

11 SOCIAL ROLES

11.1 Marital status

There were pronounced differences between males and females with respect to their marital status. Almost three quarters (72.6%) of males were currently single or never married compared with just under half (44.4%) of females (Table 11-1). Moreover, 59.4% of males and 33.2% of females had never had a relationship where they had lived with a partner for six months or more.

Table 11-1. Marital status by sex

	Proportion (%)		
	Males	Females	Persons
Currently single, never married	72.6	44.4	61.2
Currently married or de facto	12.1	24.5	17.1
Currently separated, divorced or widowed	15.4	31.0	21.7
Never married or in a de facto relationship (6 months or more)	59.4	33.2	48.8

Unsurprisingly marital status also varied considerably by age group, with 80.3% of the younger group aged 18-34 years being single or never married and 65.7% never having been in a long term, cohabiting relationship. This compared to 47.1% and 36.4% respectively of the older group aged 35-64 years.

11.2 Parenting

Just over half the females (56.2%) and one quarter of the males (25.9%) were parents with children of their own.

One in eight (12.8%) people had dependent children under the age of 18 years living at home with them. The proportion was far higher for females with one quarter (23.6%) of females caring for dependent children living at home with them compared with 5.5% of males (Table 11-2).

Table 11-2. Parental status by sex

	Proportion (%)		
	Males	Females	Persons
Own children (any age)	25.9	56.2	38.1
Dependent children living at home (including step children)	5.5	23.6	12.8

Seven out of ten (69.5%) of these mothers were the primary care givers to their children. One-fifth (21.7%) of the fathers with dependent children living at home with them were the primary care givers.

Just less than half of the mothers (44.8%) were currently married or in a de facto relationship compared to 71.7% of fathers.

For the 42.7% of parents who were not the primary carers for their children, the supporting carer was either the other partner (in 90.0% of cases) or a grandparent (10.0%). Three quarters (75.0%) of these parents were very satisfied and another 14.0% somewhat satisfied (14.0%) with the help they were receiving from the supporting carer, and half (49.0%) believed they would have a lot of difficulty maintaining a parenting role without that assistance.

When their capacity to provide care to their dependent children was rated by the interviewers, three quarter (75.6%) of these parents were assessed as functioning very well. However, 21.3% of mothers and 28.3% of fathers were rated by interviewers as having obvious or severe impairment in their ability to care for their child or children. One quarter of parents with dependent children (25.9% of mothers and 23.3% of fathers) had had contact with their state department of family/community services in the past year.

11.3 Care of others

A number of participants (14.7%) were providing care to others because of a disability, long term illness or old age. This figure was 19.6% for females and 11.3% for males. It was higher in the older (35-64 year old) compared to the younger (18-34 years) age group, at 17.5% and 10.9% respectively.

11.4 Contact with family and friends

Nearly a quarter of the participants (22.4%) felt socially isolated and lonely. Just over two thirds (69.3%) said that their illness made it hard to maintain a close relationship.

When rating their interpersonal relationships over the past year relative to previous years, 22.1% said these had deteriorated. While 38.1% noted no change in the quality of their interpersonal relationships, 38.7% said they had improved.

Almost one third (31.0%) of participants lived alone. Of these, 40.6% said that they would prefer to be living with someone else.

Almost all participants (96.1%) had had some form of contact with a family member over the past year. For two thirds (65.4%), this contact was almost every day, while for a further 18.2% it was at least weekly. Face-to-face contact with family members in the past year was almost as high, at 93.2% for at least one contact, with 56.5% of participants in contact with a family member almost daily and 17.1% at least once a week.

The majority (86.5%) of participants had at least one friend or more, although almost half (47.5%) said they needed and would like to have more friends. The majority (85.3%) also had someone to rely on at times of serious need. For two thirds (67.0%) of participants this was a family member, while for 18.3% it was a friend. Many also had at least one person they could confide in over the past year, with 40.9% mainly confiding in family and 29.6% mainly in friends.

There were, however, 13.3% of participants who had no friends at all, 14.1% who had no-one to rely on and 15.4% who had never had a confiding relationship. Males were less likely to have contact with family and friends and to have no one to rely on in times of serious need, as were those in the older age group (35-64 years) compared to the younger age group (18-34 years).

When participants were asked to describe their involvement in organised activities over the past year, just over two thirds (68.6%) said they had not attended any social programs and a similar proportion (69.4%) had not attended any recreational programs.