



Australian Government

Department of Family and Community Services



## Highlights from the LSAC Wave 1 data

### Who are the LSAC children?

- Most LSAC children live with two biological parents – 89 per cent of the infant cohort and 82 per cent of the 4-5 year old cohort.
- In the infant cohort 39 per cent were the only child in the family; for 4-5 year olds, 11 per cent were still an only child.
- More than 40 per cent of 4-5 year olds and 25 per cent of infants were already in families with more than two children.

### *Employment and income*

- The rate of paternal employment is not related to the age of the study child. Ninety-two per cent of fathers in the infant cohort were employed as were 93 per cent in the 4-5 year old cohort.
- However, the rate of maternal employment was strongly related to the age of the study child. Thirty-nine per cent of mothers in the infant cohort were employed compared to 54 per cent in the 4-5 year old cohort.
- Lone mothers were less likely to be in employment than couple mothers in both cohorts (42 per cent for infants and 57 per cent for 4-5 year olds).
- During the first year of the child's life, 40 per cent of the mothers had resumed or commenced work.
- Most (73 per cent) working mothers were working part-time. Twenty-seven per cent of mothers in both cohorts were working 35 or more hours per week.
- In contrast, 9 out of 10 working fathers were working 35 or more hours per week.

### *Combining work and family*

- Parents had quite a positive view of work – 70 per cent of parents agreed that working made them feel more competent.
- However, taking income into account, around 40 per cent of fathers in both cohorts, indicated that they would like to work fewer hours.
- A lower proportion of mothers wanted to work fewer hours, with just over 20 per cent of mothers of 4-5 year olds and just over 30 per cent of mothers of infants, expressing a preference to work less.

### *Parental income*

- Working fathers earned about the same in both cohorts whereas mothers who were employed earned significantly more in the 4-5 year old cohort than the infant cohort, perhaps reflecting more hours worked as the child gets older.

### *Quality of neighbourhood*

- Nine in ten parents agreed that their neighbourhood was safe and clean and around three-quarters that their neighbourhood had good parks, playgrounds and play spaces.

### *Breastfeeding and weight*

- The proportion of babies who start breastfeeding is over 90 per cent, compatible with the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) dietary guidelines.
- These guidelines aim at having 80 per cent of babies still being breastfed at six months. In both LSAC cohorts only around one-half were still being breastfed at that age.
- The dietary guidelines also promote exclusive breastfeeding to six months of age without the need to introduce additional fluids and solids. Ninety-one per cent of children had started solids before six months of age with 37 per cent starting solids by the age of four months.
- Seventy-nine per cent of 4-5 year olds had a body mass index within the normal range, 15 per cent were overweight and 6 per cent obese.
- Fifty-two per cent of parents of obese children indicated that their child was of "normal weight" or "underweight".

### *Children's diet*

- Dietary guidelines recommend consumption of between one and two servings of fruit and two to four of vegetables each day for children aged four to seven – 16 per cent of 4-5 year olds in LSAC had eaten little or no fresh fruit or vegetables in the previous 24 hours.

### *Childhood injuries*

- Seven per cent of infants and 18 per cent of the 4-5 year old cohort were hurt, injured or had an accident that needed medical attention from a doctor or hospital, in the 12 months preceding the survey.

### *Child care*

- In the month before the survey, 35 per cent of infants had been looked after by someone other than a parent at regular times during the week.
- The most common types of care for infants were grandparents and day care centres.
- The most common reason for using care was for the parents' work or study commitments (80 per cent of those parents using day care centres and 72 per cent of those using grandparent care).

### *Preschool and care use by 4-5 year olds*

- Almost all of the 4-5 year old children (95 per cent) attended a school, kindergarten, preschool or day care centre at least one day a week.

### **How are Australian infants and 4-5 year old children faring overall?**

- The Outcome Index has been created to summarise the overall development of children in LSAC - looks at health and physical development, social and emotional functioning and learning and academic competency.
- Girls in the 4-5 year old cohort showed better outcomes in the learning and social/emotional domains than boys.
- Lower education levels of the primary parent (the mother in 97 per cent of cases) were associated with more negative outcomes and fewer positive outcomes.
- For 4-5 year olds, attendance in care with an education focus (eg. school, preschool, day care with a preschool program) is associated with improved learning scores compared to care settings without an education focus.

### **Parenting infants and 4-5 year old children**

- Most parents (73 per cent in infant cohort and 65 per cent in 4-5 year old cohort) consider themselves to be a better than average parent.
- For the infant cohort, the most positive ratings came from first-time parents.
- For the 4-5 year old cohort the rating for first-time parents was almost identical to that where the child was a second or third child.
- Parents of 4-5 year olds who consider themselves to be more competent at parenting tended to have children with higher scores on the social-emotional development scale.
- Most parents show very high levels of warmth towards the child, high levels of consistency and inductive reasoning and low levels of hostility.

### **How do Australian infants and 4-5 year old children spend their time?**

- Infants spent on average about 13 hours in a 24 hour period asleep; 4-5 year olds an average of 10 and a half hours a day.
- Eighty-nine per cent of 4-5 year old children spent time watching television, a video or a DVD. Of these 89 per cent, the average time spent watching is 2.3 hours per day.
- Sixty-six per cent of the 4-5 year olds children spent time walking, running or doing exercise on an average day.
- Forty-six per cent of infants spent time watching television, a video or a DVD. Of these 46 per cent, the average time spent watching is 1.4 hours per day.
- Not much time is spent by children alone with their father; most time is spent with only their mother or their mother and father.

### *Children's contact with non-resident parents*

- Eleven per cent of infants and 17 per cent of 4-5 year olds had a parent who did not live with them.
- Twenty per cent of children in both cohorts had no contact with the non-resident parent.
- Infants were more likely to have frequent contact (daily or weekly) with their non-resident parent than 4-5 year olds.

The LSAC 2004 Annual Report will be available on the *Growing Up in Australia* website from 16 May: <http://aifs.gov.au/growingup>.