



Australian Social Trends

USING STATISTICS TO PAINT A PICTURE OF AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY



MARCH 2012

EMBARGO:

11.30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) WEDNESDAY 28 MARCH 2012

A u s t r a l i a n
S o c i a l T r e n d s
M a r c h 2 0 1 2

Peter Harper

Acting Australian Statistician

ABS catalogue no. 4102.0

ISSN 1321-1781

© Commonwealth of Australia 2012



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons [Attribution 2.5 Australia](#) licence.

In all cases the ABS must be acknowledged as the source when reproducing or quoting any part of an ABS publication or other product. Please see the [Australian Bureau of Statistics website copyright statement](#) for further details.

INQUIRIES

- For further information about these and related statistics contact the National Information and Referral Service on 1300 135 070, or refer to contacts listed at the back of this publication.

Produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics

Contents

Introduction.....	vii
Life on 'Struggle St': Australians in low economic resource households.....	1
Life after Homelessness.....	8
Love Me Do.....	12
Disability and Work.....	17

Introduction

Australian Social Trends draws on a wide range of data, sourced both from ABS and other agencies, to present a picture of Australian society. This publication aims to inform decision-making, research and discussion on social conditions in Australia. It covers social issues of current and ongoing concern, population groups of interest, and changes in these over time.

The selection of articles aims to address current and perennial social concerns and to provide answers to key social questions. Some topics are revisited as new data become available. The aim of this approach is for each report to remain responsive to contemporary concerns, while accumulating a more comprehensive picture of Australian social conditions over time. For this reason, articles often include cross references to other relevant articles in the current issue, and in previous issues. All articles published since 1994 are available from the Australian Social Trends page of the ABS web site: www.abs.gov.au/socialtrends.

Australian Social Trends is structured according to the ABS Wellbeing Framework which identifies areas of social concern, population groups and transactions among people and entities within their social environments (see ABS [Measuring Wellbeing: Frameworks for Australian Social Statistics, 2001](#) – cat. no. 4160.0). The broad areas of social concern are:

- population
- family and community
- health
- education and training
- work
- economic resources
- housing
- crime and justice
- culture and leisure
- other areas - including environment, religion, and transport and communication.

Australian Social Trends is now issued on a quarterly basis, and in the course of a year the articles will cover a wide range of the areas of social concern.

The articles focus strongly on people and social concerns. Each article aims to tell a story, providing a sense of the social and historical context in which a particular topic is embedded, moving from the general to the specific, and using statistics to bring light to the issue. Articles aim to balance 'what' analysis (relating the relevant statistical facts surrounding the issue, e.g. number, characteristics, change over time, sex, age and other differences), with 'why' analysis (providing context and explanation by highlighting relevant social changes and events and the chronologies of these). For example, an article on work may examine current labour force participation, how the labour market has changed over time, how different groups of people are affected by social and economic conditions, and how these factors may be linked to observed employment trends.



Life on 'Struggle Street'

Australians in low economic resource households

People's material standard of living is largely determined by their access to economic resources and the consumption possibilities this provides. While regular income is an important economic resource for many people, wealth in the form of bank accounts, shares, superannuation or property can be drawn upon to smooth and support consumption over time, including during periods of low income.¹

This article looks at the characteristics of people in households with both relatively low income and relatively low wealth (low economic resources). The advantage of taking into account wealth as well as income is that it excludes those with high wealth who enjoy reasonable levels of consumption despite a low level of income. This approach is therefore more likely to capture people most at risk of experiencing economic hardship, than analyses of income alone.

People in low economic resource households

Australia experienced almost two decades of economic growth from the end of the recession of the early 1990s to the start of the downturn associated with the Global Financial Crisis in the late 2000s. This led to increases in income and wealth, but the benefits have been felt by some more than others.

In 2009–10, nearly one in four people (23% or 4.9 million people) lived in households that were in the lowest two quintiles of both equivalised adjusted disposable household income and the lowest two quintiles of equivalised household net worth.

People and households by economic resources – 2009–10

	Low economic resources(a)		Other		Total	
	%	millions	%	millions	%	millions
People	22.6	4.9	77.4	16.7	100.0	21.6
Aged 0-14 years	38.0	1.6	62.0	2.6	100.0	4.2
Aged 15 years and over	19.0	3.3	81.0	14.1	100.0	17.1
Households	20.4	1.7	79.6	6.7	100.0	8.4
People per household	..	2.9	..	2.5	..	2.6

(a) Households in the two lowest quintiles for both equivalised adjusted disposable household income (adjusted to include imputed rent) and equivalised household net worth.

.. not applicable

Source: ABS 2009–10 Survey of Income and Housing

Data sources and definitions

This article uses data from the ABS 2003–04 and 2009–10 Surveys of Income and Housing, and the ABS 2009–10 Household Expenditure Survey.

People with *low economic resources* (i.e. low consumption possibilities) are those in households in the lowest two quintiles (i.e. 40%) of both equivalised adjusted disposable household income and equivalised household net worth. People in *other households* are those who are not in *low economic resource households*.

A household's *income* consists of all current receipts, whether monetary or in kind, that are received by a household or by individual members of a household, and which are available for, or intended to support, current consumption. This includes income from wages and salaries (including salary sacrificed or salary package arrangements), profit or loss from own unincorporated business, investment income, government pensions and allowances, superannuation, workers' compensation and child support.

Disposable income is the income remaining after income tax, the Medicare levy and the Medicare levy surcharge are deducted.

Adjusted disposable household income is disposable household income, including net imputed rent.

Net *imputed rent* is an estimate of the value of housing services that households receive from home ownership, from paying subsidised rent, or from occupying a dwelling rent-free. It is equal to the estimated market rent that a dwelling would attract if it were to be commercially rented, less housing costs that would be paid by a landlord.

To enable comparison of the relative economic wellbeing of households of different size and composition, measures of income, wealth and expenditure in this article have been adjusted or *equivalised* to take account of these differences. For a lone person household, the equivalised value is equal to the original value. For a household containing more than one person, it is an indicator of the level that would be needed by a lone person household to enjoy the same level of economic wellbeing as the household in question.

Net worth or *wealth* is the value of a household's assets less the value of its liabilities.

Quintiles are groupings that result from ranking all households or people in the population in ascending order according to the relevant characteristic (e.g. income, expenditure, or wealth) and then dividing the population into five equal groups, each comprising 20% of the population.

These low economic resource households have, on average, more household members (2.9 people) than other households (2.5 people). Children were twice as likely as adults to live in

low economic resource households. In 2009–10, 1.6 million children aged 0 to 14 years (38%) lived in low economic resource households, with 3.3 million people aged 15 years and over (19%).

Income and wealth

A person's economic resources and their potential standard of living are related to their household's characteristics. In 2009–10, the average weekly equivalised adjusted disposable household income of people in low economic resource households (\$465) was less than half (45%) that of people in other households (\$1,033).

After adjusting for inflation, incomes of those in households with low economic resources increased in real terms by 21% between 2003–04 and 2009–10, compared with a 27% rise across other households.²

This disparity between people in low economic resource households and the rest of the population is even more pronounced when it comes to wealth. The average equivalised net worth of people in households with low

The disparity in both income and wealth between low economic resource households and the rest of the population has increased since 2003-04.

economic resources in 2009–10 (\$53,500) was one tenth of the average across other households (\$509,800). After adjusting for inflation, the net worth of low economic resource households had not increased significantly since 2003–04, while the average net worth across all other households had increased by 29%.

These data indicate that the disparity in both income and wealth between those in low economic resource households and the rest of the population had grown over the six years to 2009–10.

Further Definitions

Dependent children include all children aged under 15 years, and people aged 15–24 years who are full-time students, have a parent in the household and do not have a partner or child of their own in the household.

The *reference person* for each household is the person aged 15 years or over who (in order of selection): has the highest tenure type; is one of the partners in a registered or de facto marriage; is a lone parent with dependent children; is the person with the highest income; or is the eldest person.

...household composition

In 2009–10, one in five (20% or 1.7 million) households were classified as having low economic resources. The proportion varied according to the composition of the household and the age of the household members, reflecting the fact that people are at greater risk of economic hardship at particular stages in the life course.

Among households comprising one parent with dependent children, three in five (59%) were classified as having low economic resources. One parent households accounted for only 6% of all households, but made up 18% of low economic resource households.

Couples with only dependent children were also more likely than average to have low economic resources (24%). Among these households, those whose eldest child was aged less than 15 years were more likely to have low economic resources (27%) than those with older children (18%).

The proportion of households classified as having low economic resources increased with the number of children in the household – from 28% of households with one child aged less than 15 years, to 33% of those with two children, and 49% of households with three or more children aged less than 15 years.

Income, expenditure and wealth by economic resources – 2009-10

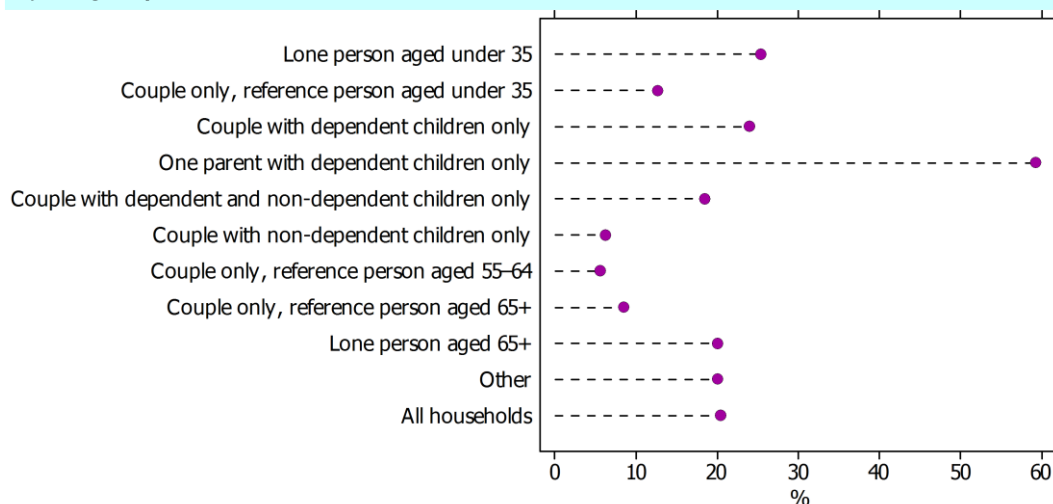
		Low economic resource households(a)	Other households	All households
Average weekly equivalised adjusted disposable household income(b)	\$	465	1 033	905
Average weekly equivalised adjusted household expenditure(b)	\$	500	872	789
Average equivalised household net worth	\$'000	53.5	509.8	406.5
Households	millions	1.7	6.7	8.4

(a) People in the two lowest quintiles for both equivalised adjusted disposable household income (adjusted to include imputed rent) and equivalised household net worth.

(b) Adjusted to include imputed rent.

Source: ABS 2009-10 Survey of Income and Housing; ABS 2009-10 Household Expenditure Survey

Low economic resource households as a proportion of households in selected life cycle groups – 2009-10



Source: ABS 2009-10 Survey of Income and Housing

The likelihood of having low economic resources was much lower among households with older couples and those without dependent children. Only 6% of households comprising a couple with non-dependent children fell into the low economic resource category. Older couples living by themselves were also less likely than average to have low economic resources, regardless of whether the reference person was aged 55–64 years (6%), or 65 years and over (8%). While lower income levels were quite common among households comprising a couple aged 65 years and over (63% were in the lowest two quintiles of income), relatively higher levels of wealth among these households (only 13% were in the lowest two quintiles of net worth) explains why relatively few were counted among low economic resource households.

Among older people, living alone was associated with a greater risk of economic hardship. One in five (20%) people aged 65 years and over who were living alone were considered to have low economic resources.

...work

Employment plays a key role in economic wellbeing for many people as it is the main way people obtain the economic resources needed to support current household living expenses as well as to save for retirement. Depending on circumstances, a lack of employment for household members may increase the risk of economic hardship.

The average number of people employed in low economic resource households in 2009–10 was considerably lower than in other households (0.8 compared with 1.4 people). The average hours of paid work, in total by all members in households with low economic resources (27 hours per week), was half that of other households (54 hours per week). These differences are partly due to the lower proportion of people of working age in low economic resources households.

Households with no-one employed were twice as likely to have low economic resources (32%) as those with at least one person employed (16%). Similarly, households where only one person was employed were twice as likely to have low economic resources (24%) as those where two people were employed (11%).

The importance of employment to household economic wellbeing was particularly apparent for those with young children. Of households comprising a couple with dependent children where no-one was working, 70% were identified as having low economic resources, compared with only 22% where at least one person was working. Among one parent households with dependent children where no-one was employed, 88% had low economic resources, compared with 42% in which someone was employed.

Having someone in the household employed does not necessarily guarantee relatively higher economic resources. In 2009–10, more than a third (37%) of households with one part-time worker only, fell within the low economic resource group. Even among households with one full-time worker only, one in five (20%) had low economic resources.

Selected household characteristics by economic resources – 2009-10

		Low economic resource households(a)	Other households	All households
Median age of household reference person(b)	years	42	51	49
Average number of people	no.	2.9	2.5	2.6
Average number of employed people	no.	0.8	1.4	1.3
Average weekly hours worked(c)	no.	26.6	53.9	48.3
Main source of household income from wages and salaries	%	48.5	73.5	67.8
Main source of household income from government pensions and allowances	%	43.8	13.0	19.9
Home owner without a mortgage	%	4.2	34.1	27.3
Home owner with a mortgage	%	27.5	47.8	43.2
Public housing	%	13.0	0.5	3.3
Private renter	%	50.2	15.2	23.1

(a) People in the two lowest quintiles for both equivalised disposable household income (adjusted to include imputed rent) and equivalised net worth.

(b) Median age refers to the age which divides the group into two equal parts, one half being below this age, the other half being above.

(c) Total average hours worked by all household members in their main and second job.

Source: ABS 2009-10 Survey of Income and Housing

...main source of income

The lower levels of employment among low economic resource households were reflected in relatively high reliance on government pensions and allowances. Of people in low economic resource households in 2009–10, 44% relied on government pensions and allowances as their main source of household income. This compares with 13% of people across other households. Around half of people in low economic resource households (49%) had

wages and salary as their main source of household income, compared with nearly three quarters (73%) of people across other households.

Of those living in one parent households with low economic resources, nearly three-quarters (74%) relied on government pensions and allowances as their main source of household income. In lone person and couple only households where the reference person was 65 years and over and which had low economic resources, 99% relied on government pensions and allowances as their main source of income.

Government benefits, taxes, and income distribution

The government tax and transfer system redistributes economic resources to assist those in the community who are most in need of financial support.

The income measure used in this article includes government benefits, pensions and allowances received in cash. However, the most comprehensive income measure, final income – equal to *adjusted disposable household income* plus government social transfers in kind (e.g. health, education and housing), less taxes on production and consumption) – will become available when the results of the 2009–10 study are released in *Government Benefits, Taxes and Household Income, Australia, 2009–10* (cat. no. 6537.0) on 29 June 2012.

Results from the ABS 2003–04 study showed that the net effect of the full range of government benefits and taxes on the distribution of household income was an increase in the income of households in the lower income groups, and a decrease in the average income of households in the higher income groups.

...housing

People's command over economic resources can influence their housing opportunities and particularly their chances of owning their own home. Less than a third (32%) of people in low economic resource households lived in an owner occupied dwelling (and only 4% in mortgage free dwellings), compared with 82% of other people (including 34% in mortgage free dwellings). The lower ownership rates partly reflect the younger age profile of those in low economic resource households, with many at a stage in the life course during which home ownership is less common.

Those in low economic resource households were much more likely to be renting in public housing (13% compared with 1% across all other households). As might be expected, 89% of all public housing tenants lived in low economic resource households.

Expenditure patterns of low economic resource households

While information on people's economic resources (i.e. their income and wealth) provides insight into their consumption possibilities, expenditure on goods and services provides information about their actual consumption, and gives an indication of their material standard of living.

In 2009–10, the average weekly equivalised expenditure (adjusted to include imputed rent) on goods and services of people in low economic resource households (\$500) was 57% of the average expenditure of other households (\$872).

Between 2003–04 and 2009–10, after controlling for inflation, the weekly equivalised adjusted household expenditure of people in low economic resource households increased by 14% (\$61). The average expenditure of other households increased by 17% (\$126) over the same period.

Housing, food and transport were the broad expenditure items that accounted for the largest proportion of expenditure on goods and services across both low economic resource households and other households. Among those in low economic resource households, these items accounted for 57% of total

expenditure, while for those in other households they accounted for 45%.

The equivalised expenditure on housing of those who lived in low economic resource households (\$133 per week) was similar to that of people in other households (\$130). However, housing represented a greater proportion of total expenditure on goods and services for those in low economic resource households (27% compared with 15%).

The average weekly equivalised expenditure on food among low economic resource households (\$89) was 67% of that spent by other households (\$132). Transport costs accounted for 13% of total goods and services expenditure among low economic resource households and 15% for other households. In terms of levels, the equivalised expenditure on transport among low economic resource households (\$62 per week) was less than half that among other households (\$130), on average.

It was a similar situation with expenditure on recreation, with low economic resource households spending 10% of their total expenditure on recreation, compared with 12% for people in other households. However, those in low economic resource households had considerably lower equivalised expenditures on recreation (\$50 per week) than people in other households (\$108).

Weekly equivalised expenditure by economic resources – 2009-10

Broad expenditure unit	Low economic resource households(a)		Other households		All households	
	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%
Goods and services						
Current housing costs (selected dwelling)	133	26.6	130	15.0	131	16.6
Domestic fuel and power	17	3.3	20	2.3	19	2.4
Food and non-alcoholic beverages	89	17.8	132	15.1	122	15.5
Alcoholic beverages	10	1.9	21	2.4	19	2.4
Tobacco products	10	1.9	7	0.8	7	0.9
Clothing and footwear	16	3.2	30	3.4	27	3.4
Household furnishings and equipment	16	3.2	40	4.5	34	4.3
Household services and operation	29	5.9	44	5.1	41	5.2
Medical care and health expenses	15	3.0	45	5.1	38	4.8
Transport	62	12.5	130	14.9	115	14.5
Recreation	50	10.0	108	12.4	95	12.0
Personal care	8	1.6	16	1.8	14	1.8
Miscellaneous goods and services	34	6.8	80	9.2	70	8.9
Average weekly equivalised adjusted expenditure on goods and services(b)	500	100.0	872	100.0	789	100.0

(a) People in the two lowest quintiles for both equivalised adjusted disposable household income (adjusted to include imputed rent) and equivalised household net worth.

(b) Adjusted to include imputed rent.

Source: ABS 2009-10 Household Expenditure Survey; ABS 2009-10 Survey of Income and Housing

Selected indicators of financial stress(a) by economic resources – 2009-10

Household experience	Low economic resource households(b)	Other households	All households
	%	%	%
Spend more money than we get	24.4	12.5	14.9
Unable to raise \$2,000 for something important in a week	43.3	7.0	14.4
Could not pay gas/electricity/telephone bill on time	31.0	7.9	12.5
Could not pay registration/insurance on time	12.3	3.2	5.0
Pawned or sold something	8.1	1.3	2.7
Unable to heat home	6.3	0.8	1.9
Went without meals	10.1	1.4	3.2
Sought financial assistance from friends/family	20.1	4.9	7.9
Sought assistance from welfare/community organisation	10.3	0.9	2.8
	millions	millions	millions
Total households	1.7	6.7	8.4

(a) Household situation over the past 12 months.

(b) People in the two lowest quintiles for both equivalised adjusted disposable household income (adjusted to include imputed rent) and equivalised net worth.

Source: ABS 2009-10 Survey of Income and Housing

People in low economic resource households had lower equivalised expenditures on medical and health care than those in other households, both in proportional terms (3% and 5%, respectively), as well as levels (\$15 and \$45 per week, respectively). This may be due to the younger age profile of people in low economic resource households. Additionally, two-thirds (67%) of low economic resource households had at least one person who had access to subsidised health care through government concession cards, compared with one-third (34%) of other households.

Financial stress

While people who are comparatively well off can experience financial stress and perceptions of stress can vary within a household, different rates of stress observed across groups can provide valuable additional insights into their relative material wellbeing.

...ability to save income

In 2009–10, 17% of households with low economic resources reported being able to save money most weeks, compared with 46% of other households. Around a quarter (24%) of low economic resource households reported spending more money than they received most weeks, twice the rate of other households (12%). This gives an indication of the extent to which people, particularly in low economic resource households, may be forced to draw upon their limited assets or rely on credit from week to week simply to make ends meet.

...ability to raise emergency money

An important element of financial security is the ability to meet unexpected expenses. In 2009–10, 43% of low economic resource households reported that they would not be able to raise \$2,000 in a week for something important. In contrast, only 7% of other households reported being in this position.

...other indicators of financial stress

A range of other indicators of financial stress were more prevalent among low economic resource households: 10% reported that they had gone without meals in the past 12 months due to cash flow problems, while 8% had resorted to pawning or selling possessions. By contrast, only 1% of other households had been forced to either of these lengths.

Close to a third (31%) of low economic resource households reported that they had been unable to pay a utility bill on time in the past 12 months, and 20% had sought financial help from friends or family due to cash flow problems. This compares with 8% and 5%, respectively, among other households. One in ten (10%) low economic resource households were forced to seek assistance from welfare or community organisations, compared with 1% of other households.

Looking ahead

While there will always be disparities between households in terms of income and wealth, the tax and transfers system, along with other government interventions, serve to minimise the risk of economic hardship, particularly at critical points in the life course.

The 2011 Henry review into Australia's tax and transfer system outlined a number of challenges facing the country over the coming decades.³ These include the need to increase participation and productivity in the workforce; maintain the adequacy and sustainability of the tax and transfer system in the context of an ageing population; increase retirement savings through the superannuation system; and increase housing affordability. These key directions were set with a view to the importance of policies that not only redistribute income but that also promote growth of incomes at all levels.

Endnotes

- 1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001, *Measuring Wellbeing: Frameworks for Australian Social Statistics, 2001*, cat. No. 4160.0. <www.abs.gov.au>.
- 2 Estimates of income for 2003–04 are not directly comparable with 2009–10 due to improvements in measuring income. Estimates for 2003–04 have been recompiled to reflect the new treatment of income, where data are available to support this calculation.
- 3 Australian Government 2011, *Australia's future tax system*, viewed 27 February 2012 <www.taxreview.treasury.gov.au>.



Life after Homelessness

Anyone in society can experience a period of homelessness at some stage in their life. Adverse life events or circumstances, such as illness or being the victim of violence, may trigger an episode of homelessness that, for some, may only be short lived. However, others experiencing homelessness may have struggled with considerable personal disadvantage throughout their lives.¹ In such circumstances there may be less personal, family or community resources at their command to either avoid or quickly recover from an episode of homelessness.

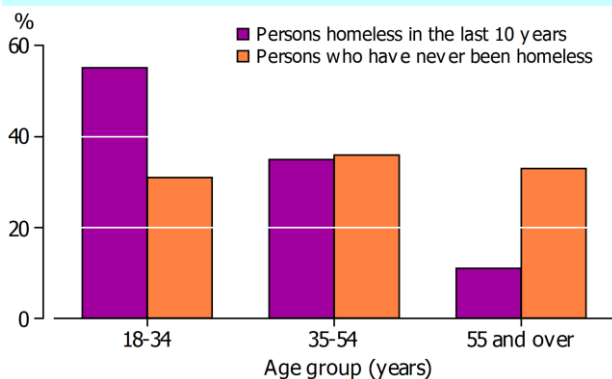
People who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness can be disconnected from employment and education institutions, be socially excluded from support networks, and are more likely to experience poorer physical and mental health.¹

This article examines a range of socio-economic indicators of those who had experienced at least one episode of homelessness in the last 10 years, but were no longer homeless. It does not examine causal relationships between homelessness and people's circumstances.

Who has been homeless?

In 2010, 1.1 million adults (7% of the 16.8 million adult population living in private dwellings) had experienced homelessness at some time in the previous 10 years. There were a similar number of men and women in this group.

Age distribution –2010(a)(b)



(a) Age reported at time of survey.

(b) Excludes persons who had been homeless more than 10 years ago.

Source: ABS 2010 General Social Survey

Data sources and definitions

Data in this article are from the ABS 2010 General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS provides a very wide range of information about people who, at the time the survey, were living as usual residents of private dwellings in Australia (excluding very remote areas). The GSS, therefore, does not include people who, at the time of the survey, were staying in homeless shelters; sleeping rough; staying temporarily with other households; or staying in boarding houses. Therefore very few people who may have been experiencing homelessness at the time of the survey will have responded to the survey. See ABS [General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2010](#) (cat. no. 4159.0).

In this article, *Homelessness* is defined as a reported period in the past when the respondent had no permanent place to live as a result of: violence/abuse/neglect; tight housing market/rental market; family/friend/relationship problems; financial problems; alcohol or drug use; mental illness; gambling; job loss; eviction and natural disasters. While there were 965,000 adults whose most recent period of homelessness had been more than 10 years ago, this article focuses on the 1.1 million people who had at least one episode of homelessness in the last 10 years.

Never been homeless refers to people aged 18 years and over who had never experienced homelessness. It includes both people who had never been without a permanent place to live, or for whom the only reasons for being without a permanent place to live were: travelling/on holidays; work related reasons; just moving back/into town or city; house sitting; saving money; and building or renovating a home.

Age standardisation removes the effect of age when comparing socio-economic characteristics between the population who had experienced homelessness in the past 10 years with those who had never been homeless.

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) summarise different combinations of the social and economic information from the Census of Population and Housing to allow ranking of regions/areas, by the level of social and economic well-being in each region. The SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage includes attributes such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment and jobs in relatively unskilled occupations. The index refers to the on average population of the area in which a person lives, not to the socio-economic situation of any particular individual. The first quintile represents the areas of most disadvantage and the fifth quintile represents the areas of least relative disadvantage.

...age

People who reported experiencing homelessness in the last 10 years were generally younger than those who had never been homeless. While one third (32%) of the general

adult population were aged 18-34 years, this age group accounted for 55% of those who had been homeless. In contrast, while those aged 55 years and over also accounted for one third (32%) of the general adult population, only 11% of those who had experienced homelessness were 55 years or over.

...education

People who had experienced homelessness in the last 10 years reported lower levels of educational attainment. After standardising for age, of adults who had been homeless, one third (33%) had not gone beyond Year 10 at school nor obtained a non-school qualification above Certificate II level, compared with 23% of those who had never been homeless. Having been homeless was also associated with a lower likelihood of having obtained a Bachelor degree or higher (17% compared with 24% of those who had never been homeless).

...disability and long-term health condition

Adults who had been homeless in the last 10 years were much more likely to report having a disability or long-term health condition (64%) compared with those who had never been homeless (37%). People who had a disability or long-term health condition and had been homeless in the last 10 years were four times as likely to report that they had a disability type or restriction which was psychological (22% compared with 5%).

Living Conditions

...employment

Being employed has many benefits aside from financial ones, such as providing the opportunity to build networks and have social interaction. It can also assist with building confidence, developing a sense of pride and achievement and motivating people. People who are unemployed or not in the labour force may be more vulnerable to missing out on these opportunities.

More definitions

A person has a *disability* or *long-term health condition* if they have a limitation, restriction, impairment, disease or disorder, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months and/or restricts everyday activities.

Unemployed people are those aged 18 years and over who were not employed, but were actively looking for work in the four weeks prior to the survey and available to start work in the week prior to the survey.

Not in the labour force refers to people aged 18 years and over who were not employed and who were not actively looking for work in the four weeks prior to the survey.

People reporting a disability or long-term health condition or restriction type(a)(b)

	Homeless in the last 10 years (b)(c) %	Never been homeless %
Sight, hearing, speech	23	13
Physical	47	24
Intellectual	6	2
Psychological	22	5
Head injury, stroke or brain damage	2	1
Other condition which restricts every day activities(d)	32	18
Has no disability or long-term health condition	36	63

(a) A disability or long-term health condition type or restriction may be reported more than once and / or a person may report more than one condition, hence categories may not add to 100%.

(b) Excludes persons who had been homeless more than 10 years ago.

(c) Adults who experienced homelessness in the last 10 years.

(d) Other condition which restricts every day activities includes any other long term condition that requires treatment or medication and any other long term condition such as arthritis, asthma, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, dementia etc.

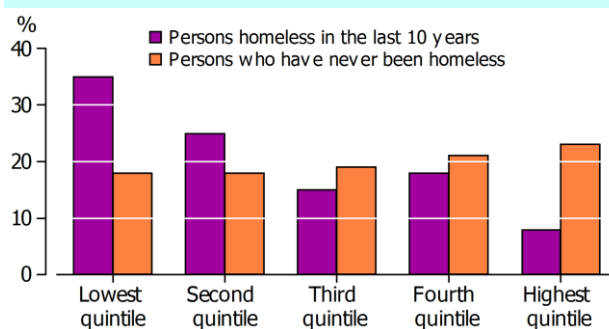
Source: ABS 2010 General Social Survey

In 2010, adults who had been homeless in the last 10 years were more likely to report being unemployed (9%) than those who had never been homeless (3%). They were also more likely to not be in the labour force (41% compared with 31%).

...income

Adults who had been homeless were twice as likely to report that their main source of personal income was a government pension or allowance compared with those who had never been homeless (48% compared with 24%).

Household income—2010(a)(b)(c)



Equivalised gross weekly household income

(a) Age standardised.

(b) Excludes persons who had been homeless more than 10 years ago.

(c) Totals exclude 'not known' or 'not stated'.

Source: ABS 2010 General Social Survey

Selected cash flow problems(a)(b)(c)(d)

	Cash flow problems reported within the last 12 months	
	Homeless in the last 10 years(e)	Never been homeless
	%	%
Household could not pay electricity, gas, or telephone bills on time	38	10
Household could not pay mortgage or rent payments on time	11	4
Household could not pay for car registration or insurance on time	14	5
Household could not make minimum payment on credit card	12	5
Household pawned or sold something because cash was needed	11	2
Members in household went without meals	11	1
Members in household were unable to heat home	5	1
Members in household sought financial help from friends or family	22	5
Members in household sought assistance from welfare /community organisations	12	1
Households reporting three or more cash flow problems	23	5

(a) In the 12 months prior to the survey.

(b) Age standardised.

(c) Excludes persons who had been homeless more than 10 years ago.

(d) Excludes not known or not stated.

(e) Adults who experienced homelessness in the last 10 years.

Source: ABS 2010 General Social Survey

Adults who had experienced homelessness were more likely to live in a lower income household than those who had never been homeless. In 2010, three in five (59%) of the adults who had experienced at least one episode of homelessness in the 10 years prior to the survey were in the bottom 40% of the household income distribution (after adjusting gross household incomes for household size and composition), compared with 36% of those who had never been homeless.

...living arrangements

Adults who had been homeless in the last 10 years were more than twice as likely to be in a one parent family (17% compared with 8%) and much more likely to be living alone (28% compared with 12%) or in a group household (9% compared with 3%) than adults who had never been homeless.

Adults who had experienced homelessness in the last 10 years were five times more likely to be living in public housing than those who had never been homeless (10% compared with 2%).

They were also twice as likely to be renting privately (45% compared with 20%), and much less likely to live in an owner occupied dwelling (38% compared with 74%).

...financial stress

Adults who had experienced homelessness within the last 10 years were more likely to live in households constrained in their activities because of a shortage of money.

In the 12 months prior to being surveyed, almost one quarter (23%) of people who had experienced homelessness lived in households which reported having three or more different types of cash flow problems (compared with 5% of people who had never been homeless).

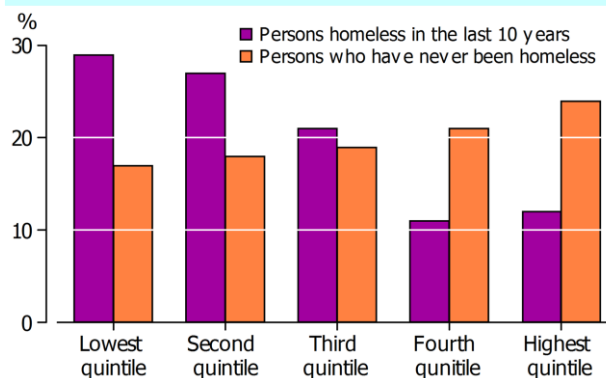
Of adults who had been homeless in the last 10 years, 38% reported being unable to pay electricity, gas or telephone bills on time, compared with 10% of people who had never been homeless, while one in ten (11%) of the adults who had been homeless reported that a member of their household went without meals, compared with 1% of people who had never been homeless.

Where do they live now?

Compared with persons who had never been homeless, in 2010, people who had experienced homelessness in the last 10 years were more likely to be currently living in more disadvantaged areas.

People who had experienced homelessness in the last 10 years were more likely to report neighbourhood problems than people who had never experienced homelessness. Of those reporting problems, they were twice as likely to report that using or dealing drugs was a local neighbourhood problem (28% compared with

Relative disadvantage of area—2010(a)(b)(c)(d)



(a) Age standardised.

(b) Excludes persons who had been homeless more than 10 years ago.

(c) Excludes not known or not stated.

(d) SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage.

Source: ABS 2010 General Social Survey

13%). They were also more likely to report people being insulted, pestered or intimidated in the street (32% compared with 18%) and that there were higher instances of offensive language or behaviour in their local area (41% compared with 29%).

Living in areas of social disadvantage with limited community cohesion can place people at greater risk of crime victimisation.² In 2010, people who had been homeless within the last 10 years were almost three times as likely to report being a victim of physical or threatened violence in the 12 months prior to the survey, compared with those who never had been homeless (25% compared with 9%).

Seeking assistance

While there are services available to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, 60% of the 1.1 million adults who had experienced at least one episode of homelessness in the previous 10 years reported that they had not sought assistance of formal services when homeless. Most (81%) of those who did not seek assistance felt that they had not needed it.

Of the 460,000 people who had been homeless and sought assistance from a service provider for their most recent experience of homelessness, over half (56%) had approached housing service providers. Two-thirds (66%) of those adults who did seek assistance from services felt that the services were helpful.

Looking ahead

The experience of homelessness is not the same for all people. The reasons people were homeless in the last 10 years differed, as did the length of time they had been homeless, the number of episodes of homelessness that they experienced, and whether or not they had sought assistance to move out of homelessness.

The 2008 Australian Government White Paper *The Road Home, A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness* set an ambitious target to halve homelessness by 2020 and offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it.¹

The measures in the White paper were targeted to both help prevent more Australians from becoming homeless each year, and to strengthen the provision of services for those Australians who do become homeless.

Endnotes

1. Australian Government, 2008, *The Road Home. A national approach to reducing homelessness*, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra, Australia, <www.fahcsia.gov.au>
2. Lee, M.R., 2000, 'Community cohesion and violence predatory victimization: A theoretical extension and cross-national test of opportunity theory', *Social Forces* 79(2), pp.683-706.



Love Me Do

Families are the building blocks of society, facilitating generational renewal, human interaction, and linking individuals to wider society as a whole. Relationships are closely linked with wellbeing, with families playing a key role in socialising children and shaping the future of society.

Changing patterns in divorce and cohabitation over recent decades have resulted in differences in family structure; however families still remain a basic unit in society. While the rate of marriages registered in Australia each year has remained relatively stable in recent years, Australians have been marrying at an older age, and delaying having their first child until later in life. More Australians are in de facto relationships, and more are choosing non-religious ceremonies if they do decide to marry.

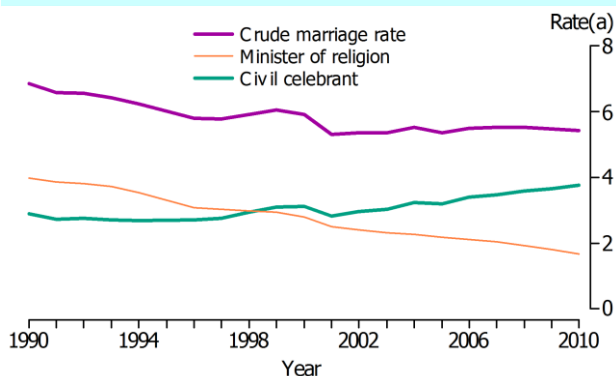
This article looks at trends in marriage, de facto relationships and divorce between 1990 and 2010, as well as the effect of these trends on the family.

How many marriages?

Over the last two decades, the crude marriage rate fell from 6.9 registered marriages per 1,000 estimated resident population in 1990 to 5.4 marriages per 1,000 estimated resident population in 2010. This decline in part reflects a changing population structure.

There were 121,000 marriages registered in 2010, the most recorded in a single year in Australia, and slightly more than the 120,000 marriages registered in 2009. Of the registered marriages in 2010, 31% were religious ceremonies, down from 58% in 1990. In contrast, in 2010, 69% of marriage ceremonies were conducted by civil celebrants, up from 42% in 1990.

Crude marriage rate – 1990 – 2010



(a) Marriages registered during a calendar year per 1,000 estimated resident population.

Source: ABS [2010 Marriages and Divorces, Australia](#) (cat. no. 3310.0), ABS [2008 Australian Historical Population Statistics](#) (cat. no. 3105.0.65.001) and ABS [Australian Demographics Statistics Quarterly](#) (cat. no. 3101.0)

Data sources and definitions

The main data sources for this article are the ABS publications:

[Marriages and Divorces, Australia, 2010](#) (cat. no. 3310.0)

[Family Characteristics and Transitions, Australia, 2006–07](#) (cat. no. 4442.0)

[Family Characteristics, Australia, 2009–10](#) (cat. no. 4442.0)

[Births, Australia](#), 1993 and 2010 (cat. no. 3301.0)

The *crude marriage rate* represents the number of marriages registered during a calendar year per 1,000 estimated resident population at 30 June of the same year.

Age-specific marriage rates per 1,000 population give the proportion of total estimated resident population aged 16 years and over for a given age-group who are married in a specific year.

The *crude divorce rate* represents the number of divorces granted during a calendar year per 1,000 estimated resident population at 30 June of the same year. *Age-specific divorce rates* provide a more accurate representation of divorce rates by taking account of both changes in the population structure and changing rates of marriage, but are not available for the most recent years examined in this article.

Median is the value which divides the relevant population into two equal parts, half falling below the value and half exceeding it.

Step families are those formed when parents re-partner following separation or death of their partner and there is at least one step child aged 0–17 years of either member of the couple, but no natural or adopted child aged 0–17 years from the couple.

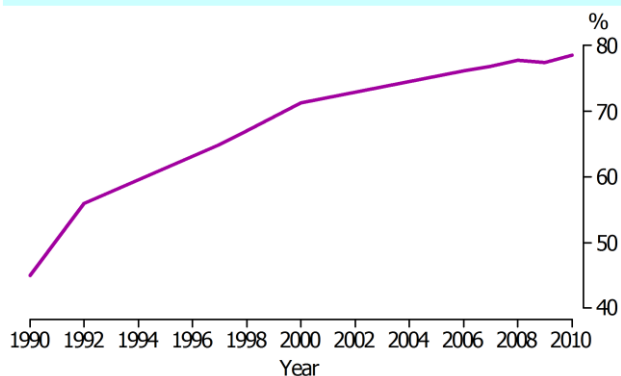
A *blended family* contains at least one step child aged 0–17 years but also at least one natural or adopted child aged 0–17 years of both parents.

...living together

In 2009–10, 11% (1.9 million) of Australians aged 18 years and over were living in a de facto relationship, while 53% were in a registered marriage.

De facto relationships were most common amongst younger people, with one fifth (22%) of people aged 20–29 years living in these relationships, compared with nearly one tenth (9.4%) of people aged 40–49 years. The proportion of people aged 20–29 years living in a de facto relationship has doubled since 1992, where one tenth (10%) were living in one of these relationships. The rate for people aged 40–49 years has also nearly doubled (up from 4.7%) during this time.

Cohabitation prior to registered marriage - 1990 – 2010



Source: ABS [Marriages and Divorces 2010, 2001, 2000, 1997, 1994](#) (cat. no. 3310.0)

De facto relationships include those living in a same-sex relationship and in 2009–10 there were around 46,300 people living in a same sex couple. The majority of these couples had no children.

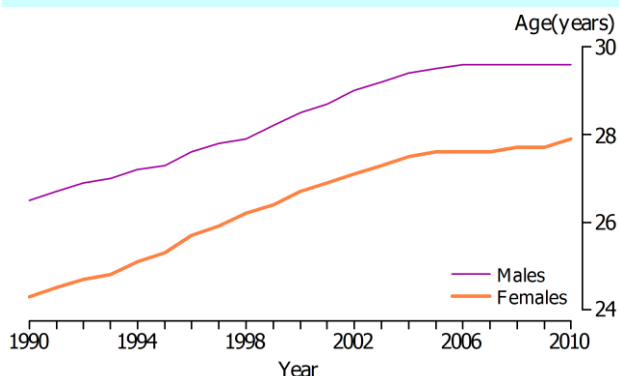
Cohabitation prior to registered marriage has increased over the last twenty years. In the early 1990s, just over half of all registered marriages were preceded by a period of cohabitation (56% in 1992).¹ By 2010 it was almost eight in ten (79%).

Many people in de facto couples expect their relationship to lead to marriage. In 2006–07, of the 1.6 million people aged 18 years and over who were in a de facto relationship, just over two fifths (42%) of them expected to enter into a registered marriage with their current partner.

...age at first marriage

Over the last twenty years, the average age at which Australians first marry has increased. In 2010, the median age at first marriage for men was 29.6 years and 27.9 years for women, an increase of more than three years since 1990 (26.5 years and 24.3 years respectively). Since 2002, the median age at first marriage for both men and women has remained relatively unchanged.

Median age at first marriage – 1990 – 2010



Source: ABS [2010 Marriages and Divorces, Australia](#) (cat. no. 3310.0), [ABS 2008 Australian Historical Population Statistics](#) (cat. no. 3105.0.65.001)

Save the date... month and day of marriage in Australia

Between 1990 and 2010, spring and autumn were the most popular seasons in which to marry. The winter months tend to be the least popular time for weddings, although in the Northern Territory couples prefer to marry in June, July or August to avoid unpredictable summer tropical weather.

In 1990, September recorded the most marriages nationally, but in 2010, October was the most popular month in which to wed. Generally in 2010, Saturday was the most popular day to get married. However, possibly due to the memorable date 10-10-10, Sunday 10 October saw the most weddings in one day for 2010 with 2,454 couples tying the knot that day.

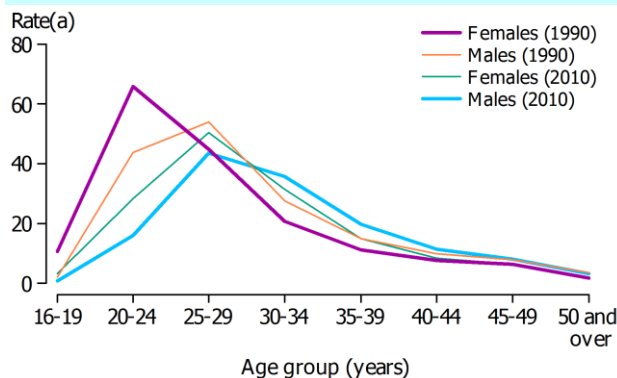
There are many factors that may affect the age at which Australians first marry. These include the pursuit of higher education, the associated delay in labour force participation, the increasing social acceptance of cohabitation before marriage, and children moving out of the family home later in adulthood due to these factors. In 2006–07, 49% of men and 45% of women aged 18–24 years had never left the parental home, mainly for financial reasons (41%) or the convenience and/or enjoyment of living at home (36%).

Since 1990, the median age at first marriage has increased by three years for men and three and a half years for women.

...marrying older

The trend of marrying later in life has also been seen in the median age for all marriages (that is, when second and subsequent marriages are included). For men the median age for all marriages rose from 28.2 years in 1990 to 31.4 years in 2010, while for women, it increased from 25.9 years in 1990 to 29.2 years in 2010.

Age-specific marriage rate(a) – 1990 & 2010



(a) Marriages registered per calendar year per 1,000 estimated resident population by 5-year age groups.

Source: ABS [2010 Marriages and Divorces, Australia](#) (cat. no. 3310.0), [ABS 2008 Australian Historical Population Statistics](#) (cat. no. 3105.0.65.001)

In the twenty years to 2010, the age-specific marriage rate more than halved in the 20–24 years age group, dropping to 16.1 per 1,000 men (down from 44.0 in 1990), and 28.4 per 1,000 women (down from 66.0 in 1990).

Conversely, in middle age groups, the rate increased. In 1990, the marriage rate for men aged 30–34 years was 27.7 per 1,000 men, rising to 35.7 in 2010. During this time the rate for women in this age group also increased from 20.8 to 31.4 per 1,000 women.

Later childbearing

A range of factors has influenced changes in Australia's birth rates. While the age at marriage is increasing, more time spent on educational pursuits, and concerns regarding financial stability,² have also contributed to these changes.

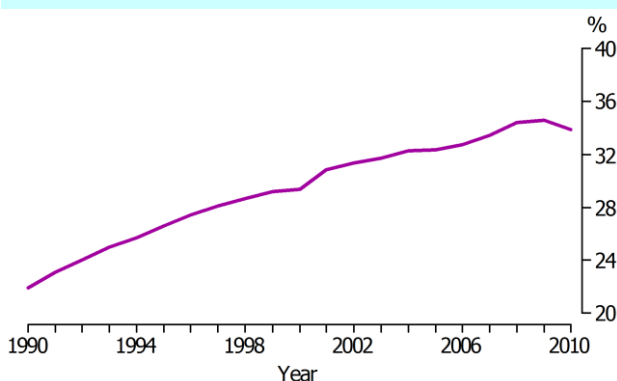
While Australia's total fertility rate has not changed significantly between 1990 and 2010 (1.90 babies per woman in 1990, compared with 1.89 babies per woman in 2010), the age at which women have their first baby has changed. In 1990, the median age of first-time mothers was 27.5 years. By 2010, this had increased to 28.9 years.

Since 2000, women aged 30–34 years have continued to record the highest fertility rate of all age groups. In 1990, the fertility rate for this age group was 102 babies per 1,000 women, rising to 123 babies per 1,000 women in 2010. Further, since 2005 the fertility rate for women aged 35–39 years has exceeded that of women aged 20–24 years.

...births outside of marriage

The proportion of births occurring outside registered marriage has increased over the last two decades. Overall, unmarried women bear children at younger ages than women in registered marriages.

Births outside of registered marriage – 1990 – 2010



Source: ABS [Births, Australia, 2010](#); [2000](#); [1995](#); [1993](#) (cat. no. 3301.0)

Marriage and divorce across the states and territories

The registration of marriages, and the granting of divorces, differs across states and territories. In 2010, the states recording the highest and lowest crude marriage rates also recorded the highest and lowest crude divorce rates. The highest rates were found in Queensland, with 5.9 marriages per 1,000 population and 2.5 divorces per 1,000 population. The Northern Territory had the lowest crude marriage rate at 4.2, as well as the lowest crude divorce rate at 1.9. The rates reflect the state in which the marriages are registered rather than the state of usual residence of the applicants.

Men and women appeared to marry younger for marriages registered in the ACT, Queensland and South Australia. The lowest median age at first marriage for males was for those registered in the ACT (29.4 years), while Queensland and South Australia had the lowest median age for females (both 27.7 years). The Northern Territory had the highest median age at marriage registered for both males (30.7 years) and females (28.7 years).

The Northern Territory also had the highest percentage of civil ceremonies, with civil celebrants conducting nearly 8 out of 10 (78%) marriage ceremonies in 2010. The ACT recorded the highest percentage of religious marriage ceremonies, with ministers of religion conducting more than a third (35%) of all marriage ceremonies.

The Northern Territory also had the highest proportion of babies born outside of marriage with three-fifths (60%). The ACT recorded the lowest proportion of births outside of marriage with 27%.

Queensland and Tasmania recorded the highest proportion of couples living together prior to marriage registered in the state in 2010 (both 86%). New South Wales recorded the lowest proportion (72%).

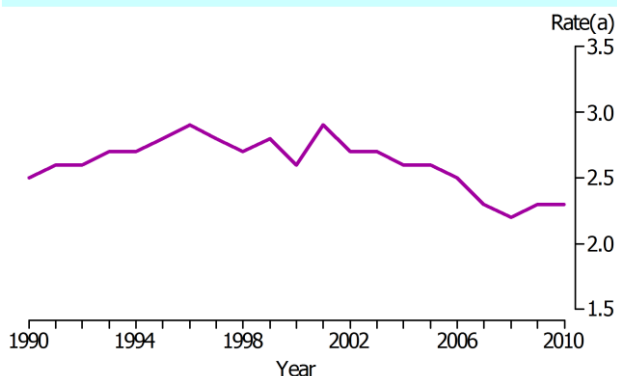
In 2010, the median age of unmarried mothers was 27.3 years, just over three years older than in 1990 (24.0 years), and nearly four and a half years younger than the median age of married women giving birth in 2010 (31.7 years). The proportion of babies born outside registered marriage also rose during this time, from just over one fifth (22%) to just over one third (34%) of all births.

Unmarried fathers also have children at younger ages. In 2010 the median age of unmarried fathers was 29.9 years compared with 34.0 years for married fathers. The median age of fathers has increased over the last twenty years, by 2.6 years for both married and unmarried fathers.

How many divorces?

Although more divorces were granted in 2010 (50,200) than in 1990 (42,600), the crude divorce rate was comparatively lower (2.3 divorces per 1,000 estimated resident population, down from 2.5).

Crude divorce rate – 1990 – 2010



(a) Divorces granted during a calendar year per 1,000 estimated resident population.

Source: ABS [2010 Marriages and Divorces, Australia](#) (cat. no. 3310.0), ABS [2008 Australian Historical Population Statistics](#) (cat. no. 3105.0.65.001)

However, over the last two decades the crude divorce rate has varied. Rates during this period peaked in 1996 and 2001, at 2.9 divorces per 1,000 estimated resident population, while the lowest rate of 2.2 occurred in 2008. In part, the fluctuations in the crude divorce rate reflect both a changing population age structure, and a changing proportion of the population that is married.

...years to separation and divorce

The number of years to separation and divorce has remained stable since 2006, and recent divorce statistics show couples are married for longer before ending their marriage.

In 2010, the median length of marriage before separation was 8.8 years, just over one year longer than in 1990 (7.5 years). The median length of time before divorcing increased by two years, from 10.2 years in 1990 to 12.3 years in 2010.

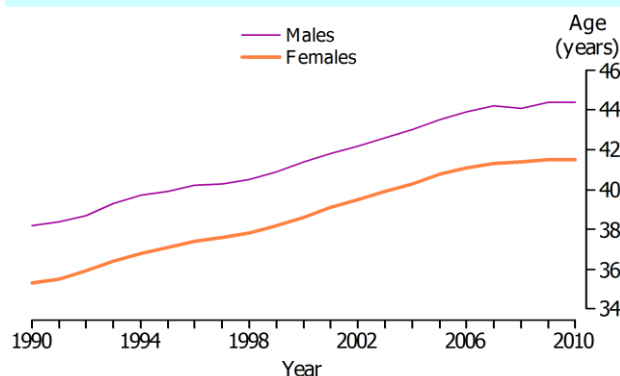
Couples are also now separated for longer prior to divorce. In 1990, the average length of time between separation and divorce was 2.7 years. In 2010 this gap had increased to 3.5 years.

...age at separation and divorce

As couples are choosing to marry later in life, and marriages are lasting longer, couples also tend to divorce at older ages. In the last two decades, the median age at separation has increased by approximately six years for both men and women.

In 2010, the median age for males at separation was 40.8 years, and 44.4 years at divorce, up from 35.3 years and 38.2 years respectively in 1990. Reflecting the age gap between men and women at marriage, the female median age at separation was 38.1 years, and 41.5 years at divorce, up from 32.4 years and 35.3 years in 1990.

Median age at divorce – 1990 – 2010



Source: ABS [Marriages and Divorces, Australia, 2010, 2002, 2001, 1998, 1997, 1996, 1995, 1994](#) (cat. no. 3310.0), ABS [Divorces, Australia, 2004, 2003, 2002](#) (cat. no. 3307.0.55.001)

Divorce and children

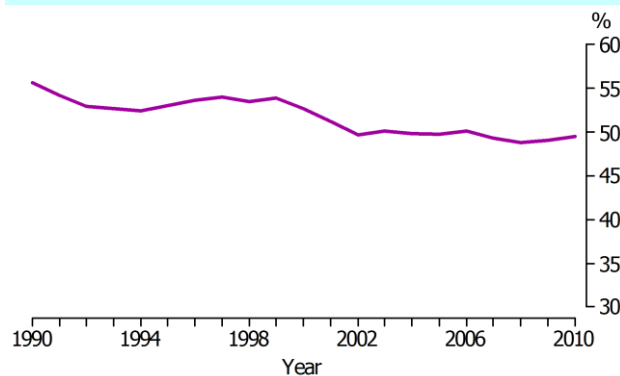
Between 1990 and 2010, the proportion of divorces involving children decreased from 56% to 49%. Divorces between couples with children aged less than 18 years made up around half of all divorces in Australia in recent years. The proportion has remained relatively stable since declining to 50% in 2002.

The reality of divorce means that many children live without regular contact with one of their parents (usually the father) after separation. In 2009–10, of the 5 million children aged 0–17 years, just over 1 million, or one in five (21%), had a natural parent living elsewhere. For four fifths (81%) of these children, the parent living elsewhere was their father.

Of all children who had a natural parent living elsewhere, nearly half (48%) saw this parent at least once per fortnight, while one quarter (24%) saw them less than once per year or never.

Nearly three quarters (73%) of children with a parent living elsewhere were in one parent families, 14% lived in step families, and 11% lived in blended families.

Divorces involving children(a)(b)– 1990 – 2010



(a) As a proportion of all divorces.

(b) Children aged under 18 years.

Source: ABS [2010 Marriages and Divorces, Australia](#) (cat. no. 3310.0), ABS [2008 Australian Historical Population Statistics](#) (cat. no. 3105.0.65.001)

International Comparisons

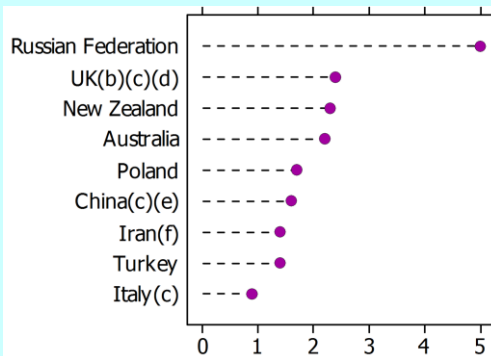


English-speaking countries generally have the highest crude divorce rates and countries which are the least secularised generally have the lowest. Differences between countries will also be affected by their respective population age structures and marriage rates.

Countries with high Catholic populations, such as Poland and Italy had lower rates (1.7 and 0.9 respectively), as well as countries with largely Islamic populations like Turkey (1.4) and Iran (1.4). The Vatican and the Philippines are the only countries where divorce is illegal.

A 'no-fault' divorce principle was introduced in Australia by the *Family Law Act 1975*. Australia is one of the few nations that operate by this principle; others include the United States of America, Canada and Malta.

Crude divorce rate(a), selected countries – 2008



(a) Per 1,000 population.

(b) Excludes Channel Islands and Isle of Man.

(c) Data for 2007.

(d) Provisional data.

(e) Excludes Special Administrative Regions and Taiwan Province.

(f) Data for 21 March 2007 to 20 March 2008.

Source: United Nations, 2009, *Divorces and crude divorce rates, by urban/rural residence: 2004-2008*, <<http://unstats.un.org>>

Looking ahead

The last two decades have seen changes in Australians' relationship behaviour, the composition of families and the decision on when to have children. These changes will affect the ways couples and families form, interact and live together into the future.

Endnotes

- 1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1994, *Focus on Families: Demographics and Family Formation*, cat. no. 4420.0, Canberra, <www.abs.gov.au>.
- 2 Gray, M., Qu, L. & Weston, R., 2008, *Fertility and family policy in Australia: Research paper no. 41*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, <www.aifs.gov.au>.



Disability and Work

Many people with disability engage in work and make a valuable contribution to society. Employment can provide financial independence, a better standard of living and improved physical and mental health.¹ Entering employment can provide individuals with increased confidence, expanding their social network and social skills as well as opportunities to develop a career by gaining new work skills and knowledge.

Recent decades have seen major developments towards achieving workplace equality for all Australians, including those with disability. The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)*² aims to protect people from discrimination because of their disability. Following a Productivity Commission Review³ in 2004, the DDA was changed to further protect the equality of opportunity for people with disability. In addition to legislative protection, since 2009 employment support has been provided through the National Disability Agreement (NDA).⁴

Although there have been improvements in anti-discrimination legislation, people with disability are still less likely to be working than other Australians. The labour force participation rate for those aged 15–64 years with disability in 2009 was 54%, much lower than that for those without disability (83%). One of the priority outcomes of the National Disability Strategy 2010–2020 is to ‘increase access to employment opportunities as a key to improving economic security and personal wellbeing for people with disability...’.⁵

This article investigates the labour force characteristics of Australians aged 15–64 years with disability.

Data sources and definitions

Most of the data in this article are from the ABS 2009 [Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers \(SDAC\)](#) (cat. no. 4430.0).

This article focuses on people aged 15–64 years living with disability and living in households.

Disability In this article a person has a disability if they have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months and restricts everyday activities. Disability is defined based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF).

Core activity limitations There are four levels of core activity limitation based on whether a person needs help, has difficulty, or uses aids or equipment with any of the following core activities: communication, mobility and self-care. The levels of limitation used in this article are profound or severe, moderate or mild, and other disability (people with a disability other than a core activity limitation). A person’s overall level of core activity limitation is determined by their highest level of limitation in these activities.

Employed A person is employed if they reported that they had worked, either full or part time (fewer than 35 hours per week), in a job, business or farm during the reference week (the full week prior to the date of interview); or that they had a job in the reference week, but were not at work.

Unemployed A person is unemployed if they were not employed during the reference week and:

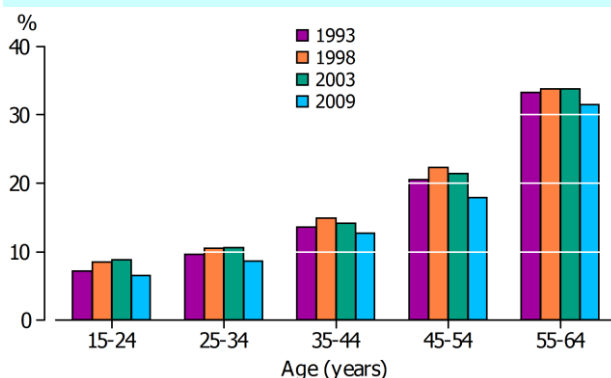
- had actively looked for full-time or part-time work at any time in the four weeks up to the end of the reference week; and
- were available for work in the reference week.

Not in the labour force A person who was neither employed nor unemployed.

Participation rate The number of people employed or unemployed, which comprises the labour force, as a proportion of the total number of the population.

Unemployment rate The number of unemployed as a proportion of the total labour force.

Disability rate by age(a) – 1993 - 2009



(a) People aged 15-64 years and living in households.

Source: [ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2009](#)

People with disability

In 2009, there were 2.2 million Australians aged 15–64 years with disability, up from 1.7 million in 1993. The disability rate for Australians aged 15–64 years, those of ‘prime working age’, rose from 15% in 1993 to a peak of 17% in 2003, then returned to 15% in 2009. In 2009, just over half (51%) of people with disability were women.

The likelihood of living with disability increases with age. In 2009, the disability rate among 15–24 year olds was 6.6% and the rate was higher for successively older age groups,

with 18% of 45–54 year olds, and 31% of 55–64 year olds living with disability in 2009.

Labour force participation

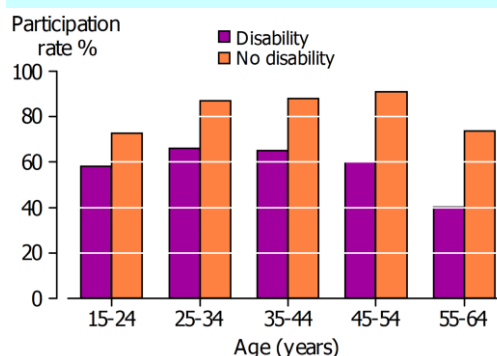
Labour force participation provides an indication of both the desire for and availability of paid work, and the ability to obtain and perform such work. Between 1993 and 2009, the labour force participation rate for working-age people (15–64 years) with disability was relatively stable. In 1993, the rate was 55%, and this was broadly similar in 2009 at 54%. Conversely, over the same period, the participation rate for working-age people with no disability increased from 77% in 1993 to 83% in 2009.

In 2009, just over half (54%) of working-age people with disability participated in the labour force compared with 83% of working-age people without disability.

Over the sixteen years from 1993 to 2009, the unemployment rate for 15–64 year olds with disability decreased from 17.8% to 7.8%, in line with the similar decline in unemployment for those with no disability (from 12.0% in 1993 to 5.1% in 2009). However, the unemployment rate for people with disability continued to be significantly higher than for those without disability in 2009.

Nearly half (46%) of working-age people with disability were not in the labour force in 2009, and more than half of these (59%) were

Labour force participation by disability status and age(a) – 2009



(a) People aged 15-64 years and living in households.

Source: ABS 2009 [Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers](#)

permanently unable to work. Of those people with disability who were not in the labour force, one fifth (20% or 194,000) had no employment restriction, meaning that it was not their disability which prevented them from working. Difficulties such as access to childcare (22%), were reported as limiting these people's ability to participate in the labour force despite having no employment restrictions. For people without disability who were not in the labour force, other difficulties were reported such as a lack of vacancies or suitable hours (both 11%).

...age and sex

Labour force participation rates for people with disability varied with age, a similar pattern to people without disability. The difference in labour force participation between people with and without disability increased with age.

Disability status(a) by labour force status – 2009

	Males		Females		Total	
	With disability(b)	No disability	With disability(b)	No disability	With disability(b)	No disability
Labour force status	%	%	%	%	%	%
Employed full time	42.5	70.5	19.9	38.2	31.0	54.5
Employed part time	12.3	13.9	25.5	34.5	19.1	24.1
Total employed	54.8	84.4	45.5	72.7	50.0	78.6
Unemployed	4.9	4.5	3.6	4.0	4.2	4.2
Not in the labour force	40.2	11.1	51.0	23.4	45.7	17.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total ('000)	1,059.4	6,323.0	1,111.9	6,224.9	2,171.3	12,547.9
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Participation rate	59.8	88.9	49.0	76.6	54.3	82.8
Unemployment rate	8.2	5.0	7.3	5.2	7.8	5.1

(a) People aged 15-64 years and living in households.

(b) Includes those who may not have a specific limitation or restriction.

Source: ABS [2009 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers](#)

Selected labour force characteristics by disability group(a) – 2009

Disability group	People '000	Labour force participation rate	Unemployment rate
		%	%
Sensory and speech	457.9	53.7	7.0
Intellectual	244.8	40.9	16.3
Physical	1,546.0	49.7	7.5
Psychological	369.6	29.2	18.9
Head injury, stroke or brain damage	155.6	35.6	15.3
All with a disability(b)	2,171.3	54.3	7.8
No disability	12,547.9	82.8	5.1
All people	14,719.2	78.6	5.4

(a) People aged 15-64 years and living in households.

(b) Includes other disability type(s) and those who may not have a specific limitation or restriction.

Source: ABS [2009 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers](#)

The peak of participation for people with disability was in the 25–34 years age group while for those without disability, participation peaked at 45–54 years. People aged 55–64 years with disability had the lowest participation rate (40%) of all the age groups. Of people of this age, with disability and not in the labour force, nearly one third (30%) reported long-term illness or injury as a reason for not wanting to work, much higher than people of the same age

Spotlight on a disability - Mental illness

The ABS [National Health Survey 2007–08](#) (cat.no. 4364.0) tells us there were 1.8 million people of working-age living with mental illness in Australia.⁶ Mental illness is a clinically diagnosable disorder that significantly interferes with an individual's cognitive, emotional or social abilities. Mental disorders can include anxiety, affective or mood disorders, and substance abuse disorders.⁷

Having a mental illness does not always result in disability. Of the 1.8 million people with mental illness in Australia, less than half (43%) reported having a disability.

Having a mental health disability can significantly impact upon a person's ability to engage with the labour market. In 2007–08, the participation rate of people with disabling mental illness was 51%, much lower than the rate for people without disability (82%). This disparity may in part result from prejudice towards people with mental health conditions.⁸ Of people living with disabling mental illness who were employed in 2007–08, significantly more (49%) worked part time, compared with all people without disability (28%).⁶

Note: The 2007–08 National Health Survey measured disability differently to the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, and as such the results from these surveys differ.

Disability groups

Disabilities can be broadly grouped depending on whether they relate to functioning of the mind or the senses, to anatomy or physiology. A person is classified to one or more of the following five disability groups:

- *Sensory or speech* (loss of sight, hearing or speech difficulties)
- *Intellectual* (difficulty with learning, or understanding things)
- *Physical* (breathing difficulties, blackouts, fits, chronic or recurrent pain, incomplete use of arms, finger, feet or legs, restriction in physical activities or in doing physical work, disfigurement)
- *Psychological* (nervous or emotional condition, mental illness)
- *Head injury, stroke or brain damage* (with long-term effects that restrict everyday activities)

without disability (2%). For people aged 55–64 years with disability, their low participation rate may partly reflect the desire for retirement or difficulties experienced by mature-age job seekers, which can discourage some from looking for work.⁹

There were differences in labour force participation between working-age men and women among those with disability, with women (49%) less likely to participate than men (60%). This was also true for people without disability (77% and 89% respectively), partly reflecting women's roles in family responsibilities.¹⁰

...disability type

Of the five main disability groups, the most common in 2009 was physical disability, which affected nearly three quarters (71%) of working-age people with disability. This was much higher than the proportion with sensory and speech disability (21%) or psychological disability (17%). People can be affected by more than one type of disability and therefore be classified into one or more disability groups.

The type of disability that an individual has can affect their likelihood of participating in the labour market. People with sensory or speech impairment had the best labour market outcomes with a participation rate of 54% and an unemployment rate of 7.0%, while people whose disability was psychological had the lowest participation rate (29%), and the highest unemployment rate (19%). People with sensory or speech impairment may be able to benefit from assistive technologies but this is not the case for people with psychological disability such as mental illness. People with mental illness may experience disruption to their work attendance and career due to the episodic nature of their disability.¹¹

...disability severity

The severity of disability is an indication of a person's limitations in the core activities of communication, mobility and self-care. Of people aged 15–64 years with disability, almost one quarter (23%) had profound or severe disability, while nearly half (47%) had moderate or mild disability. About one third (30%) of people with disability did not have a core activity limitation, yet they may have had a school or work restriction.

As with disability type, the severity of a person's disability is reflected in their ability to participate in the labour force. Generally, labour force participation decreases as the severity of disability increases. In 2009, those aged 15–64 years with moderate or mild disability had a participation rate of 53%, while those with profound or severe disability had a labour force participation rate of 31%. This pattern was evident across all types of disability. For example, the participation rate of those with moderate or mild physical restriction was 51%, while those with profound or severe physical restriction had a participation rate of 28%.

To see a pattern in unemployment rates, severity and type of disability need to be looked at together. For example, the unemployment rate for people with intellectual disability was high in comparison with other disability groups, regardless of severity. Those with moderate or mild intellectual disability (20%) had a higher unemployment rate than those with moderate or mild physical disability (8.8%). This may partly reflect the unique barriers that people with intellectual disability face in accessing education and work.

...employment restrictions

Some people with disability experience employment restrictions such as being restricted in the type of job they can do or the number of hours they can work, or needing special assistance in the workplace. People with disability who had an employment restriction were far less likely to be participating in the labour force (46%) than those without an employment restriction (71%).

Of the 69% of people with disability who had an employment restriction, two of the most common restrictions were the type of job or the number of hours they could work (51% and 31% respectively). People with profound or severe disability were the most likely to have some kind of employment restriction (92%).

Employment

In Australia in 2009, over one million working-age people with disability (50%) were in paid employment, comprising 10% of the total

Young people with a disability

For young people, the time of transition from school to continued study or employment can be critical for their long-term economic future. For young people with disability, they must take account of their abilities and restrictions in their choice of study and work paths. Completing Year 12 can enhance study and work options. The 2009 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers indicated that of people aged 18–24 years with disability, nearly two fifths (38%) had completed Year 12 compared with almost half (49%) of those without disability.

While the majority of young Australians either work, study or do a combination of both, there are some young people who are not doing either. These people are described as not fully engaged and are at risk of unemployment or only securing low paid work. Being fully engaged describes people who are either studying full time; working full time; or studying part time and working part time.

In 2009, almost two-fifths (38%) of young people (15–24 years of age) with disability were fully engaged. This compares with over half (56%) of young people without disability who were fully engaged. Young people with disability who were not fully engaged were either working part time (25%), studying part time (7%) or doing neither (68%).

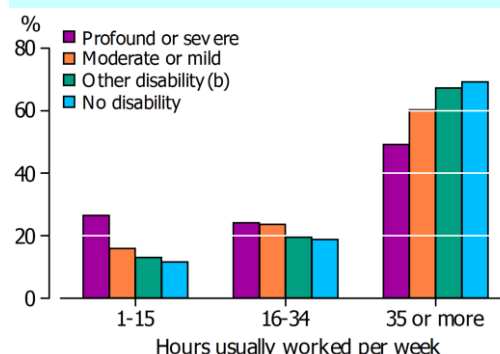
Australian workforce. Men with disability (55%) were more likely to be employed than women with disability (45%).

...hours worked

Generally, people with disability who were employed were more likely than people without disability to work part time (38% and 31% respectively). The number of hours usually worked by people with disability was associated with the severity and type of disability they had.

People with profound or severe disability who worked were more likely to work part time hours than those with less severe disability. Nevertheless, almost half (49%) of those with profound or severe disability who were working, worked full time.

Hours usually worked each week(a) by severity of disability



(a) People aged 15–64 years and living in households.

(b) Includes those who may not have a specific limitation or restriction.

Source: ABS [2009 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers](#)

Income support

A key role of the Australian Government in supporting people with disability is the provision of income support. Around 819,000 people with disability* in Australia received the Disability Support Pension (DSP) in June 2011.¹² Income and assets testing of the pension enable Disability Support Pension (DSP) recipients to earn an income while still receiving full-pension or part-pension.¹³

The number of people receiving the DSP is growing despite relative stability in the disability rate.¹⁴ This growth is partly due to changes in the eligibility criteria such as the relaxation in the number of hours recipients are able to work while being able to continue receipt of the payment.

The Productivity Commission has completed an inquiry into disability care and support in Australia. The outcomes of this inquiry have led the Australian Government to develop reforms to the DSP and establish a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).¹⁵

It is proposed that the NDIS will provide insurance cover for all Australians in the event of significant disability. This cover will provide long-term care and support.¹⁶ Suggested reforms to the DSP will allow recipients to work more hours than previously permitted.¹⁵

* Disability is defined as being unable to work for 2 years because of illness, injury or disability, or being permanently blind.

Among the five disability groups, psychological and intellectual disabilities have greater association with fewer working hours. More than a third (35%) of people with psychological disability who worked, usually worked no more than 15 hours, followed by people with intellectual disability (30%). In contrast, about two thirds of employed people with sensory or speech disability (66%) or physical disability (61%) worked full time.

...occupation and industry

Almost one fifth (19%) of working-age people with disability who were employed in 2009 worked as professionals, followed by clerical and administrative workers, and technicians and trade workers (both 15%). The distribution of people across different occupations is similar for people with and without disability. However, there was some variation of occupations according to the type of disability. For example, around one third (34%) of employed people with intellectual disability were working as labourers, such as cleaners, in 2009, while one-fifth (20%) of employed people with sensory or speech disability were in professional occupations, such as secondary school teachers.

Both people with and without disability had similar distributions across industry groups. Some industries had a higher than average (10%) disability prevalence rate, particularly

Agriculture, forestry and fishing (15%) and Transport, postal and warehousing (12%). This may be partly reflective of the older age profile of people in these industries.

People with disability who were working were more likely to run their own business (13%), and/or work from home (9%), than employed people without disability (10% and 6% respectively). Such situations may enhance the flexibility of working arrangements, making it easier for people with disability to participate in the labour force.

...income sources

Among working-age people with disability who were employed, the most commonly reported main source of cash income was wages or salary (77%), much higher than the next most common income sources, government pensions or allowances, and business income (both 9%).

Of people with disability who were employed, over one fifth (22%) received some form of government pension or allowance. This was nearly double that of people without disability who were employed and in receipt of a government pension or allowance (12%). People with disability who were working part time were more likely to receive a government pension or allowance (41%) than those working full time (10%). The main disability income support, The Disability Support Pension, can provide income to supplement earnings from work (see Income support box).

...assistance needed

Employers and disability employment service providers may need to make special arrangements to ensure that employees with disability have a suitable environment in which to work. In 2009, 12% of employed people with disability required some type of special work arrangement such as being provided with special equipment or being allocated different duties.

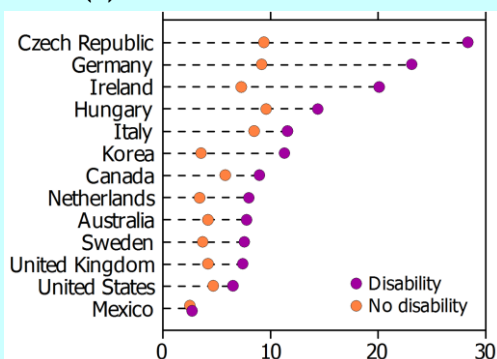
The type of disability influenced whether assistance was needed in the workplace and the kind of assistance required. Employed people with psychological or intellectual disability were likely to require special working arrangements, with nearly one fifth (18% and 16% respectively) receiving assistance, such as a support person to assist or train them on the job. People with sensory or speech disability who were working were less likely to require special working arrangements, with one tenth (9%) receiving special working arrangements. For this disability group, assistance provided took the form of special equipment (48%).



International Comparisons

In the mid-2000s, of selected OECD countries, the Czech Republic had the highest unemployment rate for people with disability whilst Mexico had the lowest. Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom all had relatively similar rates of unemployment for people with disability.

Unemployment rates by disability status(a) – 2003-2006



(a) People aged 15-64 years. Source: OECD Sickness, Disability and Work (Keeping on Track in the Economic Downturn) Background Paper, 2009. www.oecd.org. All data are for 2005 except Australia (2003), Mexico and United States (2004), and Canada and United Kingdom (2006). Note that the disability definitions vary across countries.

The severity of disability also influenced whether a person required any special work arrangements, with 10% of employed people with moderate or mild disability needing special work arrangements compared with one fifth (20%) of those with profound or severe disability.

Unemployment

As well as being less likely to participate in the labour force, people with disability who do participate are more likely to be unemployed. The unemployment rate for 15-64 year olds with disability in 2009 was 7.8%, compared with 5.1% for people without disability. The unemployment rates of men and women with disability were not significantly different (8.2% and 7.3% respectively).

As with the labour force participation rate, the unemployment rate varied between disability groups. People with sensory or speech disability had the lowest unemployment rate (7.0%). Conversely, people living with psychological or intellectual disability had the highest unemployment rates (19% and 16% respectively).

Barriers and incentives to work

In 2009 according to the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, for people with disability aged 15-64 years seeking work, the most commonly reported main difficulty in finding work was their own ill health or disability (35%). This was followed by their lack of the necessary skills or education (13%).

Similarly, people with disability who were not in the labour force reported long-term illness or injury as the main reason for not wanting to work (52%) or not looking for work (35%).

The 2008-09 ABS Survey of Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation indicated that, for people who assessed their health as poor, the most commonly reported incentives to enable work included being able to maintain welfare benefits (39%), less paperwork from government agencies (31%) and being able to sit down (26%).¹⁷

Under the National Disability Agreement (NDA) people with disability have access to increased and improved services to assist them into work.⁴ Two types of specialist agencies exist to support people with disability to find and maintain work:

- *Australian Disability Enterprises* (around 20,000 people with disability employed in Australian Disability Enterprises)
- *The Disability Employment Services* (employment assistance for job seekers with disability)¹⁸

The latest progress report of the NDA indicates that there was an 83% increase in the number of people using disability employment services from 64,800 in 2004-05 to 118,800 in 2009-10.¹⁹

An example of overcoming the barriers...

Jo* had a strong interest in getting work, but had been struggling with anxiety issues since recently finishing Year 12. Jo's feelings of anxiety meant she found it hard to talk to people; she was reluctant to leave home and worried about how she would manage job interviews and employment. After a referral to a disability employment services provider, CRS Australia, Jo received guidance on job options, interview techniques and disability counselling and support. Jo was interested in jobs in retail and when an option for a job at a supermarket came up, she was keen but anxious. The employment service helped Jo prepare for work at the supermarket, working with her psychologist. After an initial work experience placement, Jo was offered a paid position and has now worked there for six months.

'I feel good! It is a great environment to work in and I enjoy the social aspect. Work experience helped a lot', said Jo.

* Name changed for confidentiality.

Source: CRS Australia, 2012, www.crsaustalia.gov.au.

People not in the labour force

In 2009, of people aged 15–64 years with disability, 46% were not in the labour force, which is significantly higher than people with no disability (17%). Of the nearly one million people with disability who were not in the labour force, more than half were women (57%). In comparison, over two thirds (67%) of people without disability who were not in the labour force were women. Nearly half (46%) of people with disability who were not in the labour force were aged 55–64 years, and of those of this age, 71% were permanently unable to work.

Having long-term illness or disability was reported by more than half (52%) of those not in the labour force as the main reason for not wanting, or not being able to work. Other main reasons for not being in the labour force were being satisfied with their current situation (no need to work for now) (18%), or being permanently retired (9%). Of people with disability who were not in the labour force, some found it difficult to find a job due to their illness or disability (41%) or because they lacked the necessary skills or experience (8%).

Looking ahead

The Australian Government, through the *National Disability Agreement*, provides support to people with disability who wish to enter employment.⁴ Under the *National Disability Strategy 2010–2020*, federal, and state and territory governments are making a concerted effort to improve and increase employment services for people with disability.⁵ In addition, planned reforms to the Australian welfare support system, including the National Disability Insurance Scheme, aim to create increased opportunities for people with disability to enter and maintain employment.¹⁴ Increases in labour force participation may improve both financial security and personal wellbeing for people with disability.

Endnotes

- 1 Ross CE and Mirowsky J. 1995 'Does Employment Affect Health?' *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour* 36(3): 230–243.
- 2 The [Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#) , viewed 31 October 2011 <[www.comlaw.gov.au](#)>.
- 3 Productivity Commission 2004 [Review of the Disability Discrimination Act 2 1992](#) , viewed 31 October 2011 <[www.pc.gov.au](#)>.
- 4 Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2009 [The National Disability Agreement 2009](#) , viewed 24 October 2011 <[www.fahcsia.gov.au](#)>.
- 5 Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2011 [The National Disability Strategy 2010-2020](#) , viewed 24 October 2011 <[www.fahcsia.gov.au](#)>.
- 6 ABS 2007–08 National Health Survey, data available on request <[www.abs.gov.au](#)>.
- 7 Australian Health Ministers 2009 [Fourth National Mental Health Plan](#) , viewed 24 October 2011 <[www.health.gov.au](#)>.
- 8 Thornicroft, G. 2009 *Shunned: Discrimination against people with mental illness*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- 9 ABS 2010 Older people and the labour market, Australian Social Trends, cat. no. 4102.0 <[www.abs.gov.au](#)>.
- 10 ABS 2011 Fifty years of Labour Force: Now and then, Australian Social Trends, cat. no. 4102.0 <[www.abs.gov.au](#)>.
- 11 Waghorn G and Lloyd C. 2005 The Employment of People with Mental Illness: Discussion paper for the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia <[www.mifa.org.au](#)>.
- 12 Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). [FaHCSIA Facts and Figures – October 2011](#). <[www.fahcsia.gov.au](#)>.
- 13 Centrelink 2012 [Disability Support Pension \(DSP\)](#) <[www.centrelink.gov.au](#)> [Accessed 12 March 2012].
- 14 Assistant Commissioner Ralph Lattimore, Productivity Commission, DEEWR Seminar: Disability Care and Support, 9 November 2011.
- 15 Productivity Commission. 2011 [Disability Care and Support: Inquiry Report](#) viewed 11 November 2011 <[www.pc.gov.au](#)>.
- 16 [National Disability Insurance Scheme](#) 2012, viewed 18 January 2012 <[www.ndis.gov.au](#)>.
- 17 ABS 2009 Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation, Australia, Jul 2008 to Jun 2009, cat. no. 6239.0 <[www.abs.gov.au](#)>.
- 18 Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2011 [Employment for People with Disability](#) viewed 24 October 2011 <[www.fahcsia.gov.au](#)>.
- 19 AIHW 2011 [Disability support services 2009-10: report on services provided under the National Disability Agreement](#) cat. no. DIS 59, viewed 24 October 2011 <[www.aihw.gov.au](#)>.

FOR MORE INFORMATION . . .

<i>INTERNET</i>	www.abs.gov.au the ABS website is the best place for data from our publications and information about the ABS.
<i>LIBRARY</i>	A range of ABS publications are available from public and tertiary libraries Australia wide. Contact your nearest library to determine whether it has the ABS statistics you require, or visit our website for a list of libraries.

INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICE

Our consultants can help you access the full range of information published by the ABS that is available free of charge from our website, or purchase a hard copy publication. Information tailored to your needs can also be requested as a 'user pays' service. Specialists are on hand to help you with analytical or methodological advice.

<i>PHONE</i>	1300 135 070
<i>EMAIL</i>	client.services@abs.gov.au
<i>FAX</i>	1300 135 211
<i>POST</i>	Client Services, ABS, GPO Box 796, Sydney NSW 2001

FREE ACCESS TO STATISTICS

All statistics on the ABS website can be downloaded free of charge.

<i>WEB ADDRESS</i>	www.abs.gov.au
--------------------	--