

CHILDREN AND YOUTH NEWS

WELCOME

Welcome to the third edition of *Children and Youth News*, the newsletter of the ABS National Children and Youth Statistics Unit (NCYSU). *Children and Youth News* is designed to highlight developments in children and youth related statistics and features articles analysing data on topical children and youth issues. In addition, other information of likely interest to researchers and policy makers is presented. Interested readers are also invited to visit the [Children and Youth Statistics Theme page](#) on the ABS website for links to relevant ABS datasets and other web sites.

LATEST FINDINGS

SOCIAL TRENDS AMONG CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Australian Social Trends, 2004 is the 11th edition of an annual series that presents information on contemporary social issues and areas of public policy concern. By drawing on a wide range of ABS statistics, and statistics from other official sources, *Australian Social Trends* describes aspects of Australian society, and how these are changing over time. The latest edition includes a variety of articles focussing on issues that impact children and youth, including:

Attending preschool – looks at children who attend preschool and how participation rates vary according to individual and family characteristics. For a summary of this article see below.

Families with no employed parent – presents recent trends on the characteristics, social wellbeing and financial stress of families (with children aged under 15 years) with no employed resident parent.

Formal child care – looks at children under 12 years using formal child care, changes in formal child care availability and use since the early 1990s, and parents' preferences for additional care.

Living with asthma – examines the impact of asthma on children and adults, including asthma prevalence, management, medication, hospitalisation and quality of life issues.

Young people in employment – examines the labour force experiences of 15-24 year olds, including changes in full-time and part-time employment among young people, the combination of work with study, underemployment, industry, job mobility and earnings, and highlights changes that have occurred since 1983.

Other articles that may be of interest include: [Scenarios for Australia's ageing population](#), [Higher education graduates in the labour market](#), [Homelessness](#) and [Paying for university education](#).

ATTENDING PRESCHOOL

In 2001, just over half of all five year olds (57%) were at school with about a third (34%) attending preschool. While in some states and territories children can commence preschool before they turn four, participation rates for three year olds are much lower than those for four year olds (24% compared with 56% for four year olds in 2001). The preschool participation rate of four year olds in 2001 (56%) was similar to the rate in 1991 (58%).

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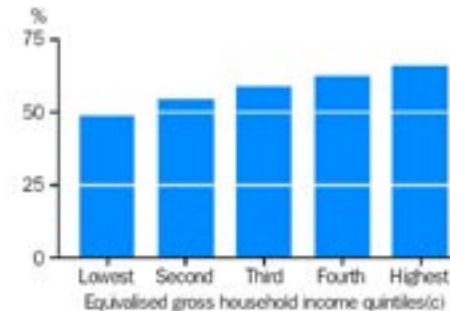
This article uses data from the 2001 Census of Population and Housing to calculate preschool participation rates. In this article **preschool** refers to the year which is two years prior to Year 1. Preschools generally cater for children aged 3-5 years and are usually open only during school terms. As preschool is generally aimed at children aged four years, this article focuses on that age group i.e. four year olds. The **preschool participation rate** is the number of four year olds who were reported as attending preschool expressed as a percentage of the total number of children aged four years.

Risk factors in early childhood are often cumulative and many persist or multiply as a child grows older.¹ One of these risk factors is socioeconomic disadvantage. Household income, parental employment and parental educational attainment can be used as measures of a child's socioeconomic status. Children's preschool participation tends to increase in line with household income. In 2001, preschool participation rates ranged from 49% of four year olds from households in the lowest income quintile to 66% of those from households in the highest income quintile.

Photo courtesy of Kalamunda Christian School.



Preschool participation rate(a)(b), by household income, 2001



(a) Children aged four years.

(b) People who stated they attended school but did not indicate the type were excluded prior to calculation of percentages.

(c) See Australian Social Trends 2004, [Economic resources: definitions](#).

Source: ABS 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

As parental employment (and income) increases, preschool becomes more affordable and, in addition to its educational role, may also become increasingly useful as a form of child care. In 2001, the four year olds least likely to attend preschool (with a participation rate of 47%) were those in couple families where neither parent was employed, and those from one-parent families in which the parent was not employed (48%). Participation rates were higher for four year olds from families with one parent employed (54% for one-parent families and 58% for couple families). The lower rate for one-parent families may reflect relative affordability as well as demand. Children aged four years in couple families with both parents employed were the most likely to attend preschool (61%).



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A low level of parental education has been identified as being associated with lower preschool participation.¹ In 2001, participation of four year olds at preschool was highest when a parent had a Bachelor degree or above (65%), decreasing to 49% for those whose parent(s) left school before Year 12.

This article is abridged from the article [Attending Preschool](#) in *Australian Social Trends, 2004* (cat. no. 4102.0).

¹ Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing 2003, *Towards the development for a national agenda for early childhood*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

CHILDREN LIVING WITHOUT AN EMPLOYED PARENT

Children living without an employed parent are seen by many as an at-risk group. In particular, not having an employed parent is regarded as an indicator of risk of socioeconomic disadvantage for children (and families). Children living in these circumstances for extended periods may not have a role model of employment to follow and may be more likely to have outcomes such as welfare dependency and diminished economic success in the long term. However, in some cases, such as when the parent chooses to be without a job to care for children, there may also be positive effects for children living without an employed parent.

There are a range of issues to consider, and complexities, in creating an appropriate measure to indicate the number of children in this at-risk group. These include selecting a unit of analysis (household, full family or parent(s) and child), a measure of joblessness (unemployment or non-employment),

and defining what is meant by 'children' (0-14 years or some other definition). Each of the potential measurement choices has advantages and disadvantages and may under- or over-state the number of children at risk. The measure preferred by the ABS is children living without an employed parent.

There are several ABS surveys that provide information on children living without an employed parent, including the Survey of Income and Housing Costs (SIHC), Census of Population and Housing, Labour Force Survey and the General Social Survey. The SIHC is used as the basis of the analysis below – it is conducted more frequently than the Census of Population and Housing and, unlike the Labour Force Survey and General Social Survey, is designed to produce reliable estimates of numbers of children.

In 2000-01 there were 678 100 (17%) children living without an employed parent. One parent families are the main group of families without an employed parent. Over half of all children living with one parent (58%) and 7% of all children living with two parents were living without an employed parent. In one parent families, the age of the youngest child appears to be a factor in whether or not the parent is employed. In one parent families where the youngest child was under five years of age, 79% of children were living without an employed parent. This compares with 46% of children in one parent families where the youngest child was aged 5-14 years. In contrast, in two parent families the proportion of children without an employed parent was similar when the youngest child was under five years (8%) or 5-14 years (7%).

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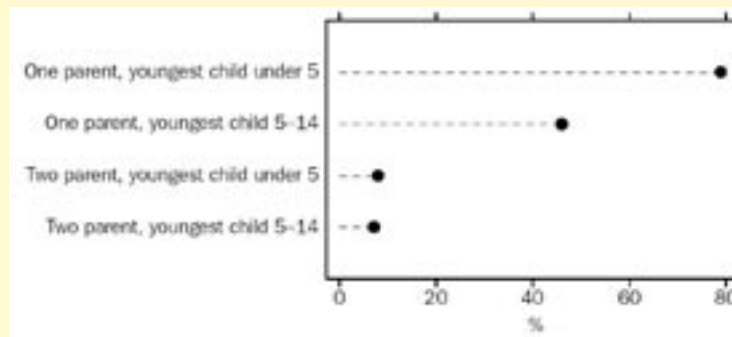
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Children living without an employed parent(a), by family type and age of youngest child, 2000-01



(a) Refers to the labour force status of parent(s) living in the same household as the children at the time of interview.

Source: Data available on request, Survey of Income and Housing Costs.

Further details on this topic are available in two recently produced articles. The article in [Australian Labour Market Statistics](#) (cat. no. 6105.0) provides a full examination of the concepts and issues along with recent trends, while the article produced in [Australian Social Trends](#) (cat. no. 4102.0) describes the characteristics of families with no employed parent, their social wellbeing and financial stress.

RECENT RELEASES

[National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey, 2002](#)
(cat. no. 4714.0) Released: June 2004

[Household and Family Projections, Australia, 2001 to 2006](#)
(cat. no. 3236.0) Released: June 2004

[Australian Social Trends, 2004](#)

(cat. no. 4102.0) Released: June 2004

[Recorded Crime - Victims, Australia, 2003](#)

(cat. no. 4510.0) Released: May 2004

[Feature Article: Children Aged 0-8 years in Victoria, March 2004](#)

(cat. no. 1367.2) Released: May 2004

[Diabetes In Australia: A Snapshot](#)

(cat. no. 4820.0.55.001) Released April 2004

[Asthma in Australia: A Snapshot](#)

(cat. no. 4819.0.55.001) Released April 2004

To find out more about these and other ABS publications, see the [ABS Catalogue](#).

CLICK
HERE

CHILDREN AND YOUTH THEME PAGE

A Children and Youth Statistics Theme Page on the ABS website contains relevant information from the ABS and other organisations. This page highlights the type and range of data available for analysis of children and youth issues and is updated to highlight new data releases as they become available.

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UPCOMING RELEASES

Sexual Assault in Australia: A Statistical Overview, 2004
(cat. no. 4523.0) - to be released August 2004

Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia, 2003
(cat. no. 4430.0) - to be released September 2004

Family Characteristics Survey, Australia, 2003
(cat. no. 4442.0) - to be released September 2004

NON-ABS RESEARCH

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD HEALTH SURVEY (WAACHS)

The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: *The Health of Aboriginal Children and Young People*, was launched on June 3, 2004. It is the first of a proposed five volumes of results to flow from this groundbreaking work in the field of Aboriginal child health and development research.

This large-scale investigation into the health and development of 5,289 Western Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was undertaken by the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research (the Institute) in conjunction with the Kulunga Research Network. This unprecedented sample represents over one-in-six WA Aboriginal children and gives researchers the strongest base

yet with which to estimate the levels of key health and development indicators for this population. The survey was designed to build a store of knowledge from which preventive strategies can be developed to promote and maintain the healthy development and the social, emotional, academic, and vocational wellbeing of Aboriginal children.

The Institute has previously surveyed the health of all Western Australian children in 1993. Recognising that this survey did not have a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the Institute met with several key Aboriginal leaders and representatives from across the state to seek support and endorsement to conduct a survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0 to 17 years. The survey was subsequently endorsed and is the first to gather comprehensive health, developmental and educational information on a population-based sample of Aboriginal children in their families and communities.

All phases of the survey, including its development, design, and implementation, were under the direction of the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey Steering Committee. The Committee comprises senior Aboriginal officers from a cross section of agencies and settings.

It is envisaged that the findings will have wide-ranging significance at both the WA and national level. Indeed some of the data are going to be utilised to help generate a set of synthetic estimates of key indicators for several other states as part of a project supported by the Rio-Tinto Aboriginal Foundation.

For further information, see the [Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey](#).

CONTACT US

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