

# HILDA *has arrived!*

Research into Australian families has been given an enormous boost with the recent release of the first wave of data from the longitudinal Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey.

RUTH WESTON AND MARK WOODEN report.

In the first survey of its type in Australia, the *Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey* (commonly known as the HILDA Survey) will yield valuable insights into the dynamics of family relationships, parenting, housing arrangements, income, workforce involvement, and the health, wellbeing and attitudes of young people and adults in Australia.

Data from the first wave of the survey, undertaken in 2001, was released in October 2002. Information collected from almost 14,000 people aged from 15 years from 7,682 households across Australia over three years will provide the first ever opportunity in this country to examine a wide range of household characteristics over a period of time.

This article examines the potential for the new survey to contribute to research on families in Australia. It summarises the case for yet another survey; provides brief descriptions of the survey design and sample selection; outlines issues covered by the survey (box 1); and describes data collection procedures, wave one response rates, and characteristics of the sample (box 2). The second part of the paper discusses the sorts of family issues that could be explored with these data.

## **The need for household panel data**

The question arises: Do we really need yet another survey? For at least two reasons, the answer to this question should be yes.

First, the HILDA Survey is distinctly different from most other surveys conducted in Australia in that it is a longitudinal, or panel, survey. Whereas most surveys are simple cross-sectional studies providing snapshots at single points in time, HILDA involves re-surveying the same people over time.

This distinction is critical for understanding any type of economic or social change. For example, a longitudinal survey is ideal for analysing the effects of marital separation.



With cross-section data the only way this question can be broached is through identifying respondents who have separated recently and then collecting information about their past retrospectively. This is problematic because of recall problems and because of the likely contamination of response as a result of the separation. Objective analyses of the impact of marital separation require data collected pre- and post-separation, which in turn require longitudinal methods.

Second, the HILDA Survey involves interviews with all members of the household aged 15 years or over. This again marks the survey as distinctive. Information about household members is usually sought of one adult only responding on behalf of others in the household – a method that precludes asking subjective questions, and raises concerns about the accuracy of some of the data collected. For example, while it can be expected that one household member will know the employment status of all other household members, is it reasonable to expect them to know more specific details of their employment arrangements (such as hours of work)?

## **Survey design and sample selection**

The broad objective of the HILDA Survey is to select a nation-wide sample of private households and then attempt to trace all of the individual members of these



households, including children, over time. Individuals would only drop out of the sample in the event of death, emigration from Australia, the onset of some disability that prevented further participation (such as the onset of dementia), and imprisonment.

The intention is to conduct survey waves annually, although funding beyond wave three (in 2003) has yet to be secured.

The survey involves more than just re-interviewing people interviewed in the previous wave. In line with the designs used in most of the household panel studies conducted overseas (such as the British Household Panel Survey, and the German Socio-Economic Panel), the sample is automatically extended over time by “following rules”. That is, any new children of members of the selected households (including both biological and adopted children), as well as any new household members resulting from changes in the composition of the original households, are added to the sample. This is a planned and important feature of the HILDA Survey design, and is

expected to enhance greatly the power of research into questions concerning the influences on, and impact of, changing household structure. Furthermore, this indefinite life panel approach is clearly superior to other approaches in terms of addressing questions concerning the socio-economic links between generations.

The data collection unit is the household. The definition of a household applied in the HILDA Survey is very similar to that used by the ABS. That is, a household is a “group of people who usually reside and eat together”.

The initial sample of households was selected using a three-stage approach. First, a sample of 488 census collection districts were selected from across Australia (each of which consists of approximately 200 to 250 households). Second, within each of these districts, a sample of 22 to 34 dwellings were selected, depending on the expected response and occupancy rates of the area. This resulted in a total of 12,252 dwellings being selected. Selections were made after all dwellings within each of the districts were fully listed. Third, given that some dwellings contain more



The HILDA Survey was initiated, and is funded, by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. It is managed by a consortium led by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne. Other partners in the group are the Australian Council for Educational Research and the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

than one household, up to three households within a single dwelling were selected to be part of the sample. The intent was to select only occupied private dwellings, and hence dwellings that were subsequently discovered to be vacant, or businesses, were excluded from the sample.

Details about the questions asked and issues covered in the survey are outlined in box 1. Data collection procedures, response rates for wave one, and characteristics of the sample are discussed in box 2.



### **HILDA'S POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO RESEARCH ON FAMILIES**

The HILDA Survey will provide rich data on families, including couple and sole-parent families, old and young families, the advantaged and disadvantaged, and those in rural and urban settings. The following is a discussion of some of the more important issues that could be examined with these data.

#### ***Paid work and non-parental child care arrangements***

The survey derives detailed information on work-related non-parental child care arrangements, with wave two of the survey extending the focus by tapping arrangements set in place to meet parents' non-work needs.

Work-related issues cover: parents' thoughts about using different forms of child care; difficulties encountered, such as finding good quality child care, juggling multiple child care arrangements, finding child care during

school holidays; and existing child care arrangements for pre-schoolers and for school-age children during school term as well as school holidays. For each child, the types of care used are ascertained (including self-care for school-age children and care by siblings for all children), along with the hours per week the child usually spends in each type of care, and its associated cost.

It will thus be possible to identify the circumstances of families linked with exclusive use of certain types of care, use of multiple forms of care per child or for different children, and placement of children in non-parental care for short or long periods, along with exclusive reliance on parental care.

Such information has important policy implications. For instance, previous research suggests that most mothers want to care for their infants full-time and to increase their hours of work as their child grows older (McDonald 2000), and that most people believe that mothers ought to remain at home to care for infants (Evans and Kelley 2002).

Given these general preferences and values, under what circumstances do parents place their very young children in long hours of non-parental care? How many parents do so despite feeling that this is not in the best interests of their child, and what factors appear to be involved in their decisions? Under what circumstances do parents rely on multiple forms of care for children, sibling care for very young children, or self-care for children in their early primary school years? The survey will help answer these questions.

In addition, the survey gathers information that may shed light on links between child care and paid work

## **ISSUES COVERED BY HILDA SURVEY**

The primary objective of the HILDA Survey is to support research questions falling within three broad and inter-related areas – income dynamics, labour market dynamics, and family dynamics. Thus we would expect to include in each wave of the survey a set of like (if not identical) questions covering each of these three broad areas.

The income component in wave one has been designed to provide a measure of previous financial year income of all individual household members. Household income, therefore, has to be calculated by summing across individual household members. Further, the HILDA approach, which is based closely on that used in the ABS Survey of Income and Housing Costs, involves deducing total individual income from the sum of different components. The data will thus provide measures of each of the different components of income – wages and salaries, pensions and benefits, business income, and so on. Measures of current income, but only for wages and salaries and for government pensions and benefits, are also sought.

Questions about employment and job search activity are primarily concerned with job characteristics for those employed at the time of interview, and with work intentions and job search activity for those not in employment. In addition, one of the novel features of the survey is the inclusion of a calendar covering the period between 1 July in the preceding year and the time of interview. This calendar is used to collect data on the length and timing of different spells of employment and unemployment and periods spent in study.

The family-oriented components of the survey are dealt with in more detail elsewhere, but include a section on child care arrangements, asked of one member in the household, a section on family formation, with a particular emphasis on child–parent contact in families that are no longer intact, and a section on partnering. In addition, additional questions about parenting and other aspects of family life are included in a self-completion questionnaire.

The range of topics covered by the survey extends well beyond these three broad areas to include such diverse issues as

housing, health, and quality of life. In addition, during wave one an extensive array of personal characteristics was also collected. This array extends well beyond the standard demographic variables to include, for example, parental and family background, marital history and labour market history variables.

A particularly novel feature of the HILDA Survey, at least relative to its international counterparts, is the amount of subjective data that are being collected. While a very limited range of attitudinal questions are included in both the British Household Panel Survey and the German Socio-Economic Panel, the addition of a leave-behind self-completion instrument as part of the suite of HILDA Survey instruments has facilitated the collection of far more information of this kind.

In future waves, while much of the content will remain stable, it is expected that there will be scope for up to ten minutes of interview time to be devoted to special topics. The topic for wave two is household assets and debts, with the broad objective being to measure net household wealth.

decisions, and between these arrangements and parental wellbeing. For example, HILDA not only looks at financial and labour market circumstances of families, but also parents' perceptions of their financial wellbeing and of various aspects of their paid work (their job security, autonomy, access to family-friendly benefits), along with benefits and difficulties they experience in combining paid work and family life.

Information is also obtained about: parents' satisfaction with their relationship with their children, and (if living together, or if this was their most recent partnership) with each other; the stress they feel in relation to their parenting responsibilities; perceived fairness of their domestic and child care responsibilities; their sense of time pressure; their physical and emotional health; perceptions of social support; and health-related lifestyle patterns (physical exercise, alcohol consumption, and cigarette smoking).

Much further down the track, as young children mature, the significance of early child care and family life experiences for children's developmental outcomes can be examined. All such research issues have important policy implications for helping parents balance work and family life, enjoy their parenting, and maximise their children's chances of developing into well-adjusted and productive members of society.

### **Marital status and wellbeing**

A number of studies have suggested that married people tend to be happier and healthier than others (particularly those who are separated or divorced), but the mechanisms linking marital status and wellbeing remain uncertain (Coombs 1991; de Vaus 2002; Stack and Eshleman 1998). Wave one of HILDA will shed some light on the importance of various objective and subjective factors linked with each partner in explaining these patterns.

However, a better understanding of the mechanisms linking marital status with personal wellbeing will be achieved over time as the survey waves accumulate. We will then be able to assess the extent to which differences in the wellbeing of people in different marital status groups result from "social selection" as opposed to "social causation". Social selection applies if people who are happy and healthy are particularly likely to get married and stay married, while social causation applies if marriage is more likely than other marital statuses to promote health and happiness.

By controlling for social selection factors, we will gain greater insight into the strength and nature of social causation – that is, the benefits that marriage tends to confer on partners. For instance, Stack and Eshleman (1998) argue that personal wellbeing is promoted by the economic protection provided by marriage and by the emotional support and encouragement of healthy lifestyles provided by spouses.

On the other hand, some authors argue that marriage is more beneficial to men than women, although recent research by de Vaus (2002) suggests that this is more apparent than real. Even so, should separation take place, both partners are more likely to see the decision as unilateral rather than joint, and to attribute the separation decision to the wife rather than to the husband (Harrison 1986; Wolcott and Hughes 1999). The array of objective and subjective measures in the HILDA survey will shed light on some of the mechanisms that help explain such patterns.

### **Financial hardship and relationship breakdown**

Consistent with Stack and Eshleman's (1998) contention that the financial protection that is typically provided by marriage promotes personal wellbeing, a great deal of

evidence has amassed suggesting the financial hardship increases the risks of relationship breakdown (White and Rogers 2000; Clarke and Berrington 1999; Kiernan and Mueller 1999). The detailed information provided by HILDA will throw light on the mechanisms underlying this link.

Ambert (1998) maintains that poverty threatens marital relationships indirectly, by generating depression, marital conflict, tension and in some cases, violence. However, she also refers to research suggesting that male unemployment is particularly problematic for couples. Why would this be so? According to Ambert, men are prone to feeling "diminished" by their unemployment and unsuccessful search for jobs, and may react negatively



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towards their wives, while wives may resent the associated financial difficulties or their need to shoulder the entire breadwinning responsibility. Other processes damaging to relationships may also be involved. For instance, Jorm (1996) and de Vaus (2002) conclude that men are more likely than women to express their distress through problematic behaviours, such as heavy drinking. Such behaviours may be especially damaging to relationships.

The HILDA data will provide important insights into processes through which objective financial hardship created by different circumstances may threaten relationship stability, including the role of physical and emotional problems in each partner, drinking patterns, interpretation of financial circumstances, and satisfaction with family relationships.

Another example of how relevant the HILDA Survey is for policy-driven research on families is its ability to shed light on the nature of links between family breakdown and financial hardship. Parental separation often creates an economic crisis since the money that supported an intact family is often insufficient to meet the costs of the two newly formed households, one of which includes the children. But as the survey waves accumulate and increasing numbers of couples in the sample separate, we will gain a much better understanding of the extent to which

post-separation financial difficulties can be explained by pre-existing financial hardship that may have contributed to relationship breakdown. This information is clearly important for the establishment of timely prevention and intervention strategies.

In exploring these issues through HILDA, researchers will be able to take into account many other factors known to threaten marital stability, such as early age at marriage, low education, non-traditional family values, emotional problems, and parental divorce during respondents' childhood

(see Wolcott and Hughes 1999). The ability to take into account characteristics of each partner, and thus characteristics of the couple relationship, will help researchers and policy makers understand the nature and relative contribution of factors that promote or threaten relationship wellbeing. The interconnections between factors linked with divorce appear to be very complex. For instance, in the United Kingdom, McAllister (1999) reports that, while divorce is more closely associated with age at marriage than with socio-economic status, those from disadvantaged

## HILDA WAVE ONE

This section describes the survey's data collection procedures, response rates for wave one, and characteristics of the sample.

### Data collection

The data collection task, at least for the first three waves, has been sub-contracted to ACNielsen, a private market research company. The majority of wave one data were collected through face-to-face interviews, which mostly took place between 24 August 2001 and 21 December 2001, with the workload spread across a total of 139 interviewers.

After establishing contact with a member of the household, an interview lasting on average around ten minutes was conducted with at least one member of the household. Further interviews were then pursued with each household member aged 15 years and over, and averaged 34 minutes in length.

Once an individual completed this interview they were then provided with a Self-Completion Questionnaire (SCQ) to complete in private. The interviewer returned to the household at a later date to pick up the questionnaire. If it was not complete or could not be collected in person, instructions were left with the respondent to return it by mail.

In most cases, selected households were sent a primary approach letter and a brochure approximately one week prior to when the interviewer was scheduled to make contact with the household. To encourage response, a \$50 cash incentive was offered to households where all eligible household members completed the Person Questionnaire. If this did not occur, a \$20 payment was made if at least one interview was obtained.

### Response rates

A summary of wave one response rates is provided in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 reveals that from the 11,693 households identified as in scope, interviews were completed with all

eligible members of 6,872 households and with at least one eligible member of a further 810 households. The household response rate was therefore 66 per cent.

The person-level outcomes are provided in Table 2. Within the 7,682 households at which interviews were conducted, there were 19,917 people, resulting in an average of 2.6 people per household. Of these, 4790 were under 15 years of age on the preceding 30 June and hence ineligible for an interview in wave one. This provided a sample of 15,127 eligible people, 13,969 of whom completed the Person Questionnaire interview.

### Sample characteristics

Table 3 provides a summary of selected characteristics of the sample of individual respondents. To assist in the assessment of how representative this sample is, comparative

population data from the ABS (August and October 2001) Monthly Population Survey are also provided.

This table demonstrates that the HILDA sample is noticeably different from the broader population in a number of ways.

First, Sydney residents are under-represented in the HILDA sample. The first column in Table 3 indicates that, according to the ABS Monthly Population Survey for October 2001, people living in Sydney comprised 21.5 per cent of the Australian population aged 15 years and over. In contrast, Sydney residents make up only 16.9 per cent of the sample of persons completing a Person Questionnaire. This difference is likely to reflect the greater difficulties making contact with the occupants of selected dwellings in Sydney (as a result of the incidence of dwellings with locked gates, gatekeepers and other devices intended to

**Table 1 HILDA wave one household outcomes**

Sample outcome	Number	%
Addresses issued	12252	
less out-of-scope (vacant, non-residential, foreign)	- 804	
plus multi-households additional to sample	+ 245	
<b>Total in-scope households</b>	<b>= 11693</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Refusals to interviewer	2670	22.8
Refusals to fieldwork company (via 1800 number or email)	431	3.7
Non-response with contact	469	4.0
Non-contact	441	3.8
Fully responding households	6872	58.8
Partially responding households	810	6.9

**Table 2 HILDA wave one person outcomes**

Sample outcome	Number	%
Enumerated persons	19917	
less ineligible children (under 15)	- 4790	
<b>Eligible adults</b>	<b>= 15127</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Refusals to interviewer	597	3.9
Refusals to fieldwork company (via 1800 number or email)	31	0.2
Non-response with contact	218	1.4
Non-contact	312	2.1
Responding individuals	13969	92.3

backgrounds are more likely to marry as teenagers and thus experience both financial difficulties and divorce.

### *Stability of marriages preceded by cohabitation*

Premarital cohabitation is another factor that has commonly been linked with marital instability, despite the opportunities that cohabitation should provide for screening out unsuitable matches. Previous research suggests a number of social selection factors that contribute to this link – that is, couples who follow the

different pathways to marriage vary systematically in ways that appear to affect the quality of their relationship (Clarke and Berrington 1999; Glezer, Edgar and Prolisko 1992; Teachman 2002).

However, since premarital cohabitation has increased dramatically and is now adopted by the majority of couples (72 per cent of those who married in 2001, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2002)), the link between mode of entry into marriage and marital stability may be weakening for more recent birth cohorts. On the

screen access), and a greater reluctance to participate because of time commitments.

Second, the HILDA sample has an under-representation of men and an over-representation of women, which is not uncommon in voluntary surveys.

Third, married people are over-represented (and unmarried people under-represented). In part, this was to be expected given the population for HILDA excludes those living in institutions. It was also expected that it would be more difficult to make contact with people living alone. Nevertheless, the size of the differential is much larger than expected.

Fourth, immigrants from a non-English-speaking background comprise only 14.7 per cent of the HILDA sample, which compares with a population estimate of 17.5 per cent. This difference reflects, at least in part, the greater difficulties communicating with people whose first language is not English.

Of the other characteristics considered, the differences are small and often insignificant. The age composition of the HILDA individual sample, for example, is quite close to the Monthly Population Survey, even though the HILDA sample excludes people living in institutions, which will tend to mean a lesser representation of older people. That said, it is true that people in their early 20s are under-represented. The breakdown by labour force status is also similar, although people working part-time are over-represented while those outside the labour force status are under-represented. These differences might be explained by both the over-representation of married women and by the exclusion of persons living in institutions. Finally, when comparing the HILDA sample of employed people with that reported in the August 2001 Monthly Population Survey, again only small differences were found. Specifically, there does appear to be an under-representation of own account workers (that is, the self-employed) in the HILDA sample.

**Table 3 HILDA wave one individual sample characteristics and ABS population compared**

	ABS Monthly Population Survey <sup>a</sup> %	HILDA Personal Questionnaire respondents %	HILDA All household members <sup>b</sup> %
<b>Area of usual residence</b>			
Sydney	21.5	16.9**	18.0**
Rest of NSW	12.2	14.5**	14.1**
Melbourne	18.4	17.3*	17.5
Rest of Victoria	6.7	7.5	7.3
Brisbane	8.6	8.8	8.8
Rest of Queensland	10.0	11.5*	11.4
Adelaide	5.8	6.1	5.8
Rest of South Australia	2.0	2.4*	2.3
Perth	7.3	7.5	7.4
Rest of Western Australia	2.5	2.8	2.7
Tasmania	2.4	2.8	2.7
Northern Territory	0.9	0.5**	0.5**
ACT	1.6	1.6	1.6
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	49.3	47.4**	48.6*
Female	50.7	52.6**	51.4*
<b>Age (years) at 30 September 2001</b>			
15-19	8.8	8.7	9.4*
20-24	8.9	7.4**	7.8**
25-34	18.7	18.7	18.7
35-44	19.0	21.7**	21.4**
45-54	17.1	17.1	17.1
55-64	11.8	12.0	11.7
65 or over	15.6	14.4*	13.9**
<b>Marital status</b>			
Married (including de facto)	58.7	63.4**	62.7**
Not married	41.3	36.6**	37.3**
<b>Indigenous status</b>			
Indigenous	1.7	1.8	
Non-indigenous	98.3	98.2	
<b>Birthplace</b>			
Born in Australia	72.4	74.4**	
Born outside Australia			
- main English-speaking country	10.2	10.9	
- other country	17.5	14.7**	
<b>Employment status in main job (employed people only)</b>			
Employee	86.0	87.0	
Employer	3.6	43.9	
Own account worker	10.0	8.4**	
Contributing family worker	0.4	0.8**	
<b>Labour force status</b>			
Employed			
- full-time	42.1	41.7	
- part-time	17.4	19.5**	
Unemployed	4.3	4.4	
Not in the labour force	36.3	34.5**	

Notes: \*\* and \* denotes significantly different from the Monthly Population Survey estimate at the 99% and 95% confidence levels respectively. Standard errors have been adjusted to take account of both the stratified and clustered nature of the design employed in the HILDA Survey.

a With the exception of indigenous status and employment status, the MPS estimates come from the October 2001 survey. In the case of the two exceptions, data for August 2001 are used. With the exception of country of birth, the population that these estimates apply to is all civilians aged 15 years and over. The figures for country of birth exclude persons living in an institution.

b The HILDA estimates are also for people aged 15 years and over, but include defence force personnel and exclude people living in remote areas of Australia and those living in special dwellings. The HILDA estimates have also been adjusted to account for variability in the probability of selection across CDs.

c We vary from the usual ABS definition in defining full-time work solely on the basis of usual hours worked (rather than on a combination of usual hours and actual hours worked).

Source: ABS data are from *Labour Force, Australia*, Catalogue No. 6203.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, August 2001 and October 2001 issues.

other hand, those who marry at the outset may be more likely than the majority who initially cohabit to possess characteristics that promote the wellbeing or at least stability of marriage.

There remains, of course, the possibility that social selection factors do not fully account for the relationship between cohabitation and marital stability. For instance, some cohabiting couples may decide to marry in the hope of saving their troubled relationship, or the experience of cohabitation itself may change couples' attitudes or behaviour in ways that threaten marital stability (see Andrews Report 1998; Axin and Thornton, 1992; Thomson and Colella 1992). While the first wave of HILDA will enable researchers to examine social selection factors that might influence the stability of relationships, it will be possible to examine the relevance of cohabiting experiences on marital stability after several years of data collection.

### **Views about having children**

With the decline in the total fertility rate and consequent ageing of the population, there is a strong need to understand factors contributing to childlessness and small family sizes. Waves one and two of the HILDA Survey tap preferences and expectations about having a first or additional child and family size intentions, while in wave two the timing of any intended birth is ascertained. Preliminary findings from wave one suggest that men and women aged 18-24 years expect to have, on average, 1.8 and 2.0 children respectively, with 27 per cent of the men and 21 per cent of the women expecting to remain childless (Fisher 2002).

In wave one, it will be possible to examine the relative strength of links between fertility preferences and expectations and various objective circumstances (such as relationship status, age of each partner, income, career path, access to family-friendly work benefits), and psychological factors (such as job satisfaction and sense of job security, relationship satisfaction, values about parenthood and children's needs). With later waves, it will be possible to explore ways in which preferences change, the circumstances underlying such changes, and outcomes when couples disagree about having children.

### **Post-separation child support and contact**

The survey also collects information about non-resident parents' financial support for, and contact with, their children. As Smyth (2002) points out, we currently know very little about the different patterns of child contact that take place, factors contributing to the different patterns, and their links with child support and children's and parents' wellbeing. Over time, it will be possible to examine relationships between child support and contact dynamics and life course trajectories of the children.

### **Intergenerational transmission**

By providing data on family of origin as well as relationship history, wave one of the survey will enable researchers to examine the strength of so-called "intergenerational transmission" effects such as the experience of parental unemployment in childhood and labour force participation in adulthood, and the experience of parental divorce during childhood and relationship stability in adulthood. More importantly, the wealth of information provided by HILDA will provide insight into mechanisms that help explain any intergenerational transmission effects observed and factors that help protect individuals from such effects.

### **Young people**

It also needs to be remembered that the survey includes interviews with young people aged 15 years or more. In wave one, it will be possible to identify those who appear to get along well or poorly with other family members and to explore reasons for these trends. In the future, it will be possible to examine life course trajectories for these different groups of young people, and for other groups, such as those who grow up in wealthy or poor families or in families whose economic fortunes change markedly, and those who have experienced multiple transitions in family life. Indeed, HILDA will enable researchers to explore patterns of leaving home – for example, the characteristics and circumstances of those who leave home early, later experiences that influence their remaining away from home or returning, and the impact that such arrangements have on parents and the young people themselves.

### **The elderly**

The ageing of the population has led to calls for employers and workers to reverse the trend towards early retirement. But how will this affect their children and grandchildren? Currently, most people who are in their 60s and early 70s appear to be in good health and to provide more financial and practical support to their families than they receive (McDonald and Kippen 1999; Millward 1998). The support of the older generation to their families may be curtailed by their continuing work responsibilities.

According to McDonald and Kippen (1999), those aged 75 or more years tend to receive more support than they provide, with family members (especially female members) being by far the most significant sources of support (Wolcott 1997). According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW 2000), spouses are the most common sources of support for the frail elderly, yet many Australians are entering old age without a spouse because they have divorced. Furthermore, divorced parents, along with those who have remarried, are less likely than other parents to receive any kind of support from their children – a trend that is particularly common for fathers (Millward 1998).

How do these people cope when living in private dwellings? What are the characteristics of elderly people living in private dwellings who believe they lack the social support they need? Are elderly people who are generally healthy and happy more likely to receive support – and if so, what is the causal direction (if any) between these variables? How do elderly parents fare when their adult children live with them for adverse reasons such as unemployment or divorce? What factors discriminate between elderly couples who appear to be enjoying their lives and those who are distressed? Where one partner is ill, what circumstances help the other to cope well in his or her caring role? Clearly, HILDA is going to be extremely valuable in throwing light on these issues, thereby suggesting important ways of supporting the growing number and proportion of elderly people in Australia.

### **Conclusion**

The HILDA Survey has two key features that will enhance the power of research on family-related matters in Australia in the years ahead.

First is the survey's longitudinal dimension. While it is often difficult to establish the existence, let alone direction, of causal connections in cross-sectional studies, the

temporal order of many events and circumstances will be revealed as the different waves of the HILDA Survey accumulate. The survey will thus enable researchers to distinguish between outcomes for families, couples, and individual family members and their causes – issues that are extremely important in the development of effective, well targeted and timely policy strategies.

Second is the survey's multi-level focus. HILDA provides detailed information pertaining to the living standards and functioning of households, families, and individual family members. In contrast, a great deal of family-related research is based on surveys of individuals only, rather than couples, or parents and children. Any information collected about other family members thus tends to be quite limited and to be based on the perspective of a single informant. This can be quite misleading. This survey overcomes these difficulties and will improve our understanding of the interconnections between dynamics relating to financial resources, labour market activities, and families.

In conclusion, it needs to be recognised that ongoing funding for the survey has yet to be secured. Much of the power of the longitudinal design thus relies on funding continuing beyond HILDA's first three waves.

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## HILDA DATA AVAILABLE FOR RESEARCH

### Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey

A moderately confidentialised HILDA Survey unit-record data file is available for research purposes. Researchers wishing to obtain the data must complete the order form and sign an accompanying Deed of License. These can be downloaded from the HILDA webpage:

<http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/data.html>



Penny Hope

Alternatively, requests for the order form and Deed of License can be submitted to: Ms Penny Hope, HILDA Survey, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic & Social Research, 6th floor, Economics and Commerce Building, University of Melbourne, Victoria 3000 Australia.

Apart from a fee to cover handling costs (\$75 if based in Australia), the data are free to approved users.



HILDA Core Design Team: (left to right) Ruth Weston, Gary Marks, Mark Wooden, David Johnson, and Nicole Watson.