

Relationships Australia

2003 Relationship Indicators Survey

Executive Summary

Theme 1: Relationships Central to Australians Lives

With so many competing interests and the ongoing quest for work/life balance, relationships remain central to our lives. Almost 1/3 of Australians rate companionship and friendship as the best thing about their relationship (28%). (This is reflective of the outcomes of a 2002 report titled 'Why Marriages Last' by the Australian Institute of Family Studies).

According to the 2003 survey, being in love (5%) and having a good sense of humour (3%) are less important than honesty/trust (14%) and a caring relationship (13%).



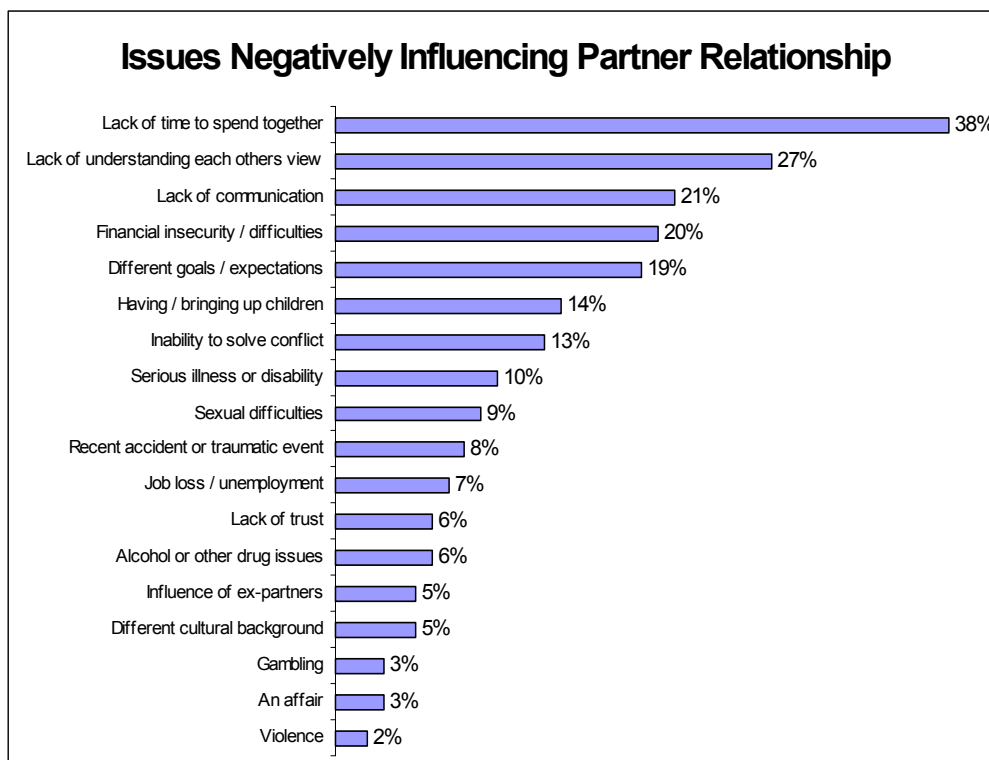
Theme 2: Relationship Nurturing the New Priority

According to the 2003 survey, Australians recognise the importance of nurturing their partner relationships and the need to allocate time and energy to making them successful.

Australians believe that the top three issues negatively influencing relationships are lack of time (38%), lack of understanding (27%) and lack of communication (21%).

Money (20%) and children (14%) also rated as negative influences, but had dropped significantly from the 1998 *Relationship Indicators* survey in which money rated 28% and children 24%.

Relationships Australia believes this introspection may be due to greater uncertainty about our world and the influence of significant external events in recent years. These uncontrollable influences may trigger a desire to look closer and work harder at our interpersonal relationships.



Theme 3: Parenthood Enjoyable for most

Fifty-seven per cent of Australian parents said that watching their children grow and spending time with them are the most enjoyable aspects of being a parent.

This reinforces a refocus on family needs and a 'tending to our own significant relationships' rather than focus on external priorities.

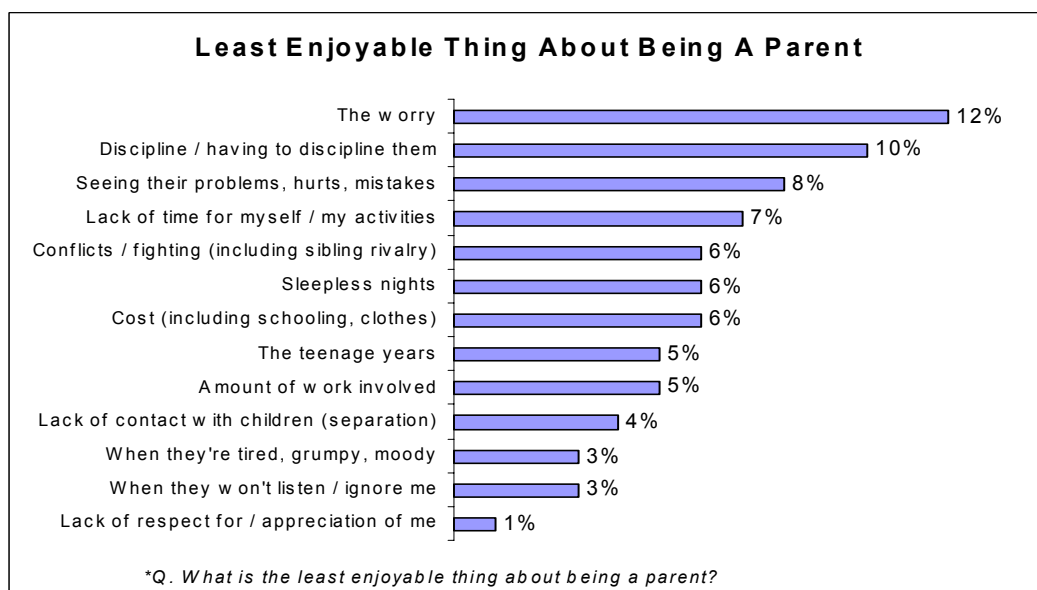
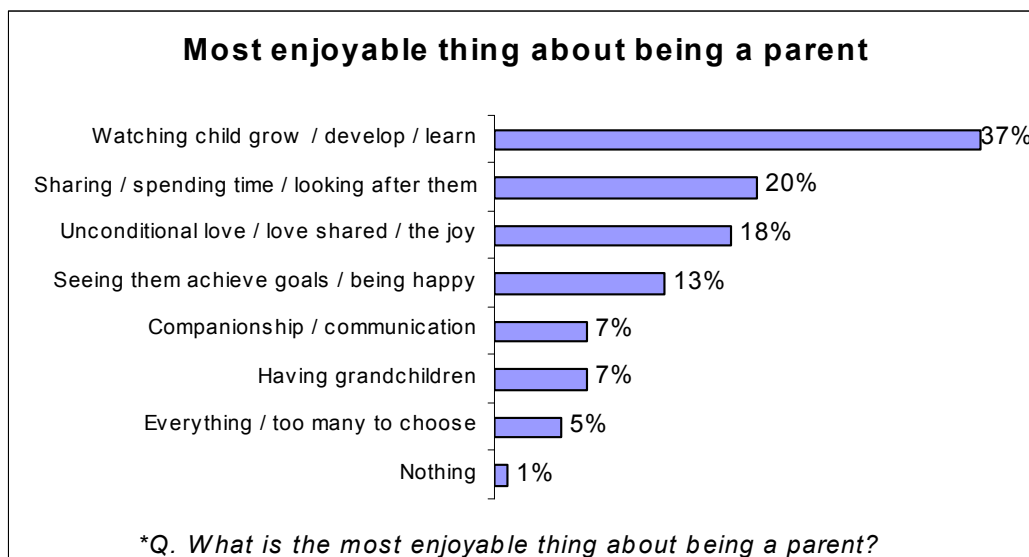
On the negative side, worry about the wellbeing of children (12%) that tops the list for Australian parents, who feel it is the least enjoyable aspect of being

a parent. Obvious things that parents would least enjoy about parenting such as lack of appreciation from children (1%), sleepless nights (6%) and cost (6%) do not rate as highly as worry or the need to discipline children (10%).

Contrary to popular belief, Australian parents do not stop worrying once their children become adults – parental worry is most intense once children pass 18 years.

Relationships Australian believes these findings show that parents fear for their children as they enter the adult world.

They are aware of their children being exposed to more adult themes earlier in their lives and are growing up 'faster'. At the same time, parents worry about a work/family balance that often limits the time they spend positively influencing their children.

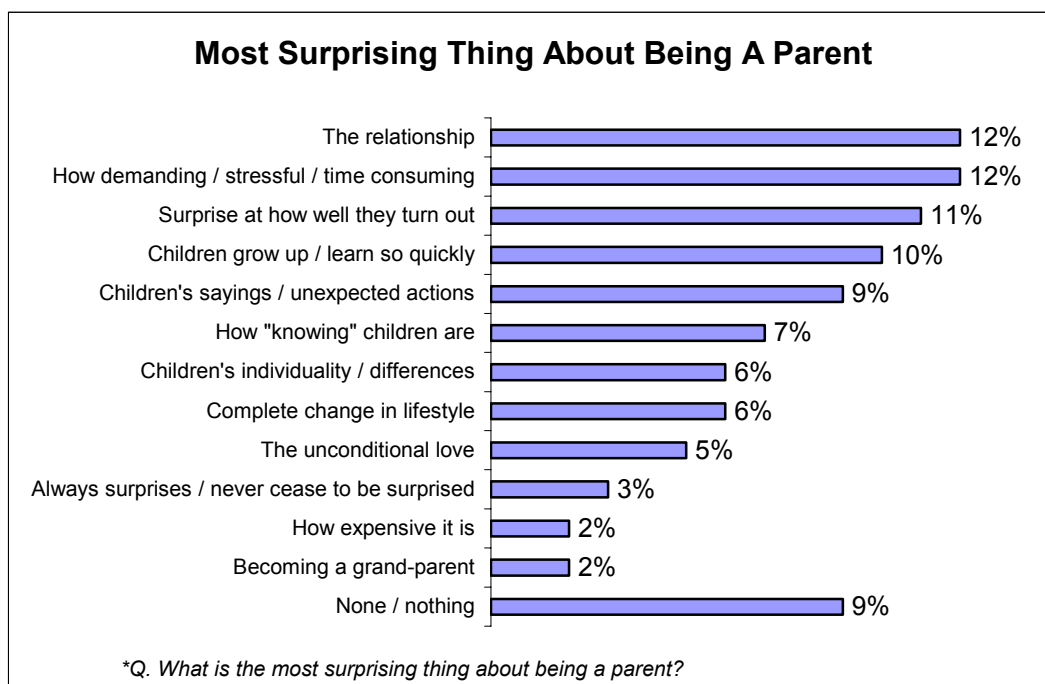


Theme 4: Australian Parents Becoming More Realistic

Australian parents have become more realistic about the expectations of parenthood. They are not surprised that with children come a complete change of lifestyle (6%) and costs (2%).

However, Australians are pleasantly surprised with the relationship they develop with their children (12%) and how well they turn out (11%), indicating a refocus on personal values and the importance of relationships in our lives.

With regard to not having children, not surprisingly, almost half of those surveyed are not parents because they feel they are not ready/too young (47%).



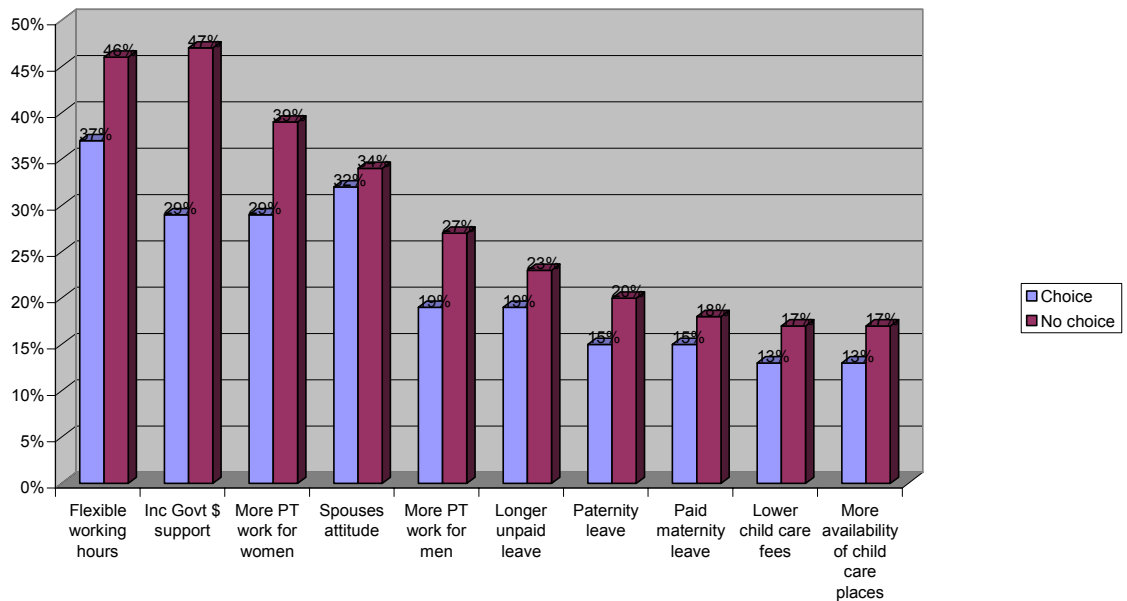
Theme 5: Work/Life Balance Not A Choice for many Australians

Many Australian parents feel they have no real choice regarding their ability to balance work and family (40%).

When asked what would assist redress the balance, the highest ratings went to more flexible working hours (46%) or an increase in government financial support (47%). Another 34% said a change in their spouse's attitude would help achieve the balance and 39% said more part-time work for women.

Relationships Australia believes that these responses reinforce the need for couples to collaborate, to ensure the best possible work/family balance and encourage spouses to get actively involved in the debate.

Balancing work and family: what helps those who feel they have a choice & what those who feel they don't have a choice would like



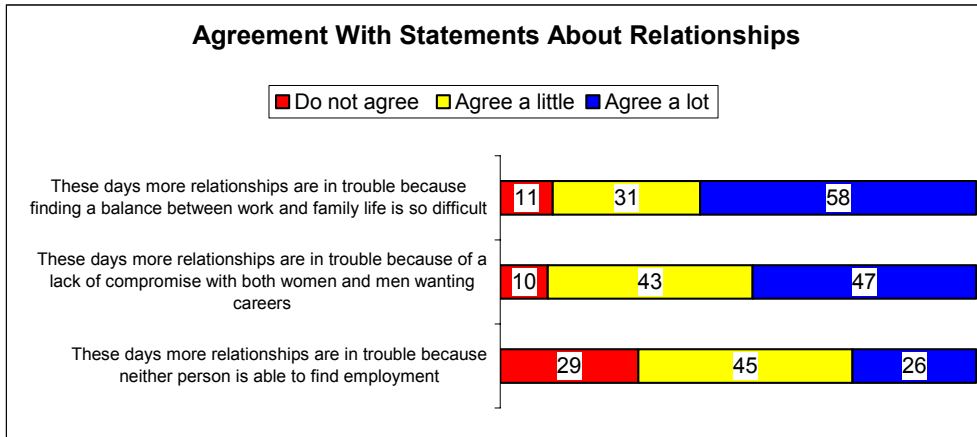
Theme 6: Australians Predict Trouble for Relationships

Australians agree that relationships are in trouble because finding a work/life balance is so difficult (89%). They also agree that a lack of compromise between men and women both wanting careers is putting relationships in jeopardy (90%) because of the difficulty integrating individual goals with the goals of the partnership.

In rural areas, trouble was predicted because neither partner is able to find employment (76.4%). The corresponding figure for urban areas is 67.4%.

Relationships Australia explains that the findings could be encouraging as it may suggest Australians are beginning to recognise the fragility of relationships and the need to return to basic communication and values.

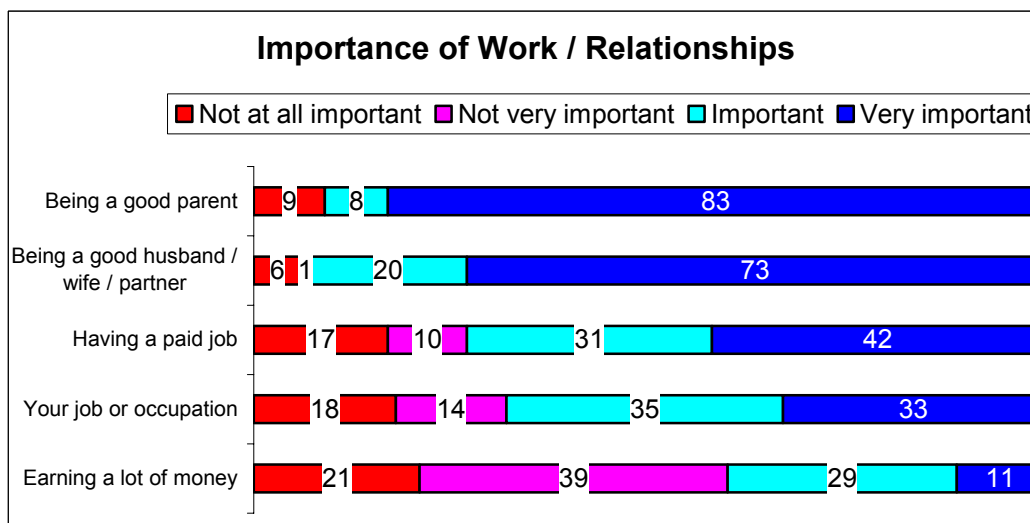
Relationships Australia suggest that our expectations of ourselves and others are changing and we are beginning to understand that we cannot be all things to all people and therefore compromise is an important element in a long-term, sustainable relationship.



Theme 7: Money no Longer Important for Self-Identity

When asked about what determines their self-identity, Australians believe that being a good husband/wife or partner (93%) and being a good parent are the most important (91%) determinants of self-identity.

Australians no longer believe that their job or earning a lot of money is an important way to view themselves. Even among those with a household income over \$75,000, only 13% said the amount one earned was very important.



Theme 8: Birth Rate of 20-somethings Continues to Decline

Of those who are not parents, 58% are aged between 20-29 years. This finding coincides with the latest ABS data which shows that fertility of women aged 20-24 has continued to decline and that over the past 2 decades, fertility in this age group has almost halved.

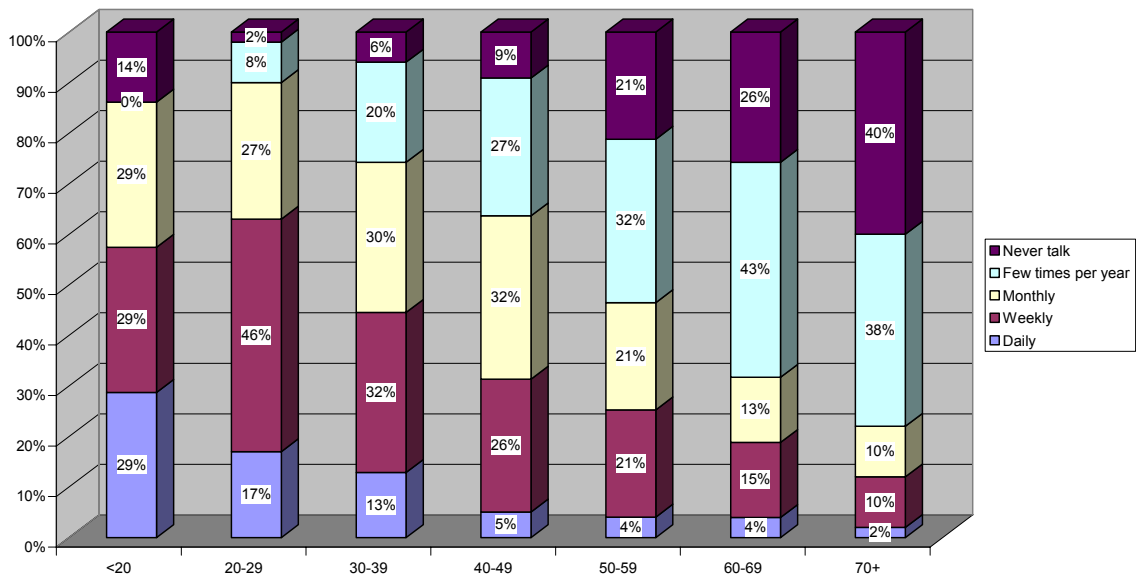
Relationships Australia believes that longer time spent in education, longer time needed to secure a career and delaying partnering all contribute to a delay in child rearing for younger Australians.

Theme 9: Sex an Easy Topic for Twenty-Somethings

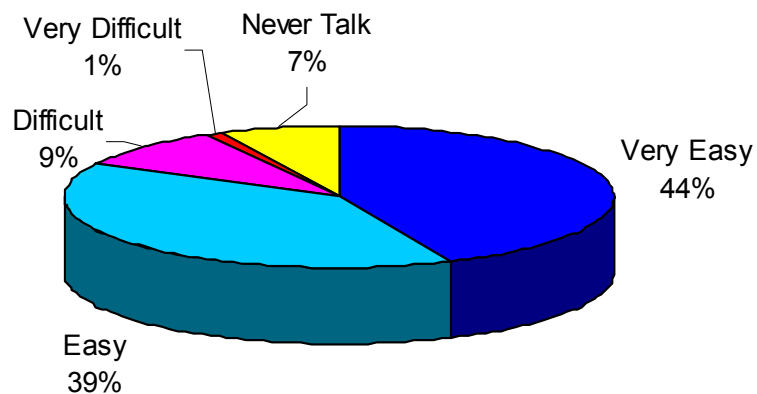
Young Australians find it easy to talk about sex with their partners with **63% of respondents in their 20's saying they talk about sex weekly or daily**. This contrasts with **69% of people in their 60s saying they rarely or never talk about sex**.

Relationships Australia says that young adults are more likely than adults in earlier generations to negotiate with their partners about sex and preferences.

Differences by age in frequency of talking with your partner about sex



Ease of talking to partner about sexual relations



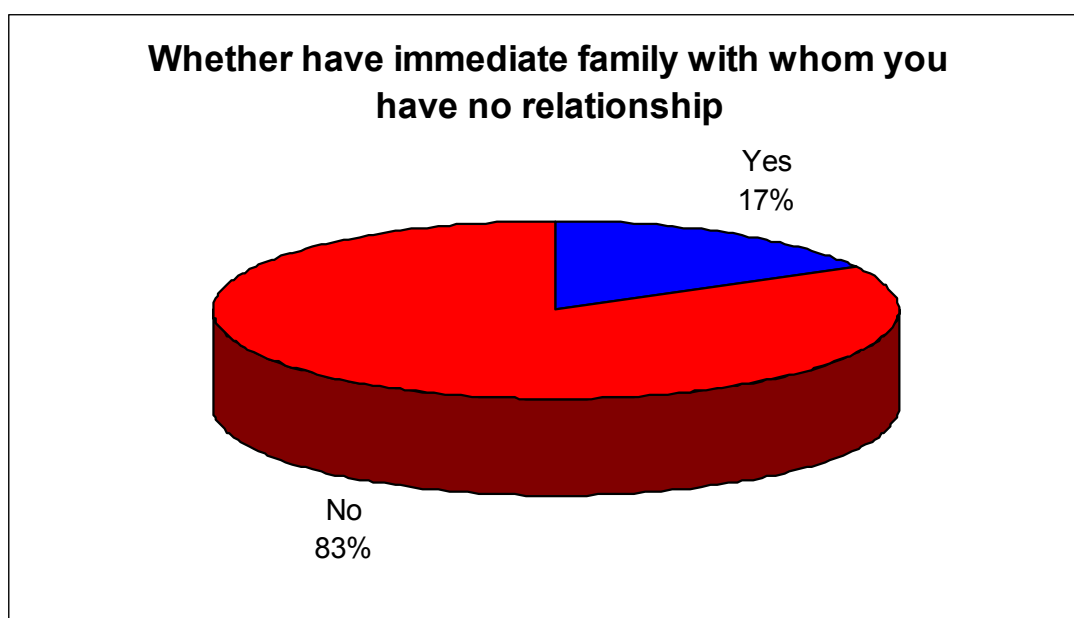
*Q. How difficult is it for you and your partner to talk openly together about your sexual relationship?

Theme 10: Family Estrangement

On face value, the current state of close personal and family relationships appears strong. The majority of adults have both a personal and a family relationship - In fact, on average, adults have 4 such relationships.

However, a significant minority (17%) is estranged from an immediate family member. Most commonly, it is a brother or sister with whom the relationship has broken down. Of those who are estranged, more than half say they have no relationship with one of their siblings.

This result confirms earlier findings from the RA Relationships Indicators survey in 1998 where the relationship most commonly identified as one participants wanted to improve was with a sibling (27%).



People who are separated or divorced are more likely to be estranged from a family member, as with the overall trend, it is most often with a brother or sister.

Amongst those who have a relative with whom they no longer communicate, many would like to renew the relationship (38%). Of those who are estranged from someone other than a spouse (there were 3 such people, and none wanted to change the situation), 45% would like to renew the relationship, if not immediately, then eventually.

However, this still leaves the majority not looking to alter the current situation.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Relationships Australia

All interviews were conducted by telephone. The questionnaire took on average 12 minutes to administer.

In total 1215 interviews were completed. Fieldwork took place in October 2003.

The survey was designed by Relationships Australia and conducted by AC Nielsen.

Interviews were conducted across all states and territories. Sample was drawn by region proportional to population. Within multi-occupant households, a 'last birthday' method of respondent selection was adopted, where by the person in the household who had had a birthday most recently was interviewed.

Data were unweighted.

The total number of interviews by region was as follows:

	CAPITAL CITY	REST OF REGION	REGION TOTAL
NEW SOUTH WALES	257	159	416
VICTORIA	217	82	299
QUEENSLAND	102	123	225
SOUTH AUSTRALIA	68	25	93
WEST AUSTRALIA	88	34	122
TASMANIA	12	17	29
ACT	19	N/A	19
NT	12	N/A	12
TOTAL	775	440	1215

ENDS