 year olds than among the younger age groups.

55-64 year olds: This age group is characterised by more people who are no longer in the active parenting phase of their life. Only 29 per cent of this age group have a child (either dependent or otherwise) living in the household. Over half live with a partner without any children in the home and the percentage of people living on their own begins to increase markedly from 10 per cent to 15 per cent.

65-74: Only 15 per cent of this age group have children in the home and most of these are adult children. Only 11 per cent of this age group live with a partner and a child. In 2001, 65-74 year olds were more likely than any other age group to be living as a couple without children in the home. (p. 17). Fifty-eight per cent of this age group live just

with their partner. Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of 65-74 year olds were living on their own – up from 15 per cent of 55-64 year olds. This increase is largely due to the death of a partner and children departing the home of their lone parents.

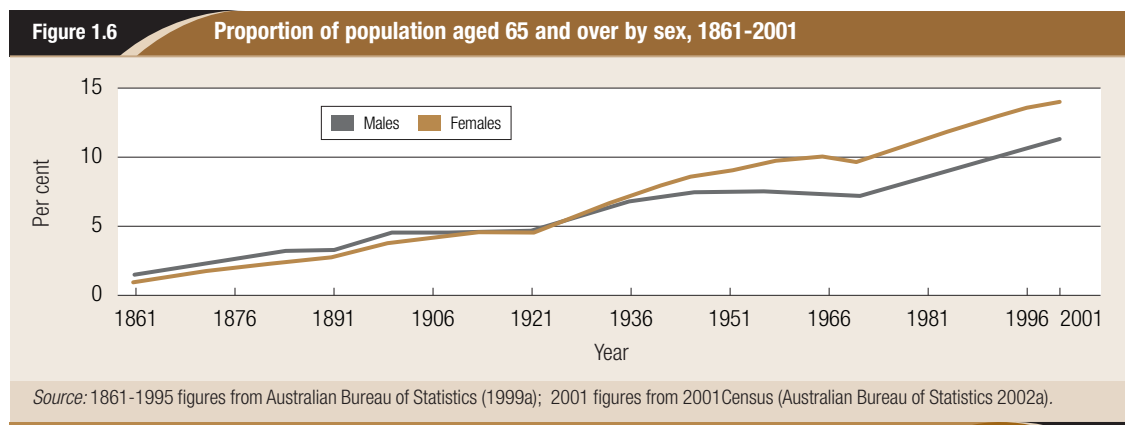
75 and older: Beyond the age of 75 people fall into one of two main groups – those living only with their partner (42 per cent) and those living alone (40 per cent). The remainder of those not in institutional care live with other relatives, with an adult child³ or in a group household. By the time people reach their early eighties (and are still living in a private dwelling), just over a third are still living with their partner and 45 per cent are living alone. From the age of 85 onwards, of those who still live in a private dwelling, a quarter still have a partner and a half live on their own. Of those aged 85 or older, 31 per cent lived in an institution of some type in 2001 (mainly nursing homes, hostels and other aged care facilities).

How much older is the population becoming?

Population ageing occurs where the population, on average, becomes older. Population ageing is due to two factors operating at once – people are living longer and they are having fewer babies. This population ageing is one of the reasons behind the change in the profile of Australian families. Because of this ageing, couple families with children are becoming a smaller proportion of the population, partly because other family and household types are growing at a faster rate.

While a great deal of attention has been given to population ageing in recent times, population ageing has been occurring over the last century and a half. This can be seen from Figure 1.6 which shows the growth in the percentage of the population aged 65 and over since 1861. In 1861 only about 2 per cent of the population was aged 65 or over. By 2001, close to 13 per cent was aged 65 or over.

Population ageing is also reflected in increases in the median age of the population:



- In 1901 the median age was 22.5 years.
- In 1947 the median age was 30.7 years.
- In 2001 the median age was 35 years.
- By 2021 the median age is projected to be 41.2 years.
- By 2051 the median age is projected to be 46 years.

Population ageing involves a change to the demographic “shape” of the population. Figure 1.7 presents a set of “population pyramids” that show the past and projected age profiles of the Australian population from 1911 to 2050. Over time, the shape has changed from a pyramid where there were far more younger than older people, to one which by 2051 is anticipated to resemble the shape of a beehive more than that of a pyramid (McDonald and Kippen 2000).

The profile in 2002 shows the post-war baby boomer bulge. This bulge is aged from 35-55. By 2051 the last of the baby boomers will be over 85 years old. Projected low fertility is reflected in the narrowing of the population base of young people.

How much is the working age population declining?

Traditionally people aged 15 to 64 have been defined as the working age population and those aged 0 to 14 and over 64 have been defined as being of non working age. Those in the non working age groups have been called the dependent populations because they do not generally directly contribute to the GNP through employment, and because they receive the benefits of government expenditure without contributing directly through paid work or taxation.

Changes in the relative sizes of the dependent and working age populations can have important implications for government policies and future expenditure. Assuming that there are no continuing productivity improvements, the shrinking size of the working age population is likely to challenge the capacity, or at least willingness, of governments to support the care, education, health and income support needs of the older population (Australian Government 2002).

Table 1.5 indicates the changing proportions of the young and older age groups over the 20th century

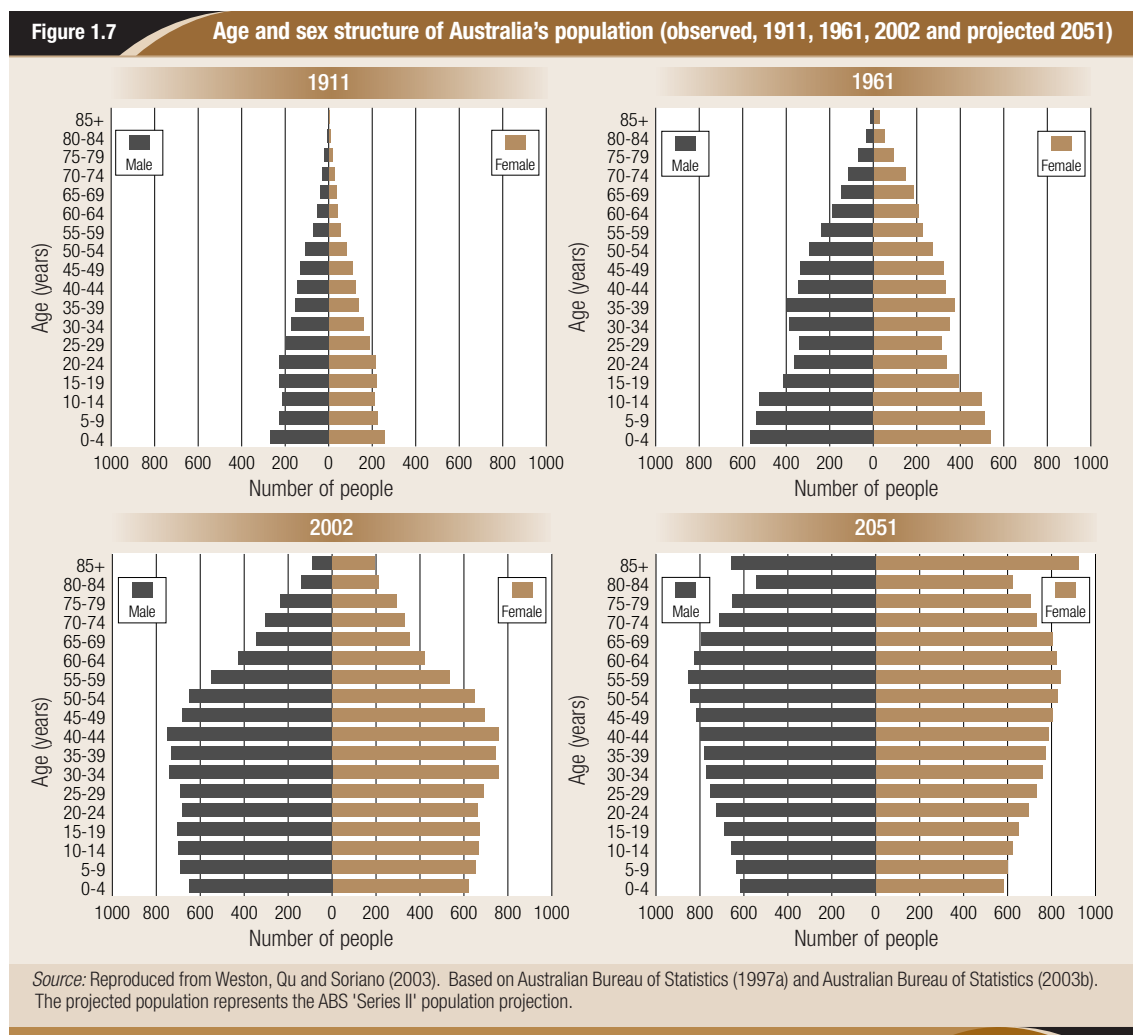


Table 1.5 Proportions of population below and above working age, Australia, 1901-2101

	1901 %	1947 %	1971 %	2001 %	2011 ^a %	2021 ^a %	2031 ^a %	2041 ^a %	2051 ^a %	2101 ^a %
0-14 years	35.1	25.1	28.7	20.2	17.8	16.1	15.4	14.6	14.0	13.8
15-64 years	60.8	66.8	63.0	67.4	67.5	64.9	61.6	59.8	58.9	57.2
65+	4.0	8.1	8.3	12.4	14.7	19.0	23.0	25.6	27.1	28.9

Source: Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1911; Australian Demographic Bulletin, 1947; Australian Demographic Statistics (3101.0); Australian Bureau of Statistics, (2003b).
^a Series B population projections.

and the predicted changes over the 21st century. The picture shows a steady decline in the relative size of the young populations over the two centuries. The under 15 age group has declined from 35 per cent in 1901 to 20 per cent in 2001 and is predicted to fall to about 14 per cent by 2101. The only exception to the general downward trend is that between 1947 and 1971 the post-war baby boom led to a small increase in the proportion of young people.

The pattern of change for those aged 65 and over is the reverse. In 1901 just 4 per cent of the population was aged over 65. By 2001 this had trebled to 12.4 per cent. Based on particular fertility and mortality assumptions, this is predicted to more than double again by the middle of this century after which the rate of growth in the older population could stabilise.

To some extent the growth of the older population is balanced by the decline in the younger group so that the relative size of the working age population does not change to the same extent as the young and older groups. Because of the post-war baby boom, the size of the working age population is expected to peak at around 68 per cent between 2001 to 2011 and thereafter gradually decline to about 59 per cent by 2051. Although this may not appear to be a large decline in the working age population, this decline, together with the increase in the aged population, has led to concerns among some policy makers and governments about a possible shortage of workers and a cost blow-out (Bishop 1999; McDonald and Kippen 2001). A further change, not evident from these figures, will be an ageing of the working age population over this period. That is, of those aged 15-65, the profile of this age group will increasingly be skewed towards older rather than younger workers.

How much longer are we living?

There have been dramatic rises in life expectancy of both men and women over the 20th century. Australia now has one of the longest life expectancies in the world.

Early in the 20th century life expectancy at birth was around 50 years for men and 55 years for women. At that time, when infant and child mortality was much higher than today there was a much more substantial gap between life

Table 1.6 Life expectancy of men and women 1881-2001 at birth and at age 65

	At birth		At age 65	
	Males (years)	Females (years)	Males (years)	Females (years)
1881-1891	47.2	50.8	76.1	77.3
1891-1900	51.1	54.8	76.3	77.8
1901-1910	55.2	58.8	76.3	77.9
1920-1922	59.2	63.3	77.0	78.6
1932-1934	63.5	67.1	77.4	79.2
1946-1948	66.1	70.6	77.3	79.4
1953-1955	67.1	72.8	77.3	80.0
1965-1967	67.6	74.2	77.2	80.7
1975-1977	69.6	76.6	78.1	82.1
1985-1987	72.7	79.2	79.6	83.6
1990-1992	74.3	80.4	80.4	84.3
1995-1997	75.6	81.3	81.1	84.8
1999-2001	77.0	82.4	82.2	85.7
2021 (projected) ^a	81.7	86.0	85.6	88.4
2051 (projected) ^a	84.2	87.7	87.5	89.9

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics, (1999a, 2003b).
^a Series B projections.

expectancy at birth and life expectancy if a person reached the age of 65 (Table 1.6).

Today far more men and women reach the age of 65 and the life expectancy for these people is gradually increasing. This increased longevity has a number of implications for families. For example:

- More children will have grandparents and great grandparents⁴.
- A large number of people can expect to live for many years beyond retirement. For couples, this changes the nature of the retirement phase of family life from a short time together to an extended time together.
- An extended retirement can have implications for governments and individuals in meeting the living costs of people for a long period of time when they are no longer in the workforce.
- There is a potentially large number of older people in the community able to participate in voluntary work and to help with younger family members.
- Increased longevity can affect patterns of inheritance as inheritances are delayed or spent in the post-retirement years.

Endnotes

- 1 A dependent child is a person under the age of 15 who does not have a partner or child of his/her own usually resident in the household.
- 2 It is likely, because of the way in which the Census collects information regarding same-sex couples, that these figures will underestimate, to an unknown extent, the number of same-sex couples.
- 3 Often the category “Other relatives” can include older people living with their children. This living arrangement is recorded where the child’s family type is recorded in the Census and the parent is recorded as a related person living with the child and the child’s family. A living arrangement described as living with “Adult children” is recorded when the Census records the household as the parent’s household with the adult child living in the parent’s household. The fact that older people living with adult children may be “hidden” in the category “Other relatives” means that the proportion of older people living with a child can be substantially understated.
- 4 However, this trend may be contained by the shift to having children at later ages.

Highlights

- Although couple families with dependent children are a minority of all families, they nevertheless represent the vast majority of families in which dependent children live.
- Australia is experiencing a steady decline in average household size.
- Lone person households represent a rapidly growing household type.
- Couples without children in the household is a rapidly growing household type.
- Australia is facing a decline in the percentage of people of “working age”.