



# Families in the news

Recent Australian Institute of Family Studies research has contributed to a diverse range of media queries.

## ■ CHILDREN? OR NO CHILDREN?

In the last edition of *Family Matters*, we reported effects of changing personal relationships on decisions about having children. The research on the impact of relationship breakdown on fertility choices made front page news in Sydney – “Break-ups shatter hopes of becoming parent” (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 March) – was widely reported in the nation’s daily newspapers: “Childless life not always a choice” (*The Age*, 7 March); “Romantic break-ups lead to low birth rates” (*Courier Mail* 7 March); “Why the desire to have a child fades” (*Adelaide Advertiser* 7 March); “Birthrate hit by rate of break-ups” (*West Australian*, 7 March); “Why some will never have kids” (*Melbourne Express*, 8<sup>th</sup> March); and “Why having kids is the lottery of life” (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 March).

The report was included in morning radio news bulletins in Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide. Senior researcher Ruth Weston, one of the report’s co-authors, was very much in demand as a radio interviewee, doing live interviews and talkback in Melbourne, Newcastle, Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane.

## ■ POLITICS? YAWN!! SAY TEENS

Also reported in the last edition of *Family Matters*, was new research into civic mindedness and political interest among older adolescents. The research, from the Australian Temperament Project, reported a very low level of interest in politics among people nearing voting age.

Although the report was only picked up by one newspaper – “Young, cool and totally indifferent to politics” and “We don’t have the power, say teenagers” (*The Australian*, 7 March), that one report resulted in a spirited reporting of the issues and its causes on radio. Radio news reports were broadcast nationally on Triple J, and in Melbourne, Hobart and Brisbane, and Institute Acting Research Manager, Ann Sanson, and Research Officer, Diana Smart, did radio interviews in Brisbane, Lismore, Adelaide.

## ■ AUSTRALIAN TEMPERAMENT STUDY

The Australian Temperament Study and the Institute’s Parenting 21 Study were also reported in a major feature on parenting, “Mums and Dudes”, in *The Bulletin* magazine of 23 January. The Institute’s Ann Sanson was extensively quoted, and participants in the Parenting 21 Study were cited verbatim.

What made this article such a rewarding one for the Institute, was the use of our research on positive aspects of family life, as the basis for an optimistic conclusion that while some parents experience problems raising their children, most get pleasure and satisfaction out of their role. We continue to receive requests for media comments about adolescent behaviour as a result of the release of the Temperament Project report in November.

## ■ PARENTAL DISCIPLINE

The Institute’s release in March of *Parenting in Australian Families: A Comparative Study of Anglo, Torres Strait Islander and Vietnamese Communities* received a muted response from the media. Only the *West Australian* reported the release, focusing on parental discipline, in an article entitled “Parents back child whacks”. The article correctly reported that the vast majority of parents in the study did not favour the introduction of laws to ban parental smacking of their children. However, it did not report that the same parents used a range of discipline strategies, and that physical punishment was a last resort.

Not surprisingly, the headline lead to interest from talkback radio, and researchers did a number of interviews in which they were able to describe the research more broadly, and to focus on its overwhelmingly positive findings. A week later, the *Herald Sun* in Melbourne, got it right, citing the report’s findings on mothers’ unhappiness that the inflexible work arrangements of their partners meant that fathers were not able to help out much with their children.

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