

# 6

## Extended families and multifamily households



# Contents

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<b>Families sharing the same home</b>	<b>68</b>
How common are multifamily households?	68
Which types of families share the one house?	68
<b>Families keeping in close contact</b>	<b>69</b>
How close do family members live to each other?	70
How much contact do family members share?	70
How much do family members help each other?	71
<b>Who has the stronger family networks?</b>	<b>72</b>
Does family type affect family networks?	72
Are family networks closer in rural areas?	74
Do older family members receive more help than they give?	74
Are women the kin-keepers?	75
Do migrants have stronger extended family ties?	76
<b>Highlights</b>	<b>77</b>

## List of tables

---

6.1	Per cent living in multifamily households by family type and country of birth, 2001	69
6.2	Living arrangements of those aged 65 and over, 2001	70
6.3	Living in multifamily household by family income and Indigenous status, 2001	70
6.4	Proximity of later life respondents' adult children and parents, 1996	70
6.5	Contact between respondents and non-resident children or elderly parents, 1996	71
6.6	Support by older parents to adult children	71
6.7	Annual per capita value (\$) of unpaid work to family members outside own household by gender and age, Australia 1997 (1997 dollars)	72
6.8	Exchange of help by parental marital status	73
6.9	Extended family ties of lone and couple mothers	73
6.10	Per cent of mothers with face-to-face contact with relatives at least weekly by age of youngest child and own workforce participation	74
6.11	Proximity and contact with extended family members by urban/rural location	74
6.12	Main age at which parents and children provide and receive support	75
6.13	Contact with extended family members by gender	75
6.14	Reciprocity of support between generations	76
6.15	Reliance on sons and daughters in later life	76
6.16	Links with specified family members among migrants	76
6.17	Links with parents among migrants whose parents have also migrated to Australia	76

## List of figures

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6.1	Provide help to relatives living outside household (excluding children aged under 25)	71
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While most household families consist of just one family, ties and networks of family members exist beyond the immediate household and remain an important part of the family experience of Australians. The existence of an extended family network beyond the immediate nuclear family and the ability of family members to provide care and support within these extended networks is an important assumption of a great deal of family policy. It is important therefore to have an understanding of these networks.

This chapter describes aspects of multifamily and extended family households and the links between related family members in different households.

### Families sharing the same home

What is a *multifamily household*? A multifamily household contains two or more families. A family, as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, consists of "Two or more persons, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering, and who are usually resident in the same household" (ABS 2001d).

An *extended family household* consists of one family plus at least one other relative such as a grandparent, aunt, uncle or cousin when these other relatives do not form a separate family unit within the household.

### How common are multifamily households?

Multifamily households are unusual in Australia. In 2001:

- Just 1.5 per cent of *households* were multifamily households.
- 2.5 per cent of *families* lived in multifamily households.
- 2.2 per cent of the *Australian population* lived in multifamily households.
- 4.2 per cent of children under the age of 15 who lived with at least one parent lived in an extended family household (that is, a household that included only one family but included relatives other than the child's immediate family).
- 1.5 per cent of *children under the age of 18* who lived in a family lived in a multifamily household (ABS 2001c).
- 10.7 per cent of Indigenous *children under 15* lived in a multifamily household and 13.9 per cent lived in a household with a relative beyond their immediate nuclear family (ABS 2001c).

- In 2001, 19.5 per cent of people *aged 65 and over who lived in private dwellings* lived in a household that contained either one of their children, the family of one of their children, their own parent(s), their grandchildren or other relatives. (ABS 2003e)<sup>1</sup>.
- Of people *aged 65 and over who lived in private dwellings in 2001*, 9.6 per cent lived with relatives but without a partner (ABS 2003e).
- Of children who lived in extended family households, 56 per cent had their grandparents in the household. Of children in multifamily households 71 per cent had their grandparents' family in the household (ABS 1999d).

### Which types of families share the one house?

Most multifamily households consist of *related families*. In 2001, 93 per cent of multifamily households consisted of related families. Most multifamily households (87.7 per cent) consisted of the families of two adjacent generations – that is, parents and child's families (ABS 2001c).

Multifamily households are clustered among particular sections of the community and are mainly formed for people at a particular stage of the lifecycle when the standard nuclear, single family household is unable to deal with particular family circumstances (for example, marriage breakdown, elderly and ill older family members). These households are also clustered within particular ethnic groups and among Indigenous Australians where the cultural values, language and economic circumstances promote multifamily household formation.

### Lone parent families

Lone parent families are more likely than couple households to live in multifamily households. In 2001, 5.3 per cent of people living in lone parent families with dependent children, lived in a multifamily household compared with just 1.7 per cent of couples with dependent children and 3.2 per cent of couples without children (2001 Census).

The higher rate of lone parent families living as part of multifamily households is likely to be because of the relative poverty in which many lone parent families live (p. 52-4). Sharing households is one way of reducing living expenses. Multifamily households also provide an easier way in which families can share other resources such as child care, skills and company.

### Do ethnic and Indigenous families share homes?

Multifamily households are much more common among some groups than others. Indigenous

Australians and Australians born in South East Asia or China are the most likely to live in multifamily households while non Indigenous Australians and those born in the United Kingdom or Western Europe are the least likely to have this living arrangement (Table 6.1).

The pattern whereby people in lone parent families are more likely than those in couple families to live in multifamily households holds for Australian born people (both Indigenous and non Indigenous). For people born in other countries, couples without children were the more likely to live in multifamily households. The reason for the relatively common practice of couples without children living in multifamily households is not entirely clear. It may reflect a pattern where young couples from these ethnic backgrounds live with their parents as they save for a house before they have children or it may reflect older couples living with the families of their adult children.

The lower rate of lone parents living in multifamily households where the reference person was born in Asia, Southern Europe, or the Middle East and North Africa may reflect a cultural disapproval of lone parent families among non Australian born parents. Such disapproval may make co-residence of lone parents too difficult.

#### Are older people living with grown children?

As people grow older the need to live with their grown children or other relatives can increase due to health reasons – especially if they are living on their own following the death of their partner. However, the bulk of people aged over 65 do not live with their children or other relatives (Table 6.2). In 2001, the majority (80.4 per cent) of people aged over 65 lived with their partner (53.3 per cent) or on their own (27.1 per cent). Just 9 per cent lived with one of their children, grandchildren or other relative<sup>2</sup>; 3.9 per cent lived in some other type of household altogether (including a group household) and 6.7 per cent lived in a non private dwelling (for example, hospital, aged care accommodation, nursing home).

The chances of living with a relative increased as people grew older. Of those aged 65-74, 7.4 per cent lived with one of their children (or their child lived with them) or another relative. However, among those aged 85 or over, almost twice that percentage (13.7 per cent) lived with a child, grandchild or another relative (Table 6.2).

However, from age 65 onwards people are far more likely to live alone than with a child. While 13.7 per cent of those aged 85 or older lived with a child or other relative, 34.7 per cent lived on their own. This should not be interpreted to mean that children are neglecting their responsibilities to older parents. Many older people are able to live independently and prefer to maintain their independence and avoid living with their children. Furthermore, adult children provide a variety of types of care and support to parents even when they do not share the same household.

#### Do low income families share the one house?

Families with lower incomes are much more likely to live in a multifamily household than those with moderate or higher incomes (Table 6.3). In 2001, of those whose family income was less than \$400 per week, 6.2 per cent lived in a multifamily household. This contrasted with just 1.3 per cent of those whose weekly family income was \$1500 or higher. This suggests that one way in which families on very low incomes manage is by sharing a household with another family – frequently relatives.

This pattern holds equally for Indigenous and non Indigenous households (Table 6.3). Almost a quarter (22.6 per cent) of Indigenous Australians with a family income below \$400 per week lived in multifamily households compared to just 6.5 per cent of Indigenous Australians with a weekly family income in 2001 over \$1500.

#### Families keeping in close contact

Some people use the term “extended family” to refer to family households that consist of family members beyond the members of the immediate nuclear family (for example, grandparents, grandchildren, adult

**Table 6.1** Per cent living in multifamily households by family type and country of birth, 2001

Country of birth (selected countries/regions only)	Couple with children %	Couple without children %	Lone parent %	All %
Australian born	1.5	2.3	4.7	2.1
Australian born, <i>Indigenous</i>	11.2	15.1	14.0	12.6
United Kingdom	1.0	1.9	2.7	1.6
Western Europe	1.1	1.8	2.6	1.6
South East Asia and China	5.1	13.7	7.6	7.1
Southern Europe	3.2	6.8	4.2	4.6
Middle East and North Africa	4.2	12.3	6.5	5.8

Source: 2001 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics customised data cube).

**Table 6.2** Living arrangements of those aged 65+, 2001

Living arrangement	Age			Total %
	65-74 %	75-84 %	85+ %	
With partner <sup>1</sup>	65.0	46.2	19.5	53.3
With child or grandchild or other relative <sup>2</sup>	7.4	9.9	13.7	9.0
Lone person	21.4	33.5	34.7	27.1
Other household	4.5	3.5	2.5	3.9
Non private dwelling	1.7	6.9	29.6	6.7

Source: 2001 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics customised data cube). Excludes visitors  
<sup>1</sup> With partner - others may be present  
<sup>2</sup> No partner present

siblings, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews). The relative rarity of such families gave rise to the belief that the extended family had largely disappeared and that nuclear families were isolated (Parsons 1943; Lee 1980). However, it quickly became clear that family relationships extended well “beyond the front door” and that family members living in separate households often continued to play a similar role to that played by members of an extended family who lived within the same household. The term “modified extended family” has been coined to refer to these links with family members living outside of the immediate household (Litwak 1960a, 1960b; Sussman 1965).

The operation of modified extended families is apparent in a number of ways including family units living near one another, maintaining contact and helping each other out through various means.

**Table 6.3** Living in multifamily household by family income and Indigenous status, 2001

	Family Income				Total
	< \$400	\$400 - \$799	\$800 - \$1499	\$1500 +	
Non Indigenous	5.4	2.6	1.9	1.3	2.3
Indigenous	22.6	11.3	8.7	6.5	13.0
All	6.2	2.9	2.0	1.3	2.5

Source: 2001 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics customised data cube).

**Table 6.4** Proximity of later life respondents' adult children and parents, 1996

	Proximity to:			
	Elderly mother %	Elderly father %	Partner's parent(s) %	Adult children (living independently) %
Not alive (or do not have)	69.5	87.5	71.0	17.0
At least one lives with respondent	1.9	0.4	0.8	All live independently
At least one lives within 30 minutes	11.0	3.7	10.0	54.0
They all live further away	17.5	8.2	18.0	28.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>721</i>	<i>721</i>	<i>721</i>	<i>721</i>

Source: 1996 Later Life Families Study. Table reproduced from Millward (1998).

**How close do family members live to each other?**

The Later Life Families Study conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in 1996 asked adults aged between 50 and 70 years of age about the degree of contact they had with their older parents and their adult children. Most people in this age group did not have elderly parents still alive. Of those that did have an elderly parent or parent in law still living, the majority of the parents lived more than 30 minutes travel away from their 50-70 year old child (Table 6.4).

Just over half (54 per cent) of these 50-70 year olds had an adult child living within 30 minutes travel but the rest did not have any adult child living nearby (Table 6.4). In the Australian Living Standards Survey in 1991-92, 56 per cent of families with a child under 18 lived within 30 minutes of at least one parent's mother and 50 per cent lived within 30 minutes of at least one parent's father. Furthermore, 64 per cent of families had at least one of the parent's brothers or sisters living within 30 minutes and 50 per cent had another important relative within the same proximity (Millward, 1996).

**How much contact do family members share?**

The Later Life Families Study found that adults aged 50-70 had high levels of contact with at least one adult child (Table 6.5). Of these 50-70 year olds, 92 per cent had at least weekly contact with an adult child. Of those with elderly parents still alive, contact with elderly parents was less frequent than with adult children. Sixty five per cent had weekly contact with their elderly mother and 50 per cent had weekly contact with their elderly father.

In the Australian Living Standards Survey, Millward (1996) found that 53 per cent of the families had at least weekly face-to-face contact with at least one parent's mother and 44 per cent had at least weekly contact with at least one parent's father. In addition, 69 per cent had at least weekly telephone contact with at least one parent's mother and 52 per cent with a father. As well as contact with their parents who lived elsewhere, these families maintained high levels of contact with a parent's siblings.

**How much do family members help each other?**

The 2002 General Social Survey found that substantial numbers of people provide help<sup>3</sup> to relatives living outside their household. Figure 6.1 shows that a substantial proportion of men and women are providing help to relatives beyond the household. This help peaks among men and women aged between 45 and 65 when approximately a third are providing this type of help. Overall, more than a quarter of adults reported providing help to these extended family members.

According to the General Social Survey, the bulk of support provided is through helping with transport and providing financial assistance.

Most adults (94 per cent) feel that they can obtain support in times of crisis and most of these people (88 per cent) believe that they could rely on family members to help out in a crisis (ABS 2003f).

Older parents continue to provide a great deal of assistance to their grown children in later life. A report to the Economic Planning Advisory Council in 1994 indicated the following levels of support provided by older parents (Table 6.6). Over three quarters of older parents provided child minding and emotional support to their adult children and 61 per cent helped care for members of their adult child's family in times of illness. Other help was also provided in the form of housing assistance and financial assistance in helping their adult children get established.

The Later Life Families Survey identified high levels of help provided by 50-70 year olds to their adult children (Millward 1998). It found that:

- 91 per cent provided emotional support and help to adult children.
- 72 per cent provided financial assistance to adult children.
- 83 per cent provided other practical help to adult children.

**Table 6.5 Contact between respondents and non resident children or elderly parents, 1996**

	Contact at least weekly		Contact them less often	
	%	N	%	N
Elderly mother	65	(143)	35	(76)
Elderly father	50	(45)	50	(45)
Partner's parent(s)	39	(80)	61	(126)
Adult children (independent)	92	(542)	8	(50)

*Source:* 1996 Later Life Families Study. Table reproduced from Millward (1998).

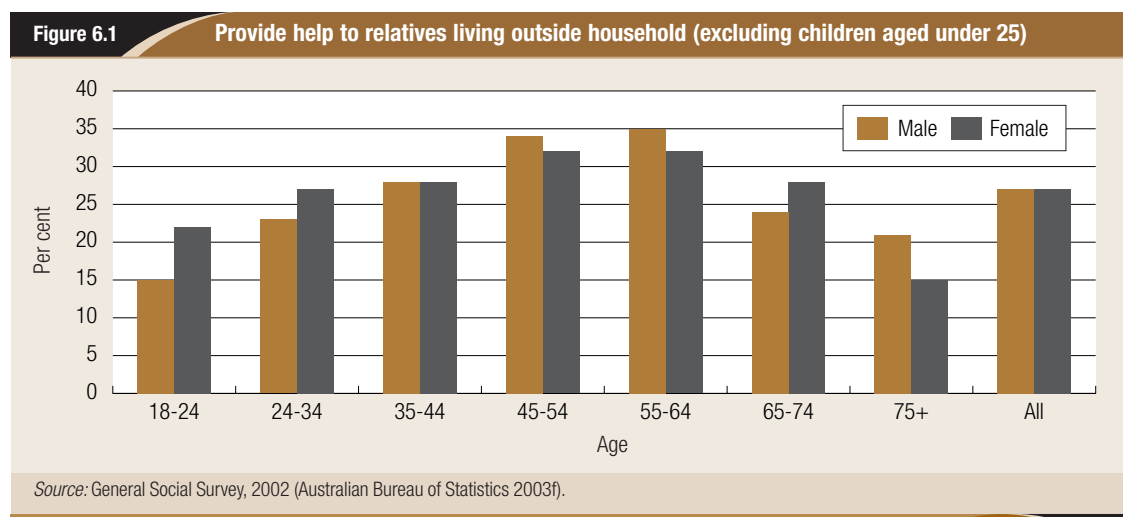
While financial support is one way in which family members help each other out, an important form of inter family support is provided by the unpaid contributions of family members. The financial value of these contributions can be estimated based on the amount of time spent helping family members. The 1997 Time Use Survey allows an estimate to be made of the value of the unpaid work of people to family members living outside of their own household (de Vaus, Gray and Stanton 2003).

On average each woman provided \$800 worth of unpaid help per year to family members living

**Table 6.6 Support by older parents to adult children**

Type of support	Per cent providing support
Child minding	76
Emotional support in crisis	76
Care for others when sick	61
Assisting with renovations	38
Financial assistance with:	
Major purchases	37
Tertiary education	27
Deposit for house or flat	33

*Source:* Clare and Tulpule (1994).



elsewhere while men provided approximately \$484 each per year (Table 6.7). As with financial forms of help (Figure 6.1) the value of the unpaid work to family members beyond the household peaks among women aged 45-64 and men aged 55-74. It is likely that these peaks in unpaid work reflect the periods of life when parents are providing assistance to adult children who have left home and to older parents who may need some support.

**Table 6.7** Annual per capita value (\$) of unpaid work to family members outside own household by gender and age, Australia 1997 (1997 dollars)

	Female \$	Male \$
<b>Household work</b>		
15-24	159	76
25-44	277	272
45-54	452	118
55-64	901	573
65-74	389	435
75 plus	489	122
<i>Total</i>	<i>378</i>	<i>253</i>
<b>Child care</b>		
15-24	43	-
25-44	167	76
45-54	368	88
55-64	726	269
65-74	506	211
75 plus	146	37
<i>Total</i>	<i>272</i>	<i>97</i>
<b>Adult care</b>		
15-24	7	-
25-44	11	1
45-54	66	4
55-64	32	1
65-74	-	13
75 plus	24	-
<i>Total</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>2</i>
<b>Volunteer work</b>		
15-24	61	32
25-44	139	178
45-54	203	102
55-64	161	139
65-74	65	184
75 plus	80	117
<i>Total</i>	<i>128</i>	<i>131</i>
<b>Total unpaid work</b>		
15-24	271	108
25-44	594	527
45-54	1,089	313
55-64	1,820	982
65-74	960	843
75 plus	739	276
<i>Total</i>	<i>800</i>	<i>484</i>

Source: 1997 Time Use Survey (de Vaus, Gray and Stanton 2003).  
 Note: Household work is defined to include food and drink preparation and clean-up, laundry, ironing and clothes care, other housework, gardening and lawn care, cleaning grounds and pet care, home maintenance, household management and purchasing

Further evidence of the degree to which the families of adults help each other is discussed in sections below.

**Who has the stronger family networks?**

The evidence discussed so far shows that many families have significant ongoing links with their wider families. However, it is also clear that not all people have these extended family ties. This section explores some of the factors associated with the existence of strong extended family ties.

**Does family type affect family networks?**

The family type in which a person lives can have an impact on the availability of extended family networks as can family disruptions such as divorce.

**Does parental divorce disrupt family networks?**

The 1990 Family Formation Study conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies found that *compared to parents whose marriage was “intact”* (Table 6.8):

- Divorced parents were a little more likely to receive financial help from their adult children.
- Widowed parents were no more likely to receive financial help.
- Widowed mothers (but not fathers) received more emotional help, help around the house and practical help.
- In general widowed fathers received about the same help as intact parents except for practical help where they received less help.

As far as parents *giving* help to adult children was concerned, the study showed that *compared to intact parents*:

- Divorced parents gave less help with home renovation, child care, help during illness and help with tertiary education.
- Widowed mothers gave about the same level of help as intact parents except for help with home renovations.
- Widowed fathers gave less help during illness and less emotional support to their adult children.

Overall:

- Widowed mothers received more help but did not give more help than intact parents.
- Widowed fathers gave a little less help and received about the same help as intact parents.
- Divorced parents did not receive extra help and gave less help than intact parents.

The 1996 Later Life Families study found that older people who had been divorced or separated had less frequent contact with their adult children. Of divorced and separated older people, 17 per cent

had less than weekly contact with an adult child compared to 10 per cent of widowed older people and 6 per cent of married older people (Millward, 1998a). This same study showed that:

- Parents who had *not* divorced were twice as likely as those who had divorced to receive emotional support from a grown child.
- Parents who had *not* divorced were 1.7 times more likely to receive practical help than were other parents (Millward 1997).

The amount of help exchanged between older people and their grown children varied according to whether parents had divorced, and if they had divorced, whether or not they had repartnered. The list below indicates the circumstances in which help was exchanged between older people and their grown children. The list is ordered from circumstances where *most* help was exchanged through to those where *least* help was exchanged (Millward 1998):

- Mothers who were widowed and not repartnered.
- Mothers who were still married to the adult child's father.
- Mothers who were divorced or separated, but not repartnered.
- Fathers who were still married to the adult child's mother.
- Mothers who had divorced or separated and were repartnered.
- Fathers who were divorced or separated, but not repartnered.
- Fathers who had divorced or separated and were repartnered.

### Do lone parent families have close ties with kin?

Due to having only one parent in the home to care for children, lone parents may need to rely on their relatives for assistance more than couple parents. The Australian Living Standards Study found that lone mothers were more likely than couple mothers to live within a 30 minute drive of some extended family members – especially parents and siblings (Table 6.9). Lone mothers also maintained more face-to-face contact with these parents and siblings than did couple mothers.

However, these figures will underestimate the contact that couple mothers have with relatives overall since couple mothers are likely to have contact with their in-laws.

### Are extended family networks closer when children are young?

Mothers have more contact with their own parents when their children are young. Contact declines as

	Couple mothers %	Lone mothers %
<b>Lives within 30 minute drive of</b>		
Mother	44	53
Father	41	47
Nearest sibling	49	57
<b>Sees in person at least weekly</b>		
Mother	45	55
Father	37	39
Nearest sibling	31	37

*Source:* Australian Living Standards Study (Millward 1996).  
 N= Lone mothers=345-561 depending on relative and question  
 Couple mothers= between 2573 to 3619 depending on question and relative

	Parents intact %	Parents divorced %	Mother widowed %	Father widowed %
<b>Help to parents</b>				
Financial	15	22*	19	17
Emotional	83	82	88*	78
Around the house	60	45	76***	55
During illness	57	55	63	55
Practical help	40	45	55***	28*
<b>Help from parents</b>				
Any financial	68	60*	67	64
Financial help with tertiary education	27	15**	23	16
Renovating	39	21***	32	21
During illness	58	46**	53	44**
Minding children	79	65**	77	81
Emotional	71	67	69	55*

*Source:* 1992 Family Formation Study (Rezak 2002).  
 These percentages are based on Multiple Classification Analysis in which the following variables were controlled: parental age, mother's education, and offspring's gender, age, marital status, number of siblings, hours worked, having children, income, whether born in Australia and co-residence with parent.  
 \* p<.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<.001. These significance levels indicate that the percentage is significantly different from the percentage for parents from an intact marriage  
 N of cases for each type of help (except child minding) was based on at least 1270 cases. Child minding was based on 967 cases

**Table 6.10** Per cent of mothers with face-to-face contact with relatives at least weekly by age of youngest child and own workforce participation

	Age of youngest child		
	0-4 %	5-11 %	12-19 %
<b>Mother not in workforce</b>			
Child's grandmother	62	45	41
Child's grandfather	50	35	32
Child's aunt/uncle	49	37	26
Other important relative	23	20	20
<b>Mother in workforce</b>			
Child's grandmother	58	45	47
Child's grandfather	50	36	37
Child's aunt/uncle	45	33	33
Other important relative	23	20	23

Source: Australian Living Standards Study (Millward 1996).

children get older. This decline is probably because grandparents play a bigger role in families when their grandchildren are pre-schoolers.

The Australian Living Standards Study also indicates that mothers had most contact with their parents and other nominated extended family members when they had a pre-schooler (Table 6.10). These daughters had the most regular contact with their mothers followed by contact with their father and siblings (child's aunts or uncles). In general, once the youngest child went to primary school at age five, contact with these relatives declined but remained stable thereafter.

There was very little difference in the level of contact that working and non working mothers maintained with their parents and relatives – even when their children were of similar age. For example, 62 per cent of not employed mothers with a pre-schooler saw their child's grandmother at least weekly compared to 58 per cent of employed mothers who did so.

**Table 6.11** Proximity and contact with extended family members by urban/rural location

	Urban %	Rural %
<b>Live within 30 minute drive</b>		
Mother	58	49
Father	51	46
Sibling	68	51
Other important relative	52	37
<b>Sees in person at least weekly</b>		
Mother	55	47
Father	44	43
Sibling	41	37
Other important relative	23	17

Source: Australian Living Standards Study (Millward 1996).

Note: Same pattern applied for 2 hour drive as for 30 minute drive

**Are family networks closer in rural areas?**

It is often thought that family ties in the country are closer than those in the city. However, migration of younger people away from rural areas means that it may be difficult for extended family ties to survive the dislocation of this movement of people with young families. Evidence from the Australian Living Standards Study indicates that rural people are a little *less* likely to have their parents living nearby and are less likely to see them regularly. Table 6.11 shows that adults in the city live closer to their mother than those who live in the country and that they have more regular contact than do their rural counterparts.

Further evidence from the Australian Living Standards Study indicated that within cities those people living in the outer suburbs lived closest to their parents and relatives and had the most regular contact with them. Adults living in the inner city or middle suburbs resembled the contact patterns of people living in the country. This means that families in the outer or "fringe" suburbs maintained family ties with extended family members more than did those living elsewhere. This pattern casts some doubt on the image of the isolated nuclear family inhabiting the outer suburbs while those in the more densely settled inner areas or in the more traditional rural areas maintain close family ties. One of the reasons for this is the family dislocation often experienced by large numbers of migrants in inner city areas.

**Do older family members receive more help than they give?**

The need for and ability to provide help varies over the life course. At some points parents are able to help out their adult children while at other life stages the flow of assistance is reversed. In 1992 the Australian Bureau of Statistics Family Survey focused on the patterns of mutual help among related families. Table 6.12 shows the various ages at which support is given and received between adults and their parents.

The pattern of helping between the generations reported in Table 6.11 has a number of important features.

- The balance of the flow of transfers, favours children rather than older parents: adult children were more likely to have received help from their older parents than to have given them help. For example, in the period covered by the Family Survey (ABS 1998a) the parents of about 20 per cent of adult children (with children aged under 12) were the main providers of informal child care; 11 per cent of parents reported providing income support to children; and 9 per cent of adults received accommodation support from their parents. By comparison, parents received relatively low levels of support from their grown children. Only 8.5 per cent of parents received

**Table 6.12** Main age at which parents and children provide and receive support

Type of support	Parents provide support (years)	Children receive support (years)	Children provide support (years)	Parents receive support (years)
Child care	50–74	20–39	-	-
Accommodation	50–74	20–39	-	-
Income	40–59	20–29	-	-
Employment	40–49	20–29	-	-
Transport	-	-	50–74	na
Personal care/home help	-	-	40+	75+

*Source:* 1992 Survey of Australian Families (de Vaus and Qu 1998).

any personal care or home help, and just under 4 per cent received regular transport support.

- Adult children received most support from their parents when they were in their twenties and thirties – the ages at which they were getting educated and established.
- Parental provision of support to their adult children was highest when they (the parents) were in their fifties and sixties, although this support can extend into their early seventies.
- Because they may have several children, parents may be providing support to adult children for an extended period. They were supporting one adult child or another for a more extended period than adult children provide support to their parents. Support for parents was concentrated in the time when they were aged over 75 years (the age after which declines in physical health tend to accelerate).
- There is evidence of a “sandwich generation” dimension to intergenerational support (Brody 1990). Many people in their fifties to seventies are both a parent of an adult child *and* an adult child of an elderly parent. Between the ages of 50–74, as parents, they were most likely to be helping their adult children, and as adult children they were most likely to be helping their elderly parents.

#### **Are women the kin-keepers?**

Women are more active than men in maintaining contact with the extended family. For this reason women have often been described as the “kin-keepers”. This tendency is evident in the results from the Australian Living Standards Study shown in Table 6.13.

Three points stand out in Table 6.13:

- Females had a higher rate of face-to-face and telephone contact with extended family members than did males.
- Mothers and daughters had the most frequent contact – 46 per cent saw each other at least weekly and 65 per cent had at least weekly telephone contact.
- Fathers had more contact with their daughters than with their sons.

Despite the greater contact between daughters and their parents, daughters did not live any closer to their parents than did sons. Forty-six per cent of women lived within 30 minutes of their parents compared to 44 per cent of men. However, in country areas men were more likely than women to live near their parents (Millward 1996).

#### **Older people and gender**

The Australian Institute of Family Studies Later Life Families Survey highlighted the important part played by extended family ties in later life. It identified some of the ways in which these family relationships differed for men and women.

While the majority of both older men and women rated their contact with their family as important, women rated these family ties as more important. Of older women, 84 per cent compared to 64 per cent of men rated these extended family ties as extremely important to them.

Female family members and relatives helped each other quite a lot. In later life, women are more likely than men both to give and receive emotional and practical help with their adult children. Equally, women at this stage of life are more likely than men to be giving support to, and receiving emotional and practical support from, parents in law. Women are also more likely, in later life, to be receiving financial help from their adult children. The only area in which men seemed to be more

**Table 6.13** Contact with extended family members by gender

	Male %	Female %
<b>Has at least weekly face-to-face contact</b>		
Mother	35	46
Father	33	37
Nearest sibling	22	32
Other important relative	16	18
<b>Has at least weekly telephone contact</b>		
Mother	45	64
Father	37	47
Nearest sibling	22	37
Other important relative	17	21

*Source:* Australian Living Standards Study (Millward 1996).

**Table 6.14 Reciprocity of support between generations**

Type of help	Emotional		Financial		Practical	
	Men %	Women %	Men %	Women %	Men %	Women %
Support to adult children	87	94	76	70	79	85
Support from adult children	70	89	14	30	72	82
Support to parents/in-laws	71	75	35	34	63	73
Support from parents/in-laws	39	47	17	22	22	34

Source: 1996 Later Life Family Survey (Wolcott 1997).

active than women was in providing financial support to adult children (Table 6.14).

Furthermore, daughters were more likely than sons to be called on to provide help in times of illness or as someone in whom to confide (Table 6.15). For example, 50 per cent of the mothers in the Later Life Survey said they would seek their daughter's help if ill (compared with 30 per cent who would seek their son's help) and 35 per cent would choose their daughter to confide in (compared with 18 per cent for sons).

Although fathers were less likely than mothers to seek help from their children if ill or to confide in

(they were more likely than women to have a partner) they were still more likely to rely on their daughters than their sons.

**Do migrants have stronger extended family ties?**

Census data discussed earlier indicated that multi-family and extended family households are more common among families from particular ethnic backgrounds. To what extent does the same pattern apply to the development of the modified extended family?

According to the Australian Living Standards Study, families from a non English-speaking background had less contact with extended family members than those from an English speaking background. Those from a non English speaking background were less likely than others to live near their parents and other relatives and were less likely to speak regularly to their parents on the phone (Millward, 1996). However, non English speaking background adults were about as likely to see their parents as other migrant families (Table 6.16).

This pattern regarding families from non English-speaking backgrounds does not fit with the common conception of tightly knit families from these backgrounds. One reason for this is that migration has disrupted extended family ties in many cases. In many cases, parents and siblings are simply not available for day-to-day contact or to provide any hands-on support. When these other family members had migrated and were thus

**Table 6.15 Reliance on sons and daughters in later life**

	If ill		To confide in	
	Men %	Women %	Men %	Women %
Daughter	29	50	14	35
Son	21	30	8	18

Source: 1996 Later Life Family Survey (Wolcott 1997).

**Table 6.16 Links with specified family members among migrants**

	Migrants from	
	English speaking background %	Non English speaking background %
<b>Live within 30 minute drive</b>		
Mother	52	46
Father	48	39
Nearest sibling	62	57
Other important relative	44	48
<b>See in person at least weekly</b>		
Mother	49	48
Father	41	38
Nearest sibling	36	40
Other important relative	20	27
<b>Speak on telephone at least weekly</b>		
Mother	63	48
Father	49	38
Nearest sibling	42	45
Another important relative	25	2

Source: Australian Living Standards Study (Millward 1996).

**Table 6.17 Links with parents among migrants whose parents have also migrated to Australia**

	Migrants from	
	English speaking background %	Non English speaking background %
<b>See in person at least weekly</b>		
Mother	56	72
Father	47	65
<b>Speak on telephone at least weekly</b>		
Mother	76	72
Father	58	65

Source: Australian Living Standards Study (Millward 1996).

potentially available for this type of interaction, families from non English-speaking backgrounds showed a much higher rate of contact with parents – especially face-to-face contact (Table 6.17). Of these families where parents had also migrated to Australia, 72 per cent had at least weekly contact with their mother. This is much higher than the rate of contact among those from English-speaking countries (56 per cent) and those who were born in Australia where less than 50 per cent had weekly contact with their mother.

The Australian Family Survey in 1992 found real differences in the patterns of adults and their parents helping each other depending on their ethnic background. This was especially the case when comparing Australians born in Southern Europe,

the Middle East or Asia with other Australians. Compared with other Australians, adults from these regions were:

- Less likely to provide personal care/home help to their parents;
- Less likely to get child care help from their parents;
- More likely to be giving their parents financial support – possibly sending money back home to help their parents in their old age.

These differences probably reflect the fact that many adults from these regions have disrupted family ties where parents are simply not available to help in these ways. (de Vaus and Qu 1998).

### Endnotes

- 1 Household might also contain the older person's partner.
- 2 Some of those who lived with a partner will also have had a child, grandchild or other relative in the household. The classification of children or other relative includes only those people who lived with these relatives without their partner.
- 3 Support includes giving money for rent and/or other housing costs, for bills or to meet debts, providing or paying for food and clothing, assistance with transport, helping with education expenses, providing regular income and purchasing big cost items such as a car or computer.

### Highlights

- Nationally, just 1.8 per cent of households contain two or more families.
- Lone parent families are much more likely than couple families to live in a multifamily household. In 2001, 5.3 per cent of people living in a lone parent family lived in a multifamily household compared with just 1.7 per cent of those from couple families with dependent children. Indigenous Australians live in multifamily households at a much higher rate than the Australian population overall. Of Indigenous Australians 12.6 per cent were living in a multifamily household at the time of the 2001 census. This compares to 2.1 per cent of all Australian born people.
- Australians born in Asia, Southern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa all had higher rates of multifamily household living than did non Indigenous Australian born people.
- Relatively few older people live with their adult children. The highest rate of living with adult children was among those aged 85 or older where 12 per cent of those in this age group lived with an adult child or grandchild.
- Multifamily household living is considerably more common among low income families.
- Even though it is relatively unusual for adults and their older parents to live together there is strong evidence of active links being maintained between family units. These links help maintain a "modified extended family".
- Most older people maintain regular contact with at least some adult children, provide support to these adult children and receive some support from them.
- Parental divorce appears to weaken the linkages between adults and their parents.
- Lone mothers appear to have more involvement with their own parents, particularly their mother, than do couple parents.
- Adults living in rural areas seem to have more limited contact with their parents and adult children than those living in urban areas.
- As far as transfers between adults and older parents are concerned, the evidence points to parents providing considerable help and support to their adult children. The balance of transfers between adult children and their older parents favours the adult children.
- Female family members are the most active in maintaining links between members of the extended family. Mother-daughter ties appear to be more active than those between mothers and sons or between fathers and their sons and daughters.
- Those people who were born overseas, overall, have less active links with older parents than those born in Australia. This is mainly because migration has disrupted these family ties. However, adult migrants from a non English speaking background who have parents living in Australia maintain active ties with these older parents.