

A SNAPSHOT OF CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDES TO CHILD SUPPORT



Bruce Smyth and Ruth Weston

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Director's foreword

In line with our legislative responsibility to investigate factors affecting the well-being of children and families, the Australian Institute of Family Studies has always maintained a keen interest in the development and evaluation of Australia's Child Support Scheme. The first major evaluation of the Scheme was conducted by the Institute in 1990, and the collection of child support data has been an important part of most Institute studies of divorce since then.

This report presents a snapshot of contemporary attitudes to child support in Australia. The study on which the report is based represents the first detailed Australian investigation of these attitudes, and was conducted to help inform the work of the 2004–2005 Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support. The Institute is indebted to the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services for co-funding this research, and for supporting the project throughout its duration.

As the authors of the report point out, child support is not just about money. Indeed child support raises many fundamental issues about social values and “fairness”. Policy should therefore have some basis in present-day views of parental responsibility and fairness. The attitudinal data in this report act as an analytic prism to understanding the community's sense of fairness in relation to inter-household financial transfers after parental separation. Not surprisingly, women and men (ever or never separated) held different views in different family circumstances.

The findings are both simple and complex; some patterns are to be expected, others are not. The various patterns are likely to be of considerable interest to policy makers, family law professionals, divorce mediators, and separated parents themselves. It is hoped that *Attitudes to Child Support* will stimulate empirical work into why respondents supported certain propositions and not others, which child support issues should be targeted by community education programs for separated parents, and which issues may act as sticking points for parents in reaching agreement on their post-separation parenting arrangements more generally.

Child support aims to benefit children. This report was written in the spirit of this aim. I congratulate Bruce Smyth and Ruth Weston on an excellent report and commend it to you.

Professor Alan Hayes

Director
Australian Institute of Family Studies

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