Breaking up is hard to do?
Relationship dynamics and their impacts on the wellbeing of children and their parents

A paper prepared by
Alan Hayes, Lixia Qu and Ruth Weston

Presented on 8 November 2012 by
Alan Hayes AM
Director, Australian Institute of Family Studies
at the
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The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and may not reflect the views of the Australian Institute of Family Studies or the Australian Government.
Plan of this presentation

Background
- The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)
- Some broad family trends apparent over the last 30 years

Parental separation
- A key area of AIFS’s focus since its inception
  - Representing an example of reciprocal relationships between:
    - family functioning and wellbeing trends
    - other social trends (e.g.: changing attitudes re roles of fathers; child protection issues etc.)
    - changes in policy and practice
    - family-related research
1. The Australian Institute of Family Studies
About the Institute

- Melbourne-based Australian Government Statutory Authority
- Established 1980
  - under the *Australian Family Law Act 1975*
- Currently located within the Portfolio of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)
- Key focus: Families and the factors that impact on their wellbeing
- Research Directions 2012–2015
  - *Australian families in a rapidly changing world*
Research Directions 2012–2015: Australian families in a rapidly changing world
Evidence-informed policy

Long-term challenges, such as building family resilience, demand a rigorous, evidence-based approach to public policy.
Policy-relevant research

- “presents what has been, what is, and what is likely to be, in a specific social context, in order to inform policy decisions.”

(Wolf, 2004, p. 68)
Policy relevant research (contd)

- But—may not always be available
  - “… needs to be the right evidence; it needs to occur at the right time and be seen by the right people.”
  
  (Banks, 2009, p. 8)

- And—may not always be timely
  - “Researchers aim for a detailed understanding of an issue—policy-makers/practitioners often need information quickly and simply to take action.”
  
  (Lewig, Arney, & Scott, 2006)
Data collection often collaborative

Examples = surveys that form the basis of much of this presentation

- **LSAC:**
  - Conducted in partnership between FaHCSIA, AIFS and ABS.
    - The findings and views of authors using these data are those of the authors and should not be attributed to FaHCSIA, AIFS or the ABS.

- **HILDA:**
  - Initiated and funded by FaHCSIA and now managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Melbourne Institute).
    - AIFS & ACER also played major roles in developing the study
    - Again, the findings and views of authors using these data are those of the authors and should not be attributed to FaHCSIA or the Melbourne Institute.

- **LSSF**
  - Waves 1 & 2: funded by AGD & FaHCSIA
  - Wave 3: funded by AGD
    - Developed by AIFS in collaboration with funding bodies and managed by AIFS
2. Selected family-related trends
Number of marriages registered and crude marriage rate, 1901–2010

Sources: ABS (various years), Marriages and Divorces Australia, Catalogue No. 3310.0; ABS (various years), Marriages Australia, Catalogue no. 3306.0.55.001
Cohabiting couples as % of all couples

“Couples” = living together (registered or de facto marriage)
Outcomes of cohabitation by 5 years

Source: 3 datasets combined: HILDA; Negotiating the Life Course, (ANU); and the Australian Life Course Survey (AIFS)
## Change in family from from Wave 1 to Wave 4

**K cohort living with both biological parents in Wave 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two biological parents</td>
<td>88.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One biological parent</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step-parent family</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sole mother</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sole father</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3230</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number of divorces and crude divorce rate, 1901-2010

Sources: ABS (various years), *Marriages and Divorces Australia*, Catalogue No. 3310.0; ABS (various years), *Divorces Australia*, Catalogue no. 3307.0.55.001
Divorces involving children
Family type, 1976-2011

Sources: ABS (2001) Yearbook Australia 2001 (Cat. No. 1301.0) 2006 and 2011 Censuses
3. Impacts of parental separation
How does parental separation affect children?
General research findings
Research: Impact of parental separation/divorce on children

- Higher risk of poor progress across a range of socio-emotional and academic measures
- As adults, higher risk of:
  - low educational attainment
  - less close relationship with parents
  - seeing own marriages end in divorce

- But risks are modest
- What happens before (as well as after) separation are key factors in shaping outcomes
  - "After" includes possibility of multiple transitions
  - "What happens" includes inter-parental relationship dynamics, impacts on the parents' sense of wellbeing, and on their parenting
- But far less research on parents' sense of wellbeing and parenting than on children's wellbeing
Research: Impact of parental separation/divorce on children

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Research: Impact of parental separation/divorce on children

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- As adults, higher risk of:
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  - less close relationship with parents
  - seeing own marriages end in divorce
- But risks are modest
- What happens before (as well as after) separation are key factors in shaping outcomes
  - “After” includes possibility of multiple transitions
- “What happens” also includes inter-parental relationship dynamics, impacts on the parents sense of wellbeing, and on their parenting
  - But far less research on parents’ sense of wellbeing and parenting than on children’s wellbeing
Among parents who had been separated for an average of 15 months, what factors help explain their:

- Views about quality of their relationship with their child’s other parent
- Parents’ satisfaction with life as a whole

Any “time-healing” effect during this period?
The Longitudinal Study of Separated Families (LSSF)
Longitudinal Study of Separated Families (LSSF)

• Wave 1:
  • 10,002 parents who had separated after July 2006
  • In Child Support Agency 2007 database
  • Telephone interviews: August – December 2008

• Wave 2:
  • 7,031 parents re-interviewed 12 months later
    (September & October 2009)
Key characteristics of parents and children

Wave 1

- 4,983 fathers & 5,019 mothers
  - 1,885 were former couples
- Mean duration of separation (15 months)
- If 2+ children, questions focused on one child
- Child’s age:
  - 0–4 years: 58%
  - 5–11 years: 30%
  - 12–17 years: 12%
Key characteristics of parents and children

Wave 2:

- Analyses based on 3,412 fathers & 3,619 mothers (including 1,070 former couples)
  - An additional 254 parents had reconciled &
  - 49 were negotiating this (most questions were skipped for these parents)

- Child’s age:
  - Under 5 years: 37%
  - 5–11 years: 41%
  - 12+ years: 12%
Wave 1: Relevant questions asked of parents

Pre-separation / separation
- Period lived together
- Any family violence before/during separation?*
- Were there any mental health problems or substance abuse or other addiction issues in the pre-separation relationship?
- Perceived role of each parent in separation decision

Family violence questions:
- Had other parent abused respondent emotionally before or during separation? (10 questions)
- Had other parent hurt respondent physically before separation?
Wave 1: Relevant questions asked of parents (continued)

Pre-separation / separation
• Period lived together
• Any family violence before/during separation?
• Were there any mental health problems or substance abuse or other addiction issues in the pre-separation relationship?
• Perceived role of each parent in separation decision

At Wave 1
• Duration of separation
• Care-time arrangements
• Re-partnering
• Any perceived safety issues for child or self regarding ongoing contact with other parent
Wave 1: Relevant questions asked of parents (continued)

Pre-separation / separation
- Period lived together
- Any family violence before/during separation?
- Were there any mental health problems or substance abuse or other addiction issues in the pre-separation relationship?
- Perceived role of each parent in separation decision

At Wave 1
- Duration of separation
- Care-time arrangements
- Re-partnering
- Any perceived safety issues for child or self regarding ongoing contact with other parent

- Perceived quality of inter-parental wellbeing
- Satisfaction with life as a whole
Pre-separation / separation
Circumstances & dynamics
LSSF Wave 1 (2008)
Wave 1: Period lived together before separation, fathers & mothers

Fathers
- 15+ years: 26
- 10-14 years: 31
- 4-9 years: 22
- 0-3 years: 21
Total: 100

Mothers
- 15+ years: 30
- 10-14 years: 29
- 4-9 years: 21
- 0-3 years: 20
Total: 100

57% of fathers and 59% of mothers have been living together for 15+ years.
Wave 1: History of family violence
Did other parent physically hurt or emotionally abuse respondent?

Fathers
- Neither: 17
- Emotional abuse alone: 36
- Physical hurt: 47

Mothers
- Neither: 35
- Emotional abuse alone: 39
- Physical hurt: 26

53% for Fathers and 65% for Mothers.
Wave 1: Any mental health problems/ substance abuse / addiction issues in pre-separation relationship?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fathers (%)</th>
<th>Mothers (%)</th>
<th>All (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>57.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wave 1: Perceived role in separation decision
Whose decision was it to end the relationship?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fathers</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mostly mine</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly other parent's</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wave 1: Perceived role in separation decision
Whose decision was it to end the relationship?

![Bar graph showing the perceived role in separation decision by parents.](image-url)
“Current” circumstances & dynamics
LSSF Wave 1 (2008)
## Wave 1: Duration of separation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fathers</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 12 months</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–23 months</td>
<td>74.8</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>76.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24+ months*</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Maximum = 26 months
Wave 1: Care-time arrangements

- **Fathers**
  - 66-100% nights: 63
  - 35-65% (shared time): 22
  - Father never sees: 8

- **Mothers**
  - 66-100% nights: 72
  - Father never sees: 13

Legend:
- Mother never sees
- Father: 66-100% nights
- 35-65% (shared time)
- Mother: 66-100%
- Father never sees
Wave 1: Respondents’ current relationship status

- Fathers:
  - Living w. partner: 14
  - Seeing someone: 13
  - Single: 73

- Mothers:
  - Living w. partner: 6
  - Seeing someone: 10
  - Single: 84
Wave 1: Is **father** living with partner?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fathers</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Institute of Family Studies
Wave 1: Is mother living with partner?

- Fathers:
  - Don't know: 21
  - No: 62
  - Yes: 17

- Mothers:
  - Don't know: 6
  - No: 94
  - Yes: 6

Australian Government
Australian Institute of Family Studies
Wave 1: Any safety concerns for self and/or as result of ongoing contact with other parent?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fathers</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self alone</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child alone</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both self &amp; child</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Fathers: 17% (12/72) of fathers reported safety concerns for self or child alone.
- Mothers: 21% (9/42) of mothers reported safety concerns for self or child alone.

Australian Government
Australian Institute of Family Studies
Perceived quality of inter-parental relationship
LSSF Wave 1 (2008)
Perceived quality of relationship with other parent, fathers & mothers

LSSF Wave 1 (2008)
Satisfaction with life as a whole
LSSF Wave 1 (2008)
Ratings of life satisfaction, fathers & mothers

**LSSF Wave 1 (2008)**

![Bar chart showing life satisfaction ratings for fathers and mothers in LSSF Wave 1 (2008). The chart includes data from LSSF and HILDA surveys.](image)

- **Fathers**
  - Low (0-4): 18%
  - Moderate (5-7): 51%
  - High (8-10): 30%

- **Mothers**
  - Low (0-4): 9%
  - Moderate (5-7): 49%
  - High (8-10): 42%
Ratings of life satisfaction, fathers & mothers


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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fathers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (0-4)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate (5-7)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (8-10)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (0-4)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate (5-7)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (8-10)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
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</table>

LSSF W1 and HILDA
Summary: Wave 1 Circumstances/dynamics

- Most had very young children
- Nearly 60% had lived with other parent for <10 yrs
- 53–65% reported history of family violence (especially emotional abuse)
- Substantial numbers believed that mental health problems/addictions etc. = issues in relationship before separation
- Mothers provided less rosy pre-separation picture than fathers
- Mothers most commonly seen as initiating decision to separate
  - mothers more likely to state this than fathers
Summary: Wave 1 Circumstances/dynamics (continued)

- 1 in 5 fathers reported shared care time (smaller % of mothers did so)
- Some confusion re whether other parent had re-partnered
- Roughly 1 in 5 reported safety concerns (self/child) re ongoing contact
- Most reported favourable inter-parental relationships at Wave 1
  - Roughly 1 in 5 reported clearly negative relationships
- Mothers more content with life than fathers at Wave 1
  - But less content than general population of parents
Quality of inter-parental relationship
LSSF Wave 1 (2008)
Examples of links with earlier & current dynamics
Perceived inter-parental relationship quality by experience of family violence before/during separation, fathers and mothers

![Bar chart showing perceived inter-parental relationship quality]

- **Fathers**
  - Physical hurt: 40%
  - Emotional abuse alone: 23%
  - None: 12%

- **Mothers**
  - Physical hurt: 39%
  - Emotional abuse alone: 22%
  - None: 12%

Legend:
- Friendly/cooperative
- Distant
- Lots of conflict/fearful
Perceived inter-parental relationship quality by reports of any mental health / addiction issues in pre-separation relationship, fathers & mothers

Note: Issues include mental health, substance abuse, gambling, etc. LSSF W1
Perceived inter-parental relationship by perceived role in separation decision, fathers & mothers

LSSF W1
Perceived inter-parental relationship quality by care-time arrangements, fathers and mothers

LSSF W1
Care time where children spend 35-65% nights with each parent is referred to as shared time.
* Results not shown due to a small number
Perceived inter-parental relationship by re-partnering of each parent, fathers & mothers

LSSF W1

“Re-partnering = living together;
Excludes those who said they did not know other parent’s status
Perceived inter-parental relationship by whether has any safety concerns for child/self re ongoing contact with other parent, fathers & mothers.
Factors predicting perceived inter-parental relationship quality

Some of these factors were highly inter-related

Example:
% who said mental health problems/addictions etc. were issues in relationship before separation was:
- highest if had been physically hurt
  - 64% of such fathers & 75% of such mothers reported these “issues”
- lowest if reported no physical hurt or emotional
  - 17–22% of such parents reported these “issues”

Multivariate analysis therefore conducted to control for effects of each factor*
(Multinomial regression)

* Respondents’ social marital status before separation (married; cohabiting), current educational attainment level, & employment status were also included in the model.
Putting it all together:
Factors predicting perceived inter-parental relationship quality

Although most parents described inter-parental relationship favourably,
- they were less likely to do so where:
  - There was a history of family violence (very strong link)
  - Parents said mental health problems /addictions etc. were issues in pre-separation relationship
  - Had been together for longer than shorter time
  - Decision to separate not a joint one (fathers) or made by him (mothers)
  - Father was not seeing the child at all
  - Respondent had re-partnered
  - Other parent had either re-partnered or his/her status not known
  - Current safety concerns (very strong link)
Putting it all together:
Factors predicting perceived inter-parental relationship quality

- No evidence by Wave 1 that time had healing effect
- But almost all parents had been separated for < 24 months
- **More** likely to describe relationship as friendly/cooperative if had been separated for < 12 months than for 12–24 months

**Why so?**
- Perhaps problems were arising during property / parenting negotiations &/ or with outcomes of such negotiations for at least one party?
Satisfaction with life as a whole

Examples of links with earlier & other current dynamics/ circumstances
General finding

- Links with *most* other factors were similar for fathers and mothers
  - That is, the direction of most trends were very similar:
    - but in each sub-group, fathers expressed lower satisfaction than mothers:

For example: next few slides.....
Life satisfaction by reports of experience of family violence, fathers & mothers

![Bar chart showing life satisfaction by reports of family violence for fathers and mothers.](chart.png)
Life satisfaction by reports of any mental health / addiction issues in pre-separation relationship, fathers and mothers.
Life satisfaction by perceived role in separation decision, fathers & mothers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fathers</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly my decision</td>
<td>Ex-partner's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly my decision</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-partner's</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Low (0-4) - Light Gray
- Moderate (5-7) - Light Pink
- High (8-10) - Red

LSSF W1
Life satisfaction by whether has any safety concerns, fathers & mothers

![Bar chart showing life satisfaction by safety concerns for fathers and mothers.](chart.png)

- **Fathers**: 25% moderate, 46% low, 29% high, 16% no concerns
- **Mothers**: 32% moderate, 52% low, 14% high, 8% no concerns
Ratings of life satisfaction by care-time arrangements, fathers and mothers

![Graph showing ratings of life satisfaction by care-time arrangements, fathers and mothers.](image)

LSSF W1
Care time where children spend 35-65% nights with each parent is referred to as shared time.
* Results not shown due to a small number
Life satisfaction by reports of **re-partnering of each parent**, fathers & mothers

“Re-partnering = living together;
Excludes those who said they did not know other parent’s status
Life satisfaction by perceived quality of inter-parental relationship, fathers & mothers

Fathers

- Friendly/cooperative: 53% (Low 14, Moderate 26, High 26)
- Distant: 51% (Low 23, Moderate 29, High 45)
- Lots of conflict/fearful: 45% (Low 26, Moderate 26, High 51)

Mothers

- Friendly/cooperative: 49% (Low 7, Moderate 41, High 49)
- Distant: 50% (Low 10, Moderate 50, High 41)
- Lots of conflict/fearful: 44% (Low 49, Moderate 49, High 49)
Putting it all together:
Life satisfaction—Multivariate analysis (OLS regression)

Mothers & fathers:
Significantly lower satisfaction than same-sex parents where:

- Dysfunctional circumstances
  - Physical hurt or emotional abuse (especially the former)
  - Believed mental health problems or addictions etc. had been issues in relationship
  - Saw inter-parental relationship as clearly negative rather than friendly/cooperative

- Had lived with other parent for longer rather than shorter time

- Played no role in separation decision (i.e., was “left”) than if joint decision

- Respondent was neither living with partner nor seeing someone
Putting it all together:
Life satisfaction—Multivariate analysis (OLS regression) (continued)

Fathers: Significantly lower satisfaction where:

- Never sees child
  - especially lower satisfaction than fathers with shared or majority care time

Mothers: Significantly lower satisfaction where:

- Father had majority care time than where fathers had no care time
Putting it all together:
Life satisfaction—Multivariate analysis (OLS regression) (continued)

Some “flipsides” of these trends

Both fathers & mothers: higher satisfaction where:

- Indicated non-existence of dysfunctional dynamics (that were examined)
- Had lived together for shorter rather than longer time
- Joint decision to separate rather than other parent’s decision
- Friendly/cooperative inter-parental relationship
- Currently living with or seeing someone (especially former)

Fathers: Significantly higher satisfaction where:

- Had some care-time (especially where has shared or majority care time)

 Mothers: Significantly higher satisfaction where:

- Father never saw child than where father had majority care time
Putting it all together:
Life satisfaction—Multivariate analysis (OLS regression) (continued)

Non-significant results
(as predictors of life satisfaction — both fathers and mothers):

- Duration of separation
- Whether believed other parent had re-partnered or did not know status
- Experience of safety concerns (i.e., net of other [related] “toxic” experiences),
  though trends were in expected direction
Wave 2 (2009)

Selected trends
Experience of physical hurt & emotional abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 2</th>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fathers</td>
<td>Moth</td>
<td>Fathers</td>
<td>Moth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical hurt</td>
<td>Emotional abuse alone</td>
<td>Physical hurt</td>
<td>Emotional abuse alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

W1: re before/during separation; W2: re previous 12 mths
Current safety concerns

For both  | For child only  | For self only
---|---|---
Fathers  
Wave 1  | 12% | 3% | 2%
Mothers  
Wave 1  | 10% | 9% | 3%
Fathers  
Wave 2  | 10% | 3% | 2%
Mothers  
Wave 2  | 9%  | 8%  | 3%
Person(s) seen as responsible for safety concerns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fathers</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wave 1</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 2</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Other parent
- Other parent's new partner
- Other adult(s)
- Other child(ren)
Person(s) seen as responsible for safety concerns

Wave 1
- Fathers: 71%
- Mothers: 93%

Wave 2
- Fathers: 71%
- Mothers: 93%

Categories:
- Other parent
- Other parent's new partner
- Other adult(s)
- Other child(ren)
Perceived inter-parental relationships

Note: data have been weighted
Change in perceived quality of inter-parental relationship

Picture is very similar in each wave (previous slide) masking level of variability across waves.

*In fact:*
- 49% Friendly/cooperative **both times**
- 10% Distant **both times**
- 10% Clearly negative **both times**

- 16% indicated improved relationship
- 17% indicated deteriorating relationship

[“Clearly negative” = “lots of conflict” / “fearful”]
Ratings of life satisfaction by wave, fathers and mothers

LSSF W1 & W2. Based on parents who participated in both waves.
Ratings of life satisfaction by wave, fathers and mothers

LSSF W1 & W2. Based on parents who participated in both waves.
Change in life satisfaction (continued)

- **Overall % moving to higher satisfaction category**
  - 31% of fathers & 25% of mothers

- **Overall % moving to lower satisfaction category**
  - 13–14%

- But still generally less satisfied that HILDA parents
Summary

- Experience of physical hurt & emotional abuse
  - physical hurt:
    - diminished substantially cf. pre-separation
  - emotional abuse with no physical hurt:
    - lower between waves than before/during separation, but still common
Summary

- Experience of physical hurt & emotional abuse
  - physical hurt:
    - diminished substantially cf. pre-separation
  - emotional abuse with no physical hurt:
    - lower between waves than before/during separation, but still common

- Safety concerns
  - Nearly as prevalent in wave 2 as in wave 1
  - Concerns tended to be directed to the other parent
    - Although applying to a minority, fathers were more likely than mothers to hold concerns relating to other parent’s new partner or other adult(s)
Perceived inter-parental relationships:
- Most commonly favourable both times (i.e., friendly or cooperative)
- Relationships equally likely to improve as to deteriorate
- Highly conflictual or fearful relationships applied to one in six parents in wave 2
Summary (continued)

● **Perceived inter-parental relationships:**
  - Most commonly favourable both times (i.e., friendly or cooperative)
  - Relationships equally likely to improve as to deteriorate
  - Highly conflictual or fearful relationships applied to one in six parents in wave 2

● **Life satisfaction**
  - Overall patterns very similar across waves, but
    - Move to higher satisfaction category more common than reverse
  - In general, LSSF parents less satisfied with life than general population of parents
Satisfaction with life as a whole

Re-partnering “not enough”? (Wave 1 results)
**Single fathers and mothers:** % expressing high life satisfaction by care time (Wave 1) (another way of viewing interaction effect)

- **Father never sees**
  - 66-100% nights with mother
  - 35-65% (shared time)

- **Parents who were seeing someone were excluded.**
Single fathers and mothers: % expressing high life satisfaction by care time (Wave 1)

LSSF W1
Parents who were seeing someone were excluded.
Re-partnered fathers and mothers: % expressing high life satisfaction by care time (Wave 1)

Living with a partner

LSSF W1
Parents who were seeing someone were excluded.
Re-partnered fathers and mothers: % expressing high life satisfaction by care time (Wave 1)

Living with a partner

Parents who were seeing someone were excluded.
Wave 2 pattern of results similar for fathers
Concluding thoughts

- Inter-parental relationships most commonly seen as favourable both times
- Life satisfaction tended to improve, but lower than that apparent for parents in general
- Mothers remained more satisfied than fathers
- Re-partnering boosted satisfaction
Concluding thoughts

- *Inter-parental relationships most commonly seen as favourable both times*

- *Life satisfaction tended to improve, but lower than that apparent for parents in general*

- *Mothers remained more satisfied than fathers*

- *Re-partnering boosted satisfaction*

**Policy:** Involvement of both parents in children’s lives after parental separation has been increasingly emphasised

i.e., *Policy = no “clean break” in parenting*
But ....

- **Single mothers (Wave 1 only)**
  - Most likely to express high satisfaction if father never saw child (= clean break in parenting)
  - Effect no longer significant in Wave 2

- **Fathers (single & re-partnered, both waves)**
  - Most likely to express high satisfaction if shared (or greater) care time

That is:

- **While re-partnering boosts life satisfaction ...**
  - Caring for the children is also very important
Re-partnered fathers who never see their children

As one father in early AIFS research explained:

“I lost the chance of seeing my children grow up day by day — nothing in life can replace that.”

Weston (1986)
and …

“til death us do part”
can span separation and divorce!