

Relationships Australia

NOVEMBER 2006

Relationships Indicators Survey 2006

Executive Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About Us

Relationships Australia (RA) Inc is a national body which aims to enhance human and family relationships, on behalf of its members, through representation, lobbying, promotion, research and social policy formation. It is a non-aligned, not-for-profit community-based organisation having a federated structure with large autonomous member organisations in every state and territory plus a national secretariat in Canberra.

RA member organisations provide relationship support services from 106 locations across Australia. While best known for its services in family dispute resolution, relationships education, counselling and children's contact services, Relationships Australia also provides assistance to a diverse range of clients including those afflicted by family violence, crime, problem gambling, drought and natural disaster.

RA services are provided to all people regardless of age, religion, cultural background, gender, social or economic status or lifestyle choice. The organisation as a whole, with its 800 staff, provides services to over 90,000 clients per year and has annual revenues in the order of \$48 million.

Survey Methodology

The research was quantitative and consisted of n = 1200 randomly selected telephone interviews amongst the general population across all states and territories of Australia. It was conducted in August 2006.

The sampling frame for the survey was the latest version of the electronic White Pages on CD-ROM. In order to ensure compatibility with the previous survey conducted in 2003, the birthday rule was used whereby the eligible respondent was identified as the household member, aged 18 or over, who most recently had a birthday.

Research Findings

The State of Australian Relationships

Australians as a whole are remarkably optimistic about the relationships they enjoy with their spouse or partner. Despite continuing high divorce rates, 90% of respondents stated that they were not at all worried or not very worried about the future of their relationship.

Nearly all respondents were able to say what the best thing was about their partner relationship. By far the most common response was the friendship and companionship they derive from the relationship - with this factor being mentioned by 38% of all respondents.

Clearly, however, respondents also had negative issues impacting their partner relationship. In all, 77% of respondents were able to cite negative influences on their relationships. As in previous surveys, time factors were the most common concern - with 36% of respondents mentioning 'lack of time spent together' and another 21% citing 'both partners working full-time' as negative factors that were influencing their relationship. Other negative influences were 'lack of understanding of each other's view' (23%), 'different perspectives/values' (22%) and 'lack of communication' (21%). These time and 'cultural' issues were more commonly mentioned by respondents as negative influences on their relationship than the harder social problems like violence, drugs and alcohol, gambling and unemployment.

The vast majority of respondents (91%) were able to mention things they did to improve their spouse/partner relationship. Reflecting a realistic understanding of some of these key negative influences, the most common things that respondents reported doing to improve their relationship were 'trying to communicate well' (31%) and 'spending time together' (29%).

Marriage and Divorce

When respondents were asked what they thought the main reasons were for people marrying these days, the majority said 'to signify a life long commitment' (68%), 'to make a public commitment to each other' (63%) and 'security for children' (62%).

When asked what the main reasons were for people not to get married nowadays, the top three responses were 'bad previous experience' (72%), 'avoidance of commitment' (67%) and 'strong commitment does not need marriage' (63%).

Balancing Work and Family Life

This continues to be a key issue with the majority of respondents agreeing that finding a balance between work and family life can cause problems in a relationship.

In terms of what is important to people, the vast majority agreed that being a good parent and a good spouse/partner were very important to them. However, there was also fairly high importance attached to economic factors, such as having a paid job and earning a lot of money, and this importance increased since the same questions were asked in 2003. Although family dominates people's perceptions of themselves, economic factors are becoming increasingly important. This is particularly so among younger age groups.

Respondents cited a number of factors or policies that would help them to better balance work and family life. Some of these were factors that could be driven by employers, such as more flexible working hours (42%), the option of part-time work (36%), a change in employer attitude or company culture (26%) and unpaid leave (21%). Others were related more to government policies, such as increased government financial assistance (35%), lower child care fees (21%) and improved access to quality aged care (20%).

One-third of respondents felt that they had no real choice in being able to better balance work and family life.

Relationship Support

The data highlights increasing acceptance of professional relationship support services with the majority of respondents agreeing that to seek help through counselling does not necessarily signify the end of a relationship. The percentage agreeing that they would have no hesitation seeking professional help if their relationship was in trouble increased from 56% in 2001 to 63% in the current survey. Acceptance of professional relationship services was considerably higher among women (69%) than men (52%).

The main resource used to overcome relationship problems was to talk to friends – cited by 48%. Many also mentioned parents (25%), books/magazines/internet (21%) and siblings (20%). Professional services had been used by 19% of respondents.

Awareness of Relationships Australia has increased from 15% in 1998 to 35% in 2006. Awareness was higher among women (42%), among respondents who were separated/divorced (47%) and those with a household income over \$75,000 a year (45%). It was also better known in Queensland (48%), Western Australia (46%) and South Australia (40%).

The Impact of Technology

New communications technology, such as the internet, mobile telephones and cheaper rates for long distance landline services, is having a considerable impact – largely positive – on the relationships of Australians.

In all, 88% of respondents had been able to improve important relationships in their life through the use of new communications technology. The main types used to improve relationships were mobile phones (61%), cheaper long distance calls (60%), internet/email (58%) and SMS text messaging (44%). Although it is the young that are making the most use of new technology, the impact cuts across all age groups with 77% of those aged over 60 using this technology to improve important relationships.

New communications technology has also had a significant impact in relationship formation. Four in ten (40%) respondents have used the new technology to form important relationships in their life. The relationships formed were mainly social, but also romantic and business.

For a significant minority (29%), however, new communications technology had also caused problems in their important relationships. This was particularly the case for the 18-29 age group of whom 45% had experienced relationship problems resulting from new technology – 28% specifically from SMS.

The full report will be available on the website from 12/12/06 www.relationships.com.au

To contact your nearest Relationships Australia service provider, call our nationwide number: 1300 364 277

Or contact the National Office:

Relationships Australia Inc
15 Napier Close
DEAKIN ACT 2600
Tel: (02) 6285 4466
Fax: (02) 6285 4722
Email: natoffice@relationships.com.au

More information can be obtained by visiting our website: www.relationships.com.au

Acknowledgements

Relationships Australia acknowledges the funding support of the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments over the last year to assist us in providing relationship support services.

This report was produced by Relationships Australia National Office based on data collected and analysed by Woolcott Research Pty Ltd. Design by Design Direction.

Relationships Indicators Survey 2006 – © Relationships Australia Inc. www.relationships.com.au.
Call us nationwide 1300 364 277.