



Steps forward for families: Research, practice and policy

The Australian Institute of Family Studies invites submissions from people interested in presenting papers, symposia or workshops at the Eighth Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, to be held at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre on Southbank from Wednesday 12 February to Friday 14 February 2003.

Conference

The Australian Institute of Family Studies conference will provide a valuable forum for those interested or involved in family research, family policy, or providing services to families in Australia. It will feature the presentation and discussion of findings of the Institute's own studies, along with work from a wide range of researchers, government bodies, service providers and community organisations.

Themes and content

Submissions are invited on any aspect of family research and policy, including family trends, family life and relationships, children, economics, support programs and family law. The Institute welcome papers exploring: research methodologies and problems (especially longitudinal work); theory relating to family, gender and sexuality; comparative research; policy and program evaluation; and historical scholarship.

Presenters are asked to note the following topic areas, and to consider the three conference sub-themes: Children and Parenting; Family and Marriage; and Families and Society. There will also be an open stream for papers which do not fit the sub-themes.

Children and parenting

- Parenting and parent-child relationships
- Cultural diversity, parenting and children's wellbeing
- Development in diverse families
- Non-resident parents and their children
- Child abuse and protection
- Extended families and intergenerational relationships
- Child care

Family and marriage

- Leaving home and establishing independence
- Relationship formation: diversity, meaning and outcomes
- Strategies for supporting marriage and family life
- Relationship education and intervention
- Fertility trends and decision-making
- Separation and divorce processes and outcomes

- Co-parenting after divorce
- Children's voices: being heard in post-separation arrangements
- Emerging issues in family law
- Family and society

Work and family

- Income support policy
- Fertility
- Social capital and civil society
- Family values
- Policy implications of an ageing population
- Social and demographic trends affecting families
- Family, community, crime and safety
- Stronger families and communities
- Family violence

Submission guidelines and conditions

Key dates

- Call for papers is open until Wednesday 2 October 2002
- Acceptance of proposals will be advised between 22-26 October 2002
- The deadline for early-bird registration is 13 December 2002

Methods of presentation

When submitting your abstract, please nominate your preferred session type – individual papers, symposia or workshops.

Individual paper submissions are invited for papers reporting original research findings, work in progress, methodological issues, and reporting/evaluating family service programs. Papers will be grouped into themes and presented in concurrent sessions. Twenty minutes, plus ten minutes for discussion, will be allocated for each individual paper. Three papers will be presented in the course of each one-and-a-half-hour session.

Symposia submissions should propose a set of closely related papers on a particular topic, the content of each paper, and the names of a convenor and a discussant. Each symposium, of one-and-a-half-hours duration, will consist of at least two papers followed by a discussant.

Workshop submissions should outline the topic, target audience, knowledge/experience requirements of participants, structure of the proposed session, and any limitations on the number of participants. Each workshop will be of one-and-a-half-hours duration.

Evaluation criteria

Submissions, be they for papers, symposia or workshops will be reviewed by a panel of assessors. Selections will be made on the basis of the following criteria:

- a clear application to the conference themes;
- appropriate methodology and presentation of data;
- clarity of discussion;
- demonstration of innovation, quality and originality.

Submission guidelines

Abstract submission is via the Internet www.aifs.gov.au

For proposals with more than one author, only one person should submit the abstract online, and this person will be the contact for all correspondence concerning the abstract with the Conference Office.

Proposals accepted for presentation will be published in the Conference Handbook and online exactly as submitted, and should thus be checked for accuracy prior to submission.

Further information

If you do not have access to the Internet, please contact the Institute on phone +61 3 9214 7888 and we will send you an application form.

If you would like to present a paper and are uncertain about how it might relate to the conference, please email or phone:

Ann Sanson (anns@aifs.gov.au), *David de Vaus* (davidd@aifs.gov.au), or *Catherine Rosenbrock* (cathr@aifs.gov.au), at the Australian Institute of Family Studies (phone: +61 3 9214 7888).

FAMILIES OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Designer babies, cyber sex and virtual communities

There is a growing consensus that it is the technological revolution that is driving the transformation of society and culture – not least the family. Designer babies, cyber sex and virtual communities are all new expressions that highlight the role of new technologies in the changing character of family and personal relationships.

2000

2010

2020

2030

2040

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In the 1970s and 1980s nobody was quite sure what was happening to the family. The statistical trends were clear enough: less marriage, more de facto relationships, more divorce, fewer children, more children born outside marriage and so on. But social scientists struggled to make sense of the underlying dynamic that underpinned these trends.

Some social scientists decided that there was no underlying dynamic – and what's more, perhaps no such thing as "the family". They deconstructed the family and found that there was nothing there. The American feminist Judith Stacey put this view most eloquently:

"We are living, I believe, through a transitional and contested period of family history, a period after the modern family order, but before what we cannot foretell. Precisely because it is not possible to characterise with a single term the competing sets of family cultures that coexist at present, I identify this family regime as postmodern. The postmodern family is not a new model of family life, not the next stage of an orderly progression of family history, but the stage when the belief in a logical progression of stages breaks down." (Stacey 1990: 18)

During the 1990s, though, there emerged a growing consensus that the dramatic changes in the family were one aspect of a much bigger set of changes that was occurring across western societies, and in many other parts of the world also. The most common way of talking about this bigger set of changes was in terms of "the Information Age". Alternatively, some social scientists emphasised the broader sweep of

MICHAEL GILDING

technological innovation, through concepts such as "the third industrial revolution", "the knowledge economy" and "the weightless economy". The bottom line was the idea that it was the technological revolution that was driving the transformation of society and culture – not least the family.

Manuel Castells, a Spanish-born sociologist at the University of California, was the most prominent theorist of the Information Age. Castells spoke of "a technological revolution, centered around information technologies" reshaping "at an accelerated pace" the foundations of society. In this context, he described "the crisis of the patriarchal family". As he put it:

"Thus, gender relationships have become, in much of the world, a contested domain, rather than a sphere of cultural reproduction. A fundamental redefinition of relationships between women, men and children has followed, and thus, of family, sexuality and personality." (Castells 2000: 2-3)

Similarly, the leading British sociologist Anthony Giddens emphasised the effects of the "world-wide communications revolution", the "new knowledge economy" and globalisation. In this context many social institutions "appear the same as they used to be from the outside, and carry the same names, but inside have become quite different". Giddens described such institutions as "shell institutions". Marriage and the family were shell institutions – once overwhelmingly economic in their character; now based on emotional communication or intimacy. Moreover, this was a global shift: