

Families in the news

Everybody is interested in families. When the Australian Institute of Family Studies publishes research on some aspect of family life, the media tend to pay attention, for family news has a high 'public interest' factor. What, then, has caught the eye of Australia's newspaper editors and television and radio producers over the last few months?

■ REASONS FOR DIVORCE

Without doubt, the research that attracted most comment in recent months was the Working Paper *Towards Understanding the Reasons for Divorce*. The findings were reported in newspaper articles in every capital city and received an enormous amount of radio coverage in the form of author interviews and talkback.

The prevalence of communication problems as the cause of marriage breakdown elicited headlines like "Lack of talk a divorce risk" (Herald Sun 5/7/99) and "The final breaking points" (Adelaide Advertiser 5/7/99).

"Most divorcees content with life after break-up" (SMH 5/7/99) took up the findings about the wellbeing of people after divorce.

Women were the instigators in most of the separations reported in the Institute study and this fact was widely reported – "Women take the divorce initiative" (Northern Territory News 5/7/99), and "Easier for women to make the break" (The Australian 5/7/99).

The publication of the Institute's divorce data coincided with the release of new research on the effectiveness of marriage education and counselling by Relationships Australia. A number of feature articles drew on both reports in a detailed analysis of divorce and relationship breakdown, and the Government's recently announced initiatives in relation to marriage education.

■ SUPERANNUATION AND DIVORCE

The Institute's April Briefing Paper, *Superannuation and Divorce in Australia*, was reported in most of the metropolitan daily newspapers. Journalists were interested in people's lack of understanding of their partner's superannuation entitlements, and the ramifications that this has in property settlements.

■ WORK AND FAMILY

The retirement from the front bench of the Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer, to spend more time with his young family, generated renewed media interest in the balance between work and family.

Discussion of the effects of work on family life ranged across the possible links between work and family stresses including marriage breakdown; declining fertility; access to reproductive technology for women delaying childbirth to establish careers; the pros and cons of older parents; quality time versus quantity time; and the costs of child care.

Attention focused on how fathers juggle their work and family responsibilities and how business has accommodated the changing role of fathers. Some commentators questioned the extent to which the work/family discussion is relevant to the majority of the working population, or whether flexible work arrangements are primarily available to professionals.

Institute research on the work preferences of women with children was cited in a number of articles, as was the article on reciprocal effects of work and family, published in the Autumn 1999 edition of *Family Matters*. The Institute also provided the media with much of the background material which informed the discussion.

■ FAMILY MATTERS

As usual, the media picked up on articles published in the Autumn edition of *Family Matters*. Institute research on the policy implications of declining home ownership, and the debate between Richard Eckersley and Institute Research Manager Peter Saunders about defining and measuring 'progress', each generated opinion pieces in daily newspapers.

A number of columnists also referred to the recently completed Institute Research Plan in feature and opinion articles about social policy and research in Australia.

– Catherine Rosenbrock
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