



SUSAN FOOKS

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Strong families across the life course

Reference material relating to families across the life course represent an important component of the information available on the *Australian Family & Society Abstracts* database at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. This bibliography looks at three different aspects of families by focusing on marriage education, the effect of family-friendly work practices, and repartnering.

All of these references are available on interlibrary loan from the Institute's Family Information Centre, with a few of them being available online. Some of the books and articles are available from bookshops and other libraries.

Marriage education

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs (1998), *To Have and To Hold: Strategies to Strengthen Marriage and Relationships: A Report of the Inquiry into Aspects of Family Services*, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, Canberra, 347p.

The Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs has examined the strategic directions for supporting relationships in Australia, with a focus on effective preventive strategies. The Committee reviewed the education, counselling, mediation, parenting and other services partially funded through the Family Relationship Services Program of the Federal Attorney-General's Department, and also observed the services provided directly through the Family Court of Australia. This report on the inquiry reviews trends in marriage and family in Australia since World War II; assesses the impact of change on Australian society; surveys the range of views in the community on the factors contributing to marriage and relationship breakdown; and provides a brief history of the Family Relationships Services Program. The

report focuses on prevention, and examines the provision of marriage education services and the current position of civil celebrants in the promotion and provision of marriage and relationship education.

'Family relationships education services' (1998), *Family Services Council Newsletter*, Spring, pp. 1-3.

Family relationships education activities are about empowerment and skills development in individuals and families so that they are better equipped to manage and enhance their family relationships, whether or not they are intact family relationships.

This article outlines family relationships education services which offers preventive activities focusing on providing information and skills to foster positive and stable relationships. The services aim to enhance the achievement of sustained family relationships through increased self awareness and understanding of relationships and processes, the capacity to apply them, and an awareness of community resources and support groups.

Halford, K. (1998), 'For better or worse: couple relationships and men's wellbeing', in *National Forum on Men and Family Relationships*, Family Relationships Branch, Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra, pp. 38-48.

The impact of couple relationships on men's wellbeing is addressed in this paper which focuses on the following arguments: that men who are in committed, mutually satisfying relationships are better off than men who are not in such relationships; that there are some core intimacy skills that have a major influence on whether men manage to sustain satisfying couple relationships; that it is possible for people who have deficits in those skills, to learn them relatively easily if they are provided in forms and at times

which are acceptable to men. The determinants of having a good relationship are identified and research which looks at predictors of relationship satisfaction over time is discussed. Core components of relationship education are outlined, with the emphasis on people using active self-directed learning and adult learning processes.

Parker, R.A. & Scannell, E.D. (1998), 'Attachment and marital adjustment', Paper presented at the 6th Australian Institute of Families Studies Conference, Melbourne, November, 15p. Online: <http://www.aifs.org.au/external/institute/afrc6papers/parker.html>.

Raising couples' awareness of relationship issues that they might not have encountered or anticipated is a key aim of pre-marriage education programs. This paper discusses the role of 'attachment theory' in providing practitioners with a framework for helping couples build more satisfying committed relationships.

Wolcott, I. & Hughes, J. (1999), *Towards Understanding the Reasons for Divorce*, Working Paper no. 20, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, 29p. Online: <http://www.aifs.org.au/institute/pubs/wolcott6.html>.

Why do marriages break down? What are the reasons for divorce? How can marriage and family relationships be strengthened? This paper, based on data collected as part of the Australian Divorce Transitions Project, conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in late 1997, focuses on the reasons that 650 divorced men and women gave for their marriage ending. The paper examines the reasons for divorce in relation to selected demographic and socio-economic factors, who initiated separation, whether assistance was sought during the marriage, whether the couple prepared for their final separation, aspects of post-divorce

adjustment, and reflections of regret. Implications for implementing strategies to strengthen marriage and family relationships, and further research agendas are discussed.

Family friendly work practices

'Family friendly work practices: an information kit for employers' (1999), *Work and Family Newsletter*, Department of Productivity and Labour Relations, WA, no. 9, May, 16p insert.

Almost all employees have a family, and with that comes family responsibilities. Progressive employers have found that by responding to the needs of families, they have been able to attract and retain skilled employees, avoid the high costs associated with staff turnover, and increase productivity by introducing more flexible work practices. This information kit is provided for employers who are interested in creating a more family friendly work environment. There are a range of family friendly work practices which employers could consider making available to employees. The information kit outlines some of these options and important guidelines on how to implement them.

Glezer, H. & Wolcott, I. (1999), 'Work and family life: reciprocal effects', *Family Matters*, no. 52, Autumn, pp. 69-74.

Central to the debate surrounding work and family life is a paradox, namely the essential competition between the demands of business to be productive and efficient in the market place, and the need for workers to enjoy satisfying family and personal lives. This article draws on data from the Institute's Australian Family Life Course Study to examine the extent to which work and home life impinge on one another. The authors discuss how factors

related to the working environment, family circumstances and time pressures influence these reciprocal effects, and identify the main predictors of work impinging on home life.

Thomson, L. (1998), 'Flexible working conditions in intractable labour markets? An insight into how female clerical workers balance work and family responsibilities in an era of labour market reform', Paper presented at the 6th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, Melbourne, November, 9p. Online: <http://www.aifs.org.au/external/institute/afrc6papers/parker.html>.

Recent studies indicate that there has been a move away from the standard working time model of employment where workers were employed five days a week, eight hours per day. At the present time the standard model of working time is no longer applicable in the Australian context. Instead there has been an increase in unemployment levels, underemployment and casualisation and excessively long work hours for a significant number of workers. It is argued that the ultimate market society is 'childless'. In this context, women are most at risk as they do not conform to the 'ideal type' of worker who is single, unhindered by a relationship, marriage or the family. What does this mean to parents who are juggling work and family responsibilities? This paper details a qualitative study that focused on the workplace experience of 40 women working in the clerical sector. The study is based on extensive interviews with respondents about all aspects of their job, conditions of employment and how they juggle their work and family responsibilities. Follow-up interviews were conducted some 18 months later to ascertain whether their work and family lives had changed. Finally, the paper explores whether the rhetoric and discourse of labour

market reform which promotes flexibility and family friendly policies actually meet the needs of family life.

Zetlin, D. & Whitehouse, G. (1998), 'Balancing work and family commitments: developments in innovative organisations', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, vol. 23, no. 3, September, pp. 9-13.

In the 1990s, balancing work and family commitments is increasingly seen as an issue to be pursued at corporation and individual levels, with social policy measures providing at best a basic set of minimum standards. This paper seeks to explore how some of the more exemplary corporations are responding to these challenges, their workers' experience of family friendly policies, and the extent to which this shift is promoting gender equity. The authors argue that current trends make it extremely difficult to address the more costly aspects of work and family policy, and that, in spite of innovation in some areas, most policy programs tend to reinforce rather than challenge the tendency for women to take up 'jobs' rather than 'careers'.

Repartnering

Elliott, R. (1997), 'Therapy with remarried couples: a multitheoretical perspective', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, vol. 18, no. 4, December, pp. 181-193.

Work with remarried couples is often difficult and complex. The first part of this essay provides a comprehensive discussion of the many issues faced by remarried couples under the headings of emotional consequences of separation, the presence of children in the new relationship, finances, lack of guidelines and models, complexity of structure, and women in stepfamilies. The

second part addresses therapy, by first tracing the past contributions to the field by structural, psychodynamic and cognitive models, and then moving on to speculate about the offerings of Adult Attachment Theory, Trauma Theory, Narrative Therapy, and Feminist Theory. Consistent with the awareness fostered by feminism, the essay attempts to create a respectful dialogue between these models with the hope of gaining value from all while elevating none. The discussion is illustrated by a case example.

Lamaro, C. (1997), 'Second marriage: a relationship or a stepfamily?' *SCOPE: Journal of Family Services Australia*, vol. 3, no. 1, December, pp. 27-30.

This article discusses second marriages and stepfamilies, and whether it is preferable for couples to develop their own relationship before being drawn too deeply into stepfamily relationships. The author states that couples generally focus on the formation of the stepfamily and allow it to take precedence over the need to develop their own relationship, and believes that the challenge is how to get couples to attend pre second-marriage education so that they will be better prepared for both the marriage relationship and the stepfamily relationships.

Nicholson, J. (1998), 'Meeting the stepfamily challenge: the value of group intervention for men in stepfamilies', in *National Forum on Men and Family Relationships*, Family Relationships Branch, Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra, pp. 173-179.

Reporting on preliminary results from a large trial to evaluate the efficacy of a preventive focused intervention for remarried couples, delivered in either a group intervention or a self-education format, this paper focuses on the impact of the intervention on fathers and stepfathers, contrasting this with mothers and stepmothers. The data analysed represent a small aspect of the Stepfamilies Preparation Program (StepPrep), an early intervention program that aims to prevent the separation of remarried couples by providing stepfamily education, positive relationship skills, positive parenting skills and communication skills.

Susan Fooks is a librarian and database indexer in the Institute's Family Information Centre.

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