

5 Family

Key messages

The traditional concept of “family” is evolving, with the proportion of babies born outside legalised marriages continuing to grow. In 2007, two-fifths of babies born in Queensland were exnuptial births.

There was a sharp increase (16.3%) in registered births in Queensland in 2007. The size of the increase should be interpreted with caution as changes to the processing system used to register births have contributed to the increase. However, there was an underlying increase in births, consistent with a nation-wide increase in births and with independent data from the Queensland Health Perinatal Data Collection.

There was a corresponding increase in the total fertility rate to 2.095 in 2007, which is the highest fertility rate seen in Queensland since 1977. Again this figure should be used with caution as the underlying births data are affected by the processing changes for birth registrations.

Improvements

The proportion of births where paternity was not acknowledged has decreased over the past 25 years to 3.3% of all births. Indigenous births, however, continue to have higher rates of unacknowledged paternity (7.8%).

Areas of concern

Approximately 10,900 children and young people in Queensland were affected by divorce in 2007. However, with the increasing tendency for children to be born to de facto couples, there are possibly thousands more children and young people affected by separation than are currently recorded in official divorce statistics.

There were an estimated 4469 homeless school students aged 12–18 years in Queensland in 2006. Although this represents an improvement from the 2001 estimate of 6381 homeless students, it is still a major concern. At increased risk of homelessness were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from step or blended families, and students who were in the care of the state.

Family types

The Family Characteristics and Transitions Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008f) found that the majority of Queensland children aged under 18 live with two parents. Of children living in families² in 2006–07, 72.2% were living with both parents in intact couple families, 15.4% lived with single mothers, 6.1% were in blended families, 3.0% were in step families and 3.0% lived with single fathers (Figure 5.1). From the previous survey in 2003, there has been an increase in the proportion of children living in intact couple families (up from 68.8%) and living with single fathers (up from 1.6%).

Children not living in the above categories of families were defined as living in “other” families, which included grandparent families or families with only foster children. In Australia in 2006–07 there were about 14,000 grandparent families, in which grandparents were guardians or main care givers of children. The number of grandparent families had declined from 23,000 in 2003.

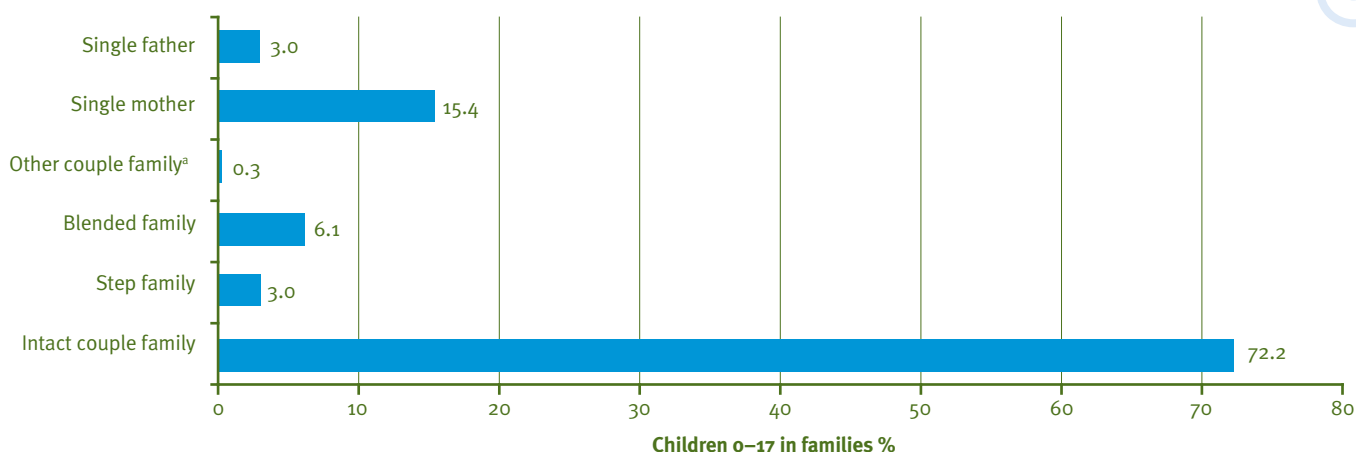
The proportion of children living in single-parent families continues to increase. In 1990, 12.7% of Australian children aged 0–14 were living in single-parent families. By 2007 this had increased to 19.5% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999, 2007c).

Figure 5.2 shows that the proportion of children aged 0–17 years living in single-parent families increases with age of the youngest child, from 13.5% of 0–4 year olds to 29.4% of 15–17 year olds. Conversely, the proportion of children living in intact families decreases with increasing age (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008f).

Family composition tends to differ for children in remote Indigenous communities, where multi-family households and closer relationships with extended family members are more common.

² As distinct from children and young people living independently or in residential facilities.

Figure 5.1 Family type for children 0–17 years, Queensland, 2006–07



a. Includes “other” couple families which are not classified as intact, step or blended, for example grandparent couple families or families with only foster children present.

Source: ABS, *Family Characteristics and Transitions, Australia, 2006–07*, cat. no. 4442.0

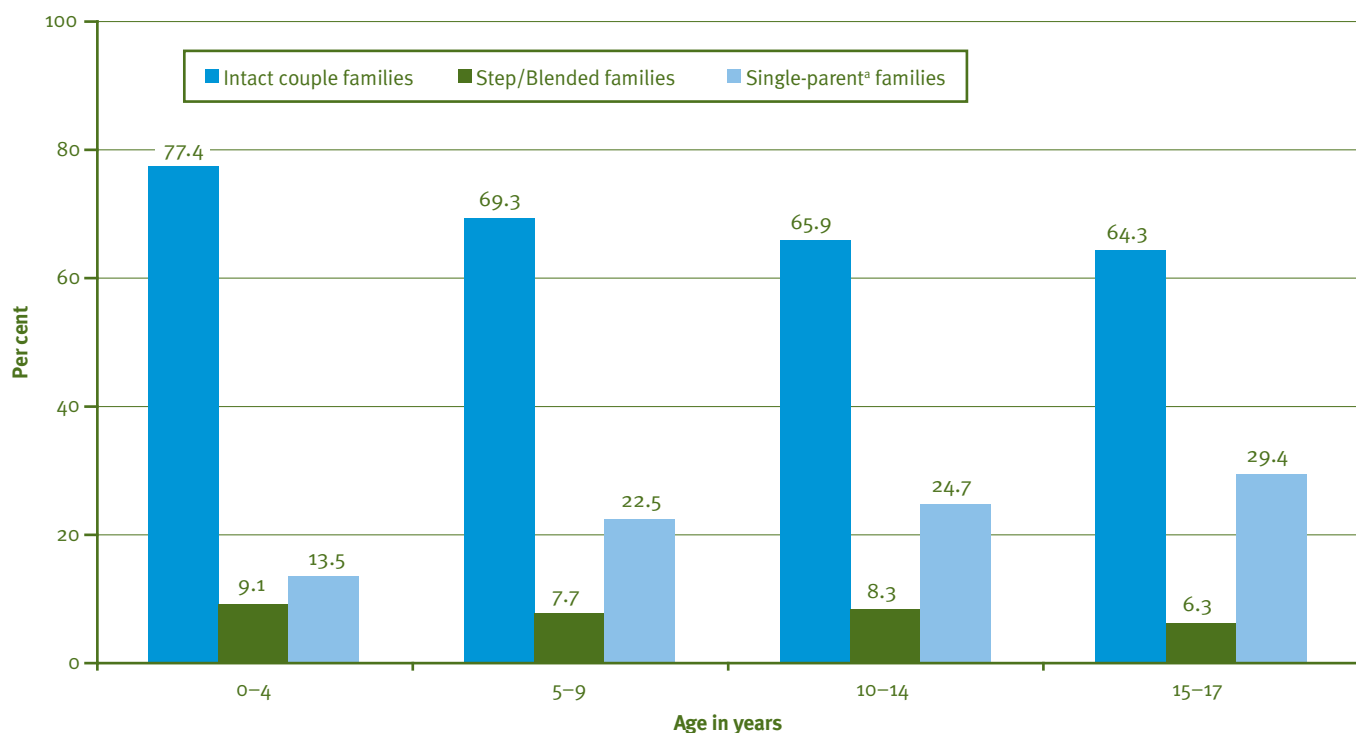
Reflecting the general increase in couples in permanent and long-term de facto relationships is the increase in exnuptial³ births and of children living with couples in de facto relationships. For couple families with dependent children⁴ in 2006, 15.3% of parents were in de facto marriages, an increase from 12.3% in 2001 and 10.2% in 1996 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007a).

In 2007, 39.8% of births were exnuptial, compared with 9.7% in 1981, with nuptial births decreasing from 83.6%

to 60.2% between 1981 and 2007 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008c). Paternity was not acknowledged for 3.3% of births in 2007, down from 6.7% in 1981.

The proportions of Indigenous babies born exnuptial or with paternity not acknowledged are much higher than for non-Indigenous babies. Of Indigenous births in 2007, 19.2% were to married couples and 80.8% were exnuptial. Paternity was not acknowledged for 7.8% of births, down from 11.0% in 2004.

Figure 5.2 Family structure by age of youngest child, Queensland, 2006–07



Note: Totals may not sum to 100 as “other” family types such as grandparent families were not included.

a. Due to high relative standard errors single-parent categories could not be separated into single mothers and single fathers.

Source: ABS, *Family Characteristics and Transitions, Australia, 2006–07*, cat. no. 4442.0

³ Exnuptial births refer to births of children to parents who are not legally married at the time of the child’s birth.

⁴ Children aged under 15 years and/or dependent students aged 15–24 years.

Births and family size

There was a 16.3% increase (from 52,665 in 2006 to 61,249 in 2007) in the number of births registered in Queensland. This is a substantial increase compared with previous years, where the change in the number of births from the year before was between 1% and 3%. Although a component of the increase is likely to be a result of changes in procedures for processing births, there was an actual increase in the overall number of births, consistent with a nation-wide increase in births. Independent data from the Queensland Health Perinatal Data Collection showed an increase in births in 2007 of 6.2% (Queensland Health – Health Information Centre, 2009). Another possible contributor to the increase in the number of births recorded is the requirement of registration, or application for registration, of the birth of all children as a condition for applying for the Australian Government’s Baby Bonus (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008j).

Of the 61,249 births in 2007, 31,656 were males (51.7%) and 29,593 were females (48.3%). This was up from 2006, when 27,128 males and 25,537 females were born (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008c). There was also a sharp increase in the number of Indigenous births, with 4486 births in 2007 (2305 male and 2181 female), up 29.5% from 3463 in 2006.

In 2007, the total fertility rate⁵ in Queensland was 2.095, which was the highest recorded in 30 years (since 2.11 in 1977). The fertility rate had been relatively stable at about 1.8 for the previous decade, but the steep increase in 2007 could be associated with the new processes of registering births, as well as the general increase in the number of babies born. Internationally and in Australia, there has been a recent tendency for women to have children later, for women to have fewer children and for more women to remain childless. The recent increases in fertility challenge these trends to some extent, and it will be interesting to monitor these changes over time.

Almost three-fifths (59.4%) of births in Queensland in 2006 occurred in major cities, with 20.3% in inner regional areas, 16.1% in outer regional areas, 2.6% in remote areas and 1.7% in very remote areas (Laws & Hilder, 2008).

Step or blended families tended to be slightly larger than intact couple families, having on average 2.1 children,

compared with 1.9 in intact couple families. Single-parent families had on average 1.7 children (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008f).

Age of parents

More than half (57.8%) of babies born in 2007 were born to mothers aged 25–34 years (Table 5.1). This was also the most common age group for fathers of new babies (51.9%). The median age of mothers of children from nuptial births (31.4 years) was older than for exnuptial births (26.2 years). Where exnuptial paternity was not acknowledged, the median age of mothers was even younger (24.4 years).

Parents of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander babies tended to be younger, with 56.2% of babies born to mothers aged 20–29 years and 47.8% having fathers aged 20–29. Indigenous mothers had a median age of 24.8 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008c).

Various studies have identified higher risks for births to teenage mothers (Laws & Hilder, 2008; Qu, Soriano, & Weston, 2006; Skinner & Hickey, 2003). Teenage mothers are more likely to be single, to be smokers, and to engage in risky alcohol consumption. They are less likely to attend antenatal care and are more likely to be living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Teenage births also carry a higher risk of medical complications, including shorter gestation, low birthweight, the need for neonatal intensive care, and perinatal and neonatal death.

Almost one in five Indigenous babies were born to a teenage mother (785 or 17.5% of Indigenous births in 2007) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008c). In contrast, 3289 or 5.4% of births in the Queensland population were to teenage mothers. After several years of declining teenage fertility rates in Queensland, the rate has risen to 23.0 births per 1000 women for the first time since 2000. The increase in teenage fertility rates is consistent with the overall increase in fertility rates across all age groups in the population (Figure 5.3). Similarly, national teenage fertility rates had declined since peaking at 55.5 births per 1000 females in 1971, with 2007 seeing the first increase in more than a decade (16.0 births per 1000 females).

Table 5.1 Births by parents’ age by Indigenous status, Queensland, 2007

	Age of mother/father								Total ^b
	Under 20	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39	40–44	45+	Unknown ^a	
Indigenous births –	Per cent								
mothers	17.5	31.7	24.5	16.9	7.8	1.4	0.1	..	100.0
fathers	7.8	24.3	23.5	19.1	11.4	3.9	2.3	7.8	100.0
All births –	Per cent								
mothers	5.4	17.5	27.7	30.1	16.3	2.8	0.2	..	100.0
fathers	2.0	10.9	22.2	29.7	20.6	7.8	3.5	3.3	100.0

.. Not applicable.

a. Age of father not known as paternity not acknowledged.

b. Components may not add to total because of rounding.

Source: ABS, *Registered Births*

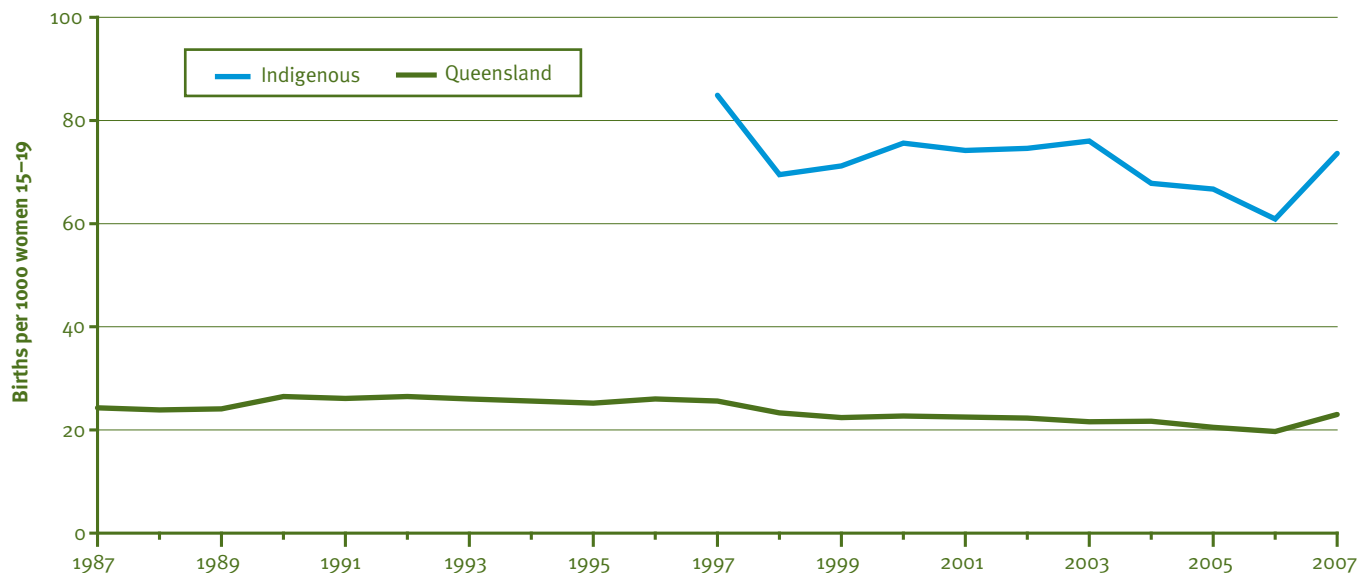
⁵ Total fertility rates refer to the number of babies a female would bear during her lifetime if she experienced current age-specific fertility rates at each age of her reproductive life.

Although there have been decreases in the teenage fertility rate for Indigenous women in recent years, the Indigenous teenage fertility rate was still three times that for all Queensland women – respectively 73.6 and 23.0 births per 1000 females in 2007.

Indigenous women tend to have more babies, with a total

fertility rate of 2.674 births per woman, compared with 2.095 for all Queensland women in 2007 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008c). Figure 5.4 illustrates the higher age-specific fertility rates for younger Indigenous women, with rates for Indigenous women in their later child-bearing years falling below the Queensland rates.

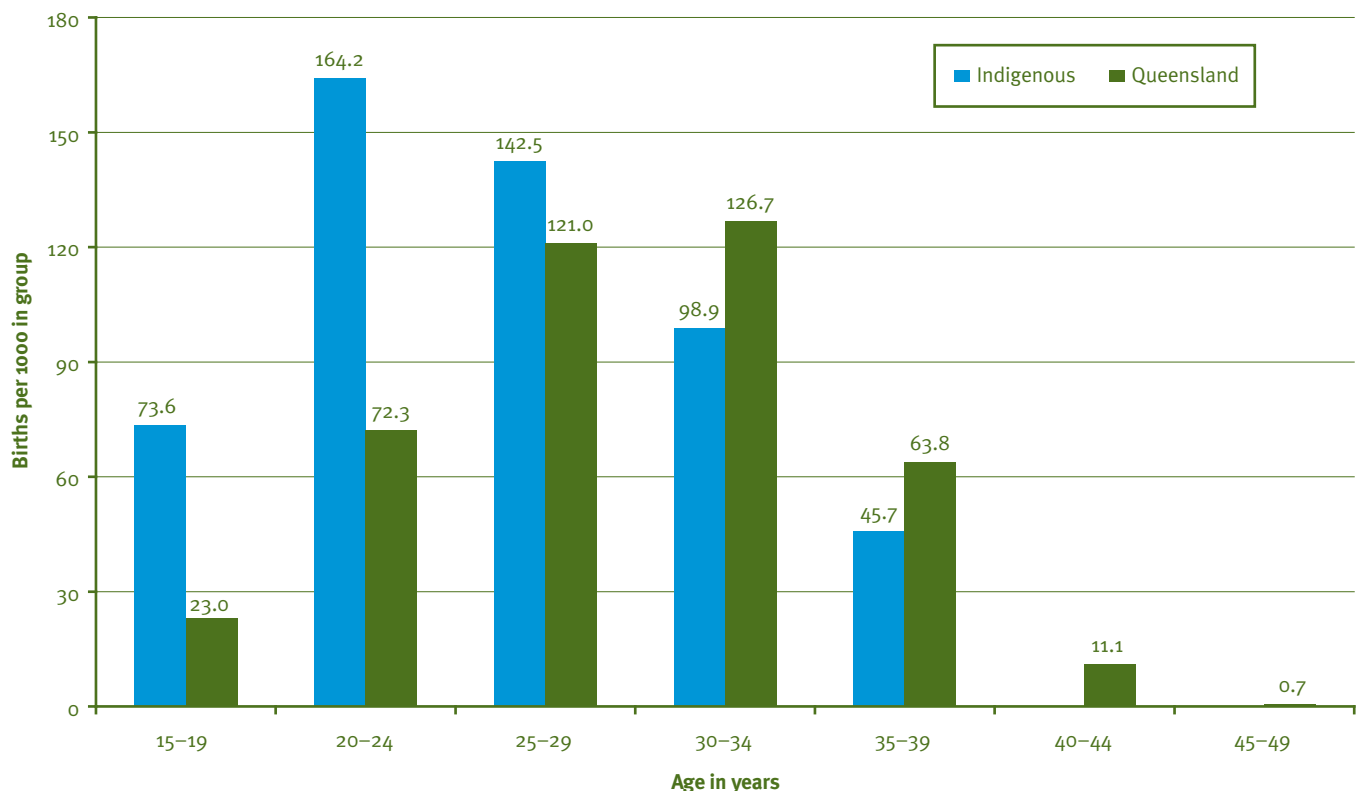
Figure 5.3 Teenage fertility^a by Indigenous status, Queensland, 1987 to 2007



a. Births per 1000 women aged 15–19. Includes births to mothers aged less than 15.

Source: ABS, *Births, Australia*, cat. no. 3301.0, various

Figure 5.4 Fertility rate^a by age by Indigenous status, Queensland, 2007



a. Births per 1000 women in group.

Source: ABS, *Births, Australia*, 2007, cat. no. 3301.0

The general increase in registered births and fertility rates has seen increases in fertility rates across all age groups of women in Queensland. Over time, fertility rates for women aged 30–44 years have been increasing gradually, whereas the fertility rates for women aged under 30 have been falling. For example, the number of births per 1000 women aged 35–39 increased from 34.6 in 1992 to 63.8 in 2007, while the rate for women aged 25–29 decreased from 134.2 to 121.0 over the same period.

Adopted children

In 2007–08, there were 440 adoptions in Australia, with 86 taking place in Queensland (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009a). There has been a substantial downward trend in adoptions over the past 25 years, from 1774 adoptions in Queensland in 1971–72 to the current number. Of the 86 adoptions in Queensland in 2007–08, 17 were local adoptions (19.8%), 47 (54.7%) were from outside Australia (intercountry adoptions) and in 22 cases (25.6%) the child was known to the adopter.

Intercountry adoptions in Queensland consisted of Hague adoptions⁶ and non-Hague adoptions. The sixteen Hague adoption children came mainly from Asian countries (such as India, the Philippines and Thailand), whereas the 31 non-Hague adoptions comprised 13 children from Taiwan, 9 from Ethiopia and 9 from South Korea.

Divorce and separation

Divorce or separation of parents is likely to result in changes to living arrangements for affected children, with children living either with a single parent or in a step or blended family. Research indicates that there are a range of detrimental outcomes for children that can be associated with parental divorce and separation (Vranisan & Mathews, 2004). However, the changing face of traditional families, and an increasing tendency for children to be born to de facto couples, suggest there will be an increasing number of children affected by separation who will not appear in the official divorce statistics.

In Queensland, 51.7% of divorces granted in 2007 involved children under 18, affecting around 10,900 or 1.1% of children in that year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008e). The average number of children affected by each divorce in Queensland was 1.91.

For children aged under 18 with a natural parent living elsewhere, less than half visited the non-resident parent at least monthly, with 21.8% visiting at least weekly and 22.9% at least monthly. Less than half visited the non-resident parent frequently (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008f). One in ten (10.4%) visited the non-resident parent at least every 6 months, with 35.9% visiting less frequently or never.

Family employment and income

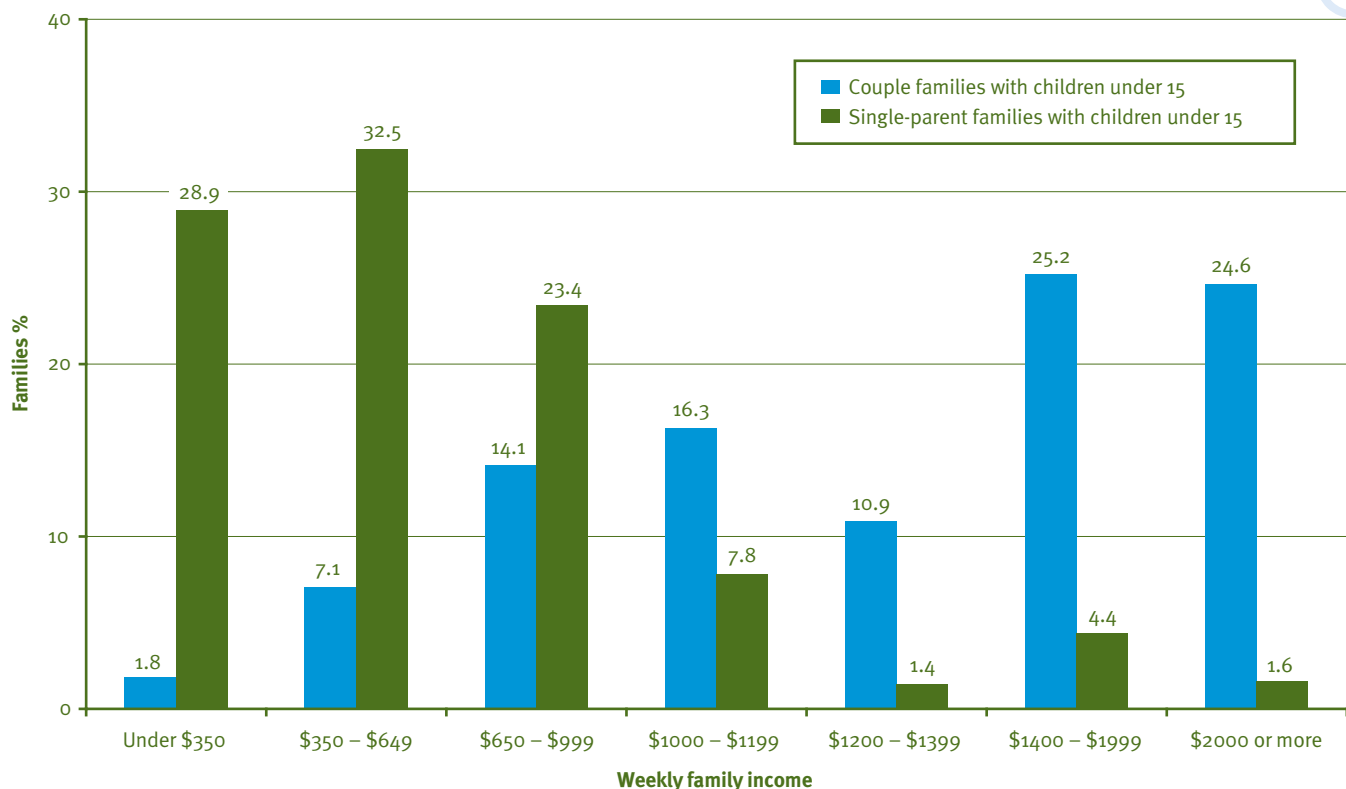
In almost all (96.5%) couple families where the youngest child is dependent, at least one parent was employed in 2006–07. In two-thirds of these families (64.5%) both parents worked (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008f). Conversely, in single-parent families with dependent children, just over two-thirds of lone parents were employed (67.6%).

Single-parent families tended to have much lower incomes than households with two parents. In 2006 only 8.9% of couple families with children aged under 15 had a weekly income less than \$650 (gross). In contrast almost two-thirds (61.4%) of single-parent families earned less than \$650 a week and 28.9% earned less than \$350 a week. Only 6.0% of single-parent families had a weekly income of \$1400 or more, compared with 49.8% of couple families (Figure 5.5).

Indigenous families also had lower incomes than other families, with 42.1% of Indigenous families with children under 15 earning less than \$650 a week, compared with 20.3% of non-Indigenous families with children under 15 (Figure 5.6). Further, as Indigenous families tend to be larger – comprising on average 3.6 persons per family, compared with 2.9 for other families (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002) – the disparity in lower incomes would be more marked on a per-person basis.

⁶ A Hague adoption is where the adoptive child's country of origin has ratified or acceded to the Hague Convention, and the applicant's file was sent after the Convention entered into force in Australia.

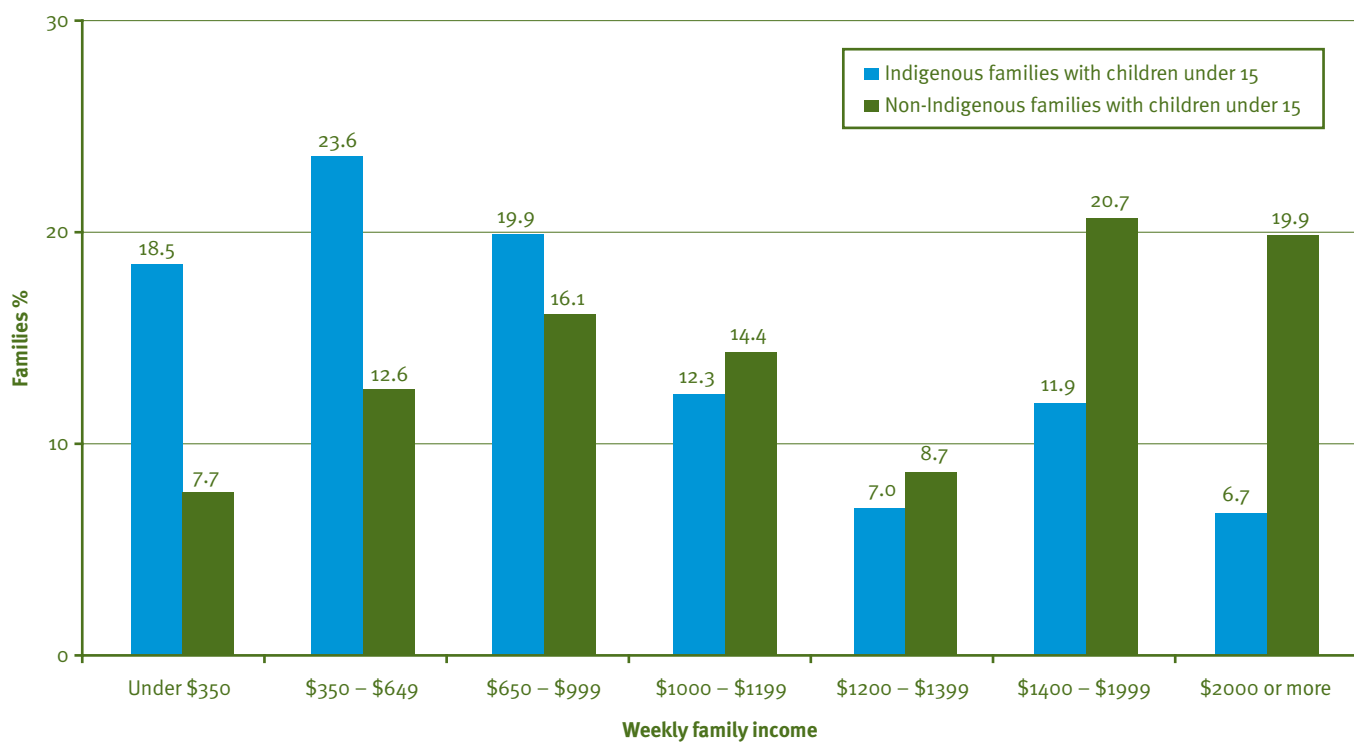
Figure 5.5 Income by family type, Queensland, 2006



Note: Excludes families with income/partial income not stated.

Source: ABS, *Census 2006*

Figure 5.6 Family income by Indigenous status, Queensland, 2006



Note: An Indigenous family is where at least one spouse/partner is of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin.

Source: ABS, *Census 2006*

Homelessness

A range of factors can result in some people being homeless for short or extended periods. These include family conflict, relationship breakdown or domestic violence, lack of affordable accommodation, and eviction or the end of a tenancy. Children and young people can become homeless with their parent/s, or on their own after some familial breakdown resulting in running away from home, or they may self-place from a care situation.

It is difficult to measure the homeless population. A study by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2008), based on various sources including 2006 Census data, estimated the size and characteristics of the homeless population in Australia. It found that:

- Indigenous people were over-represented
- 10% of homeless “households” were families with children, of which 58% were single-parent families; single-parent families were more likely to use Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) accommodation than couples with children, who were more likely to use improvised dwellings (e.g. tents, sleeping out)
- half (50%) of children in homeless families were in SAAP accommodation in 2006, which was up from 39% in 2001; as well, 26% were staying with friends or relatives, 20% were in improvised dwellings or sleeping out, and 3.0% were in boarding houses

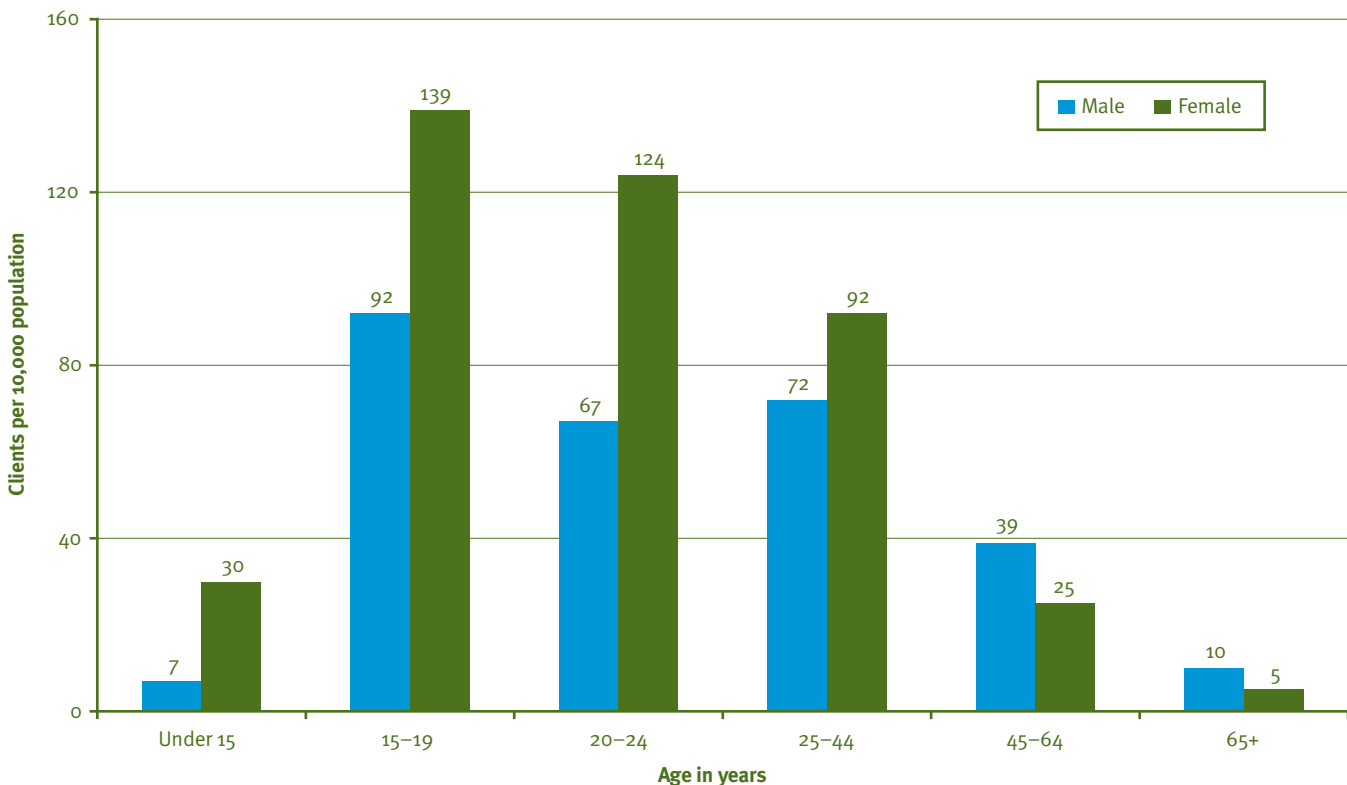
- one in three (33%) of the homeless population in 2006 were aged 18 years or younger, with 12% aged under 12
- the number of homeless youth aged 12–18 years who were alone decreased 21% from 2001
- the total rate of homelessness in Queensland in 2006 was estimated to be 6.9 homeless people per 1000 population.

In addition to Census counts of homeless people, the National Census of Homeless School Students provides information on homelessness among young people (MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2008). The number of homeless young people aged 12–18 in Queensland in 2006 was estimated to be 4469, a rate of 11 per 1000. This was considerably lower than in the previous Census in 2001 (6381, or 18 per 1000). In this period there was an increase in early intervention services targeting homeless and at-risk teenagers.

In Queensland, 88% of homeless school students aged 12–18 years were staying temporarily with friends or relatives, while 11% were in SAAP accommodation. About 1% were in improvised dwellings such as squats, tents or cars, or they were sleeping on the streets.

There were more female (54%) than male (46%) homeless students. Indigenous students were dramatically over-represented, comprising 17% of the homeless 12–18 student population, despite representing only 5.4% of the general 12–18 year old Queensland population.

Figure 5.7 Supported Accommodation Assistance Program clients by age and sex, Queensland, 2007–08



Source: AIHW, *Homeless People in SAAP: SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report, 2007–08*, Queensland supplementary tables

More than two-thirds of homeless school students in Queensland were from blended families or single-parent families (68%), with 14% from intact couple families before leaving home. Sixteen per cent of homeless students were in the care or protection of the state.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) publishes information annually on clients using SAAP services. In 2007–08, 3.7% (800) of all SAAP clients in Queensland were unaccompanied children aged under 15, and 16.4% (3400) were young people aged 15–19 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009d). One in thirteen (7.6%) clients aged 15 years or younger had three or more support periods in 2007–08.

Children and young people also accompanied adult clients using SAAP services in 2007–08. They comprised:

- 5900 children aged 0–4
- 3800 children aged 5–9
- 2700 aged 10–14, and
- 800 aged 15–17.

In 2007–08, almost one-third (31.5%) of accompanying children were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children.

Accompanying children were more likely to be with single mothers rather than with couples or single fathers. The greatest numbers of support periods in which children were involved in 2007–08 were:

- 6500 client periods for females with children
- 2100 client periods for couple families with children, and
- 700 client periods for males with children.

More than one-third (36.8%) of females with children indicated that the main reason for seeking assistance was domestic or family violence.

Unaccompanied young people aged 15–19 had the highest rates of SAAP service usage of any age group (115 per 10,000 population), and rates decreased with increasing age thereafter (for example, the rate was 95 for 20–24 year olds and 82 for 25–44 year olds).

Unaccompanied children aged under 15 had rates of SAAP use of 18 per 10,000. As illustrated in Figure 5.7, female clients had higher rates of use of SAAP services compared with males in all but the older groups, with females aged 15–19 having the highest rate of use of Queensland SAAP services of all age groups (139 per 10,000 population).

Despite the high numbers of accompanying children using SAAP services, two-thirds (66.0%) of those seeking new SAAP accommodation were turned away in 2007–08 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009c).

Three-quarters (77.0%) of couples with children and two-thirds (66.0%) of individuals with children were turned away, mainly because appropriate accommodation was not available.

As well, 60.9% of clients with valid unmet requests for SAAP accommodation were aged under 20 years.

In 2008, the Commission submitted a response to the Australian Government's Green Paper on Homelessness (view at www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au/about/submissions.html) (Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, 2008c). The Australian Government's White Paper *The Road Home: A national approach to reducing homelessness* was released in September 2008, and set out the national plan of action until 2020 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008b).

The Australian Government's prime goals are to halve overall homelessness by 2020 and to offer accommodation to all "rough sleepers" who need it by 2020. To achieve these goals, three distinct strategies will be implemented:

1. Turning off the tap: services will intervene early to prevent homelessness
2. Improving and expanding services: improve economic and social participation as well as connected and responsive services to achieve sustainable housing
3. Breaking the cycle: move people who become homeless quickly through the crisis system to stable housing.

The White Paper acknowledges that special attention must be given to the unique needs of children and young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Targets specifically relating to children and young people are:

- a 25% increase by 2013 in the number of children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who are provided with improved housing stability, and engagement with family, school and work
- a 50% increase by 2013 in the number of children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who are provided with additional support and engaged in education.