

Acting Director's report

A N N S A N S O N



F Following the resignation of David Stanton, I have been appointed as Acting Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies by the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator the Hon. Amanda Vanstone, pending the appointment of a permanent Director.

It is my pleasure to introduce this issue of *Family Matters* to readers. In contrast to the previous issue in which we explored one particular theme (fertility trends) in some depth, this edition covers a breadth of family-related topics. Two papers by Institute researchers address the changing patterns of relationship formation: David de Vaus, Lixia Qu and Ruth Weston report on important changes over the last 25 years in the way in which men and women form partnered relationships; and Lixia Qu explores the views of cohabiting couples towards marriage.

The latest paper from the Australian Temperament Project, by Institute researchers Diana Smart and Ann Sanson, throws light on development in young adulthood by examining patterns of social competence among young adults at 19-20 years of age, and how these relate to earlier characteristics. The Institute is a partner in a collaborative project on the

impact of multiple and changeable child care, and Jennifer Bowes (Macquarie University), and colleagues from the Institute and elsewhere, report some early results from this longitudinal study.

Two papers discuss aspects of work and family. Institute researcher Jennifer Renda argues that the rapid growth in part-time employment has contributed to a growing polarisation of families into "work poor"

and "work rich" categories, and emphasises the need to take part-time work into account when considering variability in families' work status. Peter Butterworth (Australian National University) analyses sources of disadvantage among lone mothers receiving income support. We are also pleased to publish in this issue the keynote address presented at the Institute's conference by Catherine Hakim (London School of Economics Department of Sociology) on the diversity of women's preferences regarding work and family. Dr Hakim's visit sparked considerable interest in the media, and she was in great demand with policy makers and researchers.

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, *Growing Up in Australia*, is a project of national significance, and an overview of its current state of development is provided in these pages. Katie Kovacs summarises a recent study conducted by the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, housed at the Institute, that examined the accessibility of child abuse prevention services to those in most need of them.

For our opinion pages this time, David Green and Alston McClelland (La Trobe University) have written a thought provoking piece examining the effects on families of a risk management approach taken by governments which, they argue, increase the burden on families, especially the most vulnerable families, who are confronting the contemporary forces of change and uncertainty. And our regular Family Law column has a report by Paul Murphy and colleagues of a pilot project in the Family Court of Western Australia.

I am confident that these research articles, together with our regular columns of booknotes, conference listings, and reports on Institute seminars and research activities, will be of considerable interest and value to readers.

Institute hosts successful conference

A number of the papers in this issue are drawn from presentations at the highly successful Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, held in Melbourne on 12-14 February 2003. The timing of this eighth national conference was an experiment for the Institute, departing from the usual July date, and we were not certain if the timing would prove attractive to presenters and participants. In the event, we were delighted at the response. We had a record number of submissions of symposia, papers and workshops, and these were of a very high quality. An increase in the number of symposia, which allowed specific topics to be explored in some depth, was particularly pleasing. The close-to-record number of 450 registrants represented a rich diversity of research organisations, government bodies, service providers and community organisations.

Given her Parliamentary commitments, we were pleased that Minister Vanstone was able to open the conference by video. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, the Hon. Larry Anthony, alerted participants to some of the key family-related policy issues for government in his address to the conference. The two keynote presentations, by Dr Catherine Hakim (London School of Economics) and Professor Bob Gregory (Australian National University), were well attended, topical, and provocative enough to engender the sort of productive debate over meal breaks that marks a good conference.



The Institute invites readers' views on aspects of *Family Matters*. Please help us plan for future issues by filling out and sending us the short *Family Matters Reader Survey* questionnaire on page 73 of this edition.

Another innovation in this conference was the closing panel discussion, in which the facilitator, journalist Jill Singer, encouraged three leading researchers and commentators, Professor Peter McDonald, Professor Dorothy Scott and Professor Frank Oberklaid, to address the question, "How can government support families in bringing up their children?" This lively discussion ensured that participants left the conference with plenty of food for thought about the nexus of family-related research, policy and practice.

While every member of the Institute made a contribution to the conference, I want in particular to thank Institute researchers who together presented more than 20 papers, and Catherine Rosenbrock and Dianne Frey whose organisational efforts resulted in a very smooth-running three days. See pp. 62-69 for a more detailed report on the conference.

Clearinghouses at the Institute

Besides the conference, there have been a number of other major events and developments at the Institute this year. On 1-3 April 2003, the Stronger Families Learning Exchange team held a workshop on action research at the YWCA Conference Centre in Melbourne for the Stronger Family Fund projects and Department of Family and Community Services staff with whom they work. Approximately 100 people attended the workshop. This was quite an organisational feat, given that the projects come from all over Australia, including some very remote areas, and are very diverse in nature. By adopting a very interactive and creative approach to the workshop, the team catered well for this diversity, allowing each project to explore and develop skills in those aspects of action research most relevant for them.

A further development at the Institute has been the establishment of the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, which has been contracted to the Institute by the Office for the Status of Women. The Centre will establish a web-based clearinghouse of research and other information on sexual assault, which will complement our existing clearinghouses on child protection and stronger families. It will also have a significant research capacity, aiming to increase the knowledge base around an issue of significant concern for Australian families. The Centre will publish a number of issue papers and newsletters, as well as authoritative reviews. The Institute is currently recruiting staff for the Centre.

New Institute publications

The Institute has published three new Research Papers this year. "Family structure, child outcomes and environmental mediators: An overview of the Development in Diverse Families study", by Sarah Wise, no. 30 in the Research Paper series, was published in January 2003. "Social capital at work: How family, friends and civic ties relate to labour market outcomes", by Wendy Stone, Matthew Gray and Jody Hughes, no. 31; and "Family change and community

life: Exploring the links", by Jody Hughes and Wendy Stone, no. 32, were both released in May 2003. For more details of recent Institute publications, and how to order copies, see this issue pp. 95-96

We invite readers' views

We are keen to ensure that *Family Matters* continues to serve its readers well. Over recent years the journal has developed in a number of ways, becoming larger and better formatted, including more external research, as well as attaining the status of a fully refereed journal. It is therefore timely for us to seek your views on what works well and what could be improved. You will find a brief questionnaire on p. 75 of this issue – please take the time to complete it and return it to us. (If others are likely to read this copy of *Family Matters*, please photocopy the questionnaire.) We will also be sending more detailed survey forms to some subscribers at a future date. Readers' responses will be used to help us plan for future issues of the journal.

Institute farewells David Stanton

I have left until last perhaps the most significant event at the Institute this year – namely, the departure of David Stanton as Director of the Institute, on 13 January 2003. After almost four years based in Melbourne, David decided to return full-time to his family in Canberra. Given the Institute's work on family-work balance, we of course found it hard to criticise this choice, but we were nevertheless very sorry to see him go.

In her address at the opening of the Institute's conference in February 2003, Minister Vanstone paid tribute to David's valuable contribution during his years at the Institute. Over his term as Director, David provided wise leadership and good management – and a joke or an anecdote to fit every occasion! He led the Institute through a significant restructuring of its research activities, resulting in a clearer and more coherent focus to its research. The Institute also grew substantially over David's term, largely through the winning of major contracts. He has thus left the Institute in a strong position.

Given the warm regard in which David is held, one farewell was not enough – an informal event at the Institute in January (see p. 69) was followed by another, more public farewell at the Institute's conference dinner in February, at the Melbourne Aquarium. As a finale, an impromptu Institute choir serenaded David with songs written to fit occasion!

Institute staff and the Institute's Board of Management join me in wishing David all the very best for the future.



David Stanton

