



Australian Government

Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Family transitions in their first five years: How children born between 1996-2001 compare with earlier cohorts

Christopher Zoppou, Jason Brandrup
and Ibolya Losoncz

The opinions, comments and/or analysis expressed in this presentation are those of the author/s and do not necessarily represent the views of the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs or the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and cannot be taken in any way as expressions of Government policy

Improving the lives of Australians



Australian Government

Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs



Introduction

- A family transition can occur either through a relationship formation or a relationship breakdown
- The impact of these family transitions on children is a subject of vigorous debate because family instability has generally increased over time
- However, since 2001, divorce rates have come down from 2.9 divorces per 1,000 population to 2.5 divorces



Introduction (cont.)

- Crude divorce rate (ABS 2006)





Australian Government

Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs



Introduction (cont.)

- Children growing up in stepfamilies and lone parent families tend to rate poorly on a range of indicators
- Children who have experienced multiple family transitions are at particularly high risk for adverse outcomes (Pryor and Rodgers 2001)
- However, little data has been presented on the frequency of transitions for Australian children
- A notable exception is a study by de Vaus and Gray (2004)



Australian Government

Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs



Our study

- Adds to the evidence base established by de Vaus and Gray (2004) by analysing the experiences of a more recent birth cohort (1996-2001)
- Uses the longitudinal capacity of the HILDA Survey
- Explores the most recent trends by constraining analysis to the first five years of childhood
- Compares the family transitions experienced by the 1996-2001 cohort against the transitions encountered by earlier cohorts



Australian Government

Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs



Data

- The HILDA survey is a longitudinal survey that can be used to gain insights into the dynamics of family relationships, parenting, housing arrangements, income, workforce participation, health and well-being of the Australian population
- N = 8,948 children (balanced panel)
- N = ~12,000 children (unbalanced panel)



Australian Government

Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

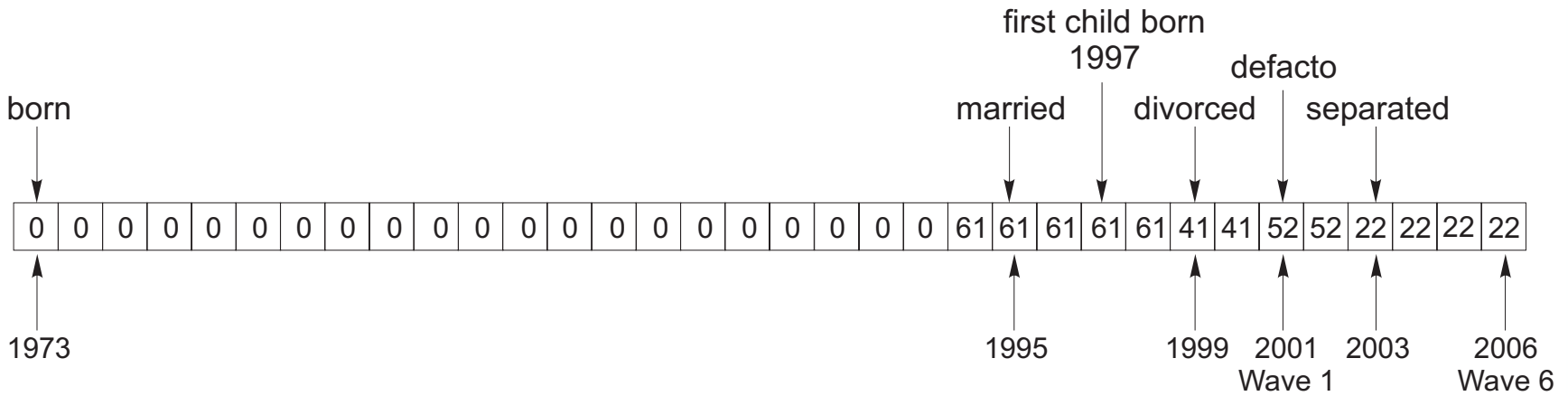


Methodology

- Methodology extends the general approach used by de Vaus and Gray (2004)
- For each mother, a time-line of their relationships was established
- Mothers' responses to their children's birth dates were combined with the mothers' relationship time-lines, enabling the family types and transitions each child experienced throughout their childhood to be determined



Methodology (cont.)





Australian Government

Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs



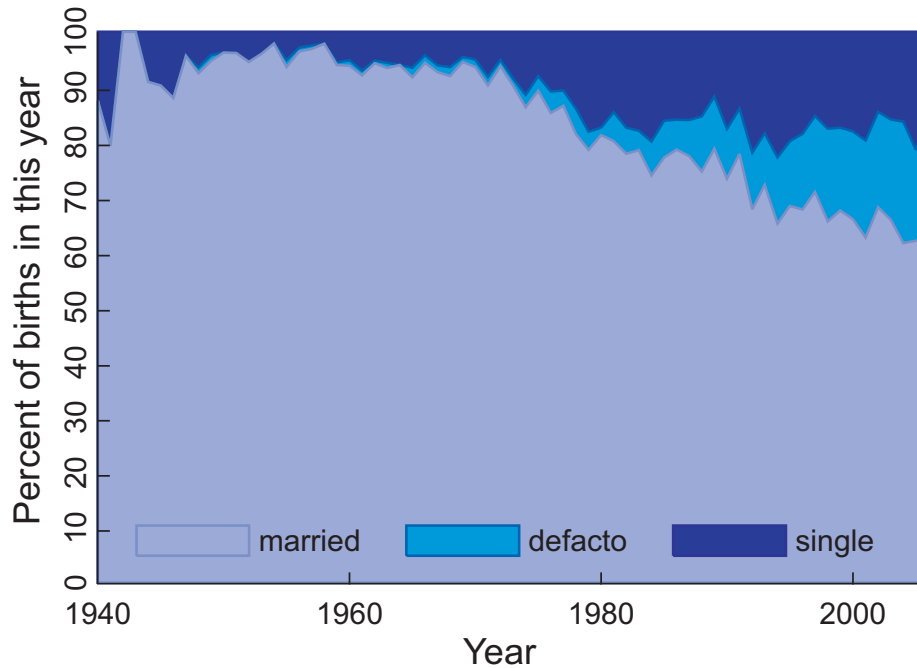
Methodology - limitations

- HILDA Survey does not capture all de facto relationships
- Relationships lasting less than one year are excluded from the analysis
- Use of a balanced panel leads to bias as people who more frequently change family type are more likely to drop out of the survey



Results

- Family types that children were born into





Results (cont.)

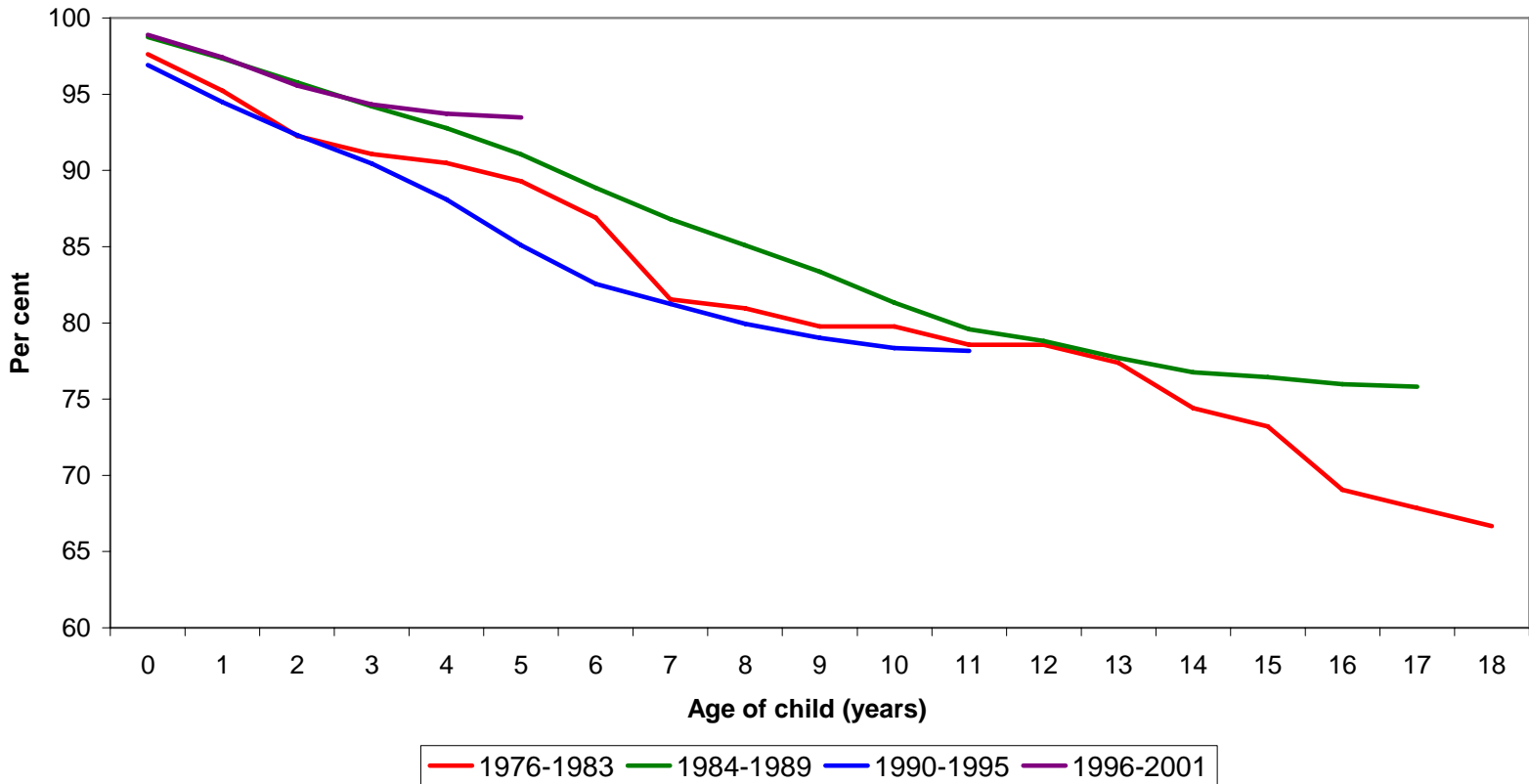
Percentages of children in various cohorts who experienced family transitions in their first five years

Cohort	Number of family transitions			
	0	1	2	3 or more
1976-1983 (n=168)	91.1	7.1	1.8	0.0
1984-1989 (n=637)	92.5	6.1	1.4	0.0
1990-1995 (n=1,067)	88.2	8.7	3.0	0.1
1996-2001 (n=812)	94.0	5.5	0.5	0.0

Source: Primary analysis of HILDA Survey, Release 6.0.



Percentage of children by age who had not experienced a family transition since birth, by cohort



Source: Primary analysis of HILDA Survey, Release 6.0.



Australian Government

Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Supporting evidence from divorces trends

- Crude divorce rate (ABS 2006)





Conclusions

- Limitations of our methodology will have lead to an underestimate of the number of transitions
- The 1996-2001 birth cohort may have experienced the highest level of family stability in their first five years that any cohort of children in recent decades had experienced
- The 1990-1995 cohort may have experienced a low level of family stability that compares poorly against the cohorts of children that preceded or followed it



Australian Government

Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs



Policy implications

- A small but significant number of children experience family transitions in their first five years
- Evidence supports policies that assist families through sometimes difficult life changes
- The reasons why the incidence of family transitions changes significantly over time need to be better understood



Australian Government

Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs



Contacts

- Chris Zoppou, Assistant Section Manager, Policy Modelling, FaHCSIA. Ph: (02) 6244 6619, e-mail christopher.zoppou@fahcsia.gov.au
- Jason Brandrup, Assistant Section Manager, Research Projects, FaHCSIA. Ph: (02) 6244 5384, e-mail jason.brandrup@fahcsia.gov.au