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Work and Family Futures

How young Australians plan to work and care

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Summary

This discussion paper analyses the perceptions of some young Australians about their future paid and unpaid work and childcare plans and aspects of their own early childhood care. It assesses qualitative empirical data collected in two Australian states in late 2003 by means of 21 focus groups comprising Year 6 and Year 11 males and females (aged 10 to 18 years) from high and low socio-economic situations in both urban and rural locations. In total, 93 young people were consulted for the study.

All the young men and women in this study expect to have a paid job when they finish school and study. None of the young women anticipates being consistently dependent on the support of her partner. Many young men and women look forward to enjoying their jobs while putting their skills and abilities to work. The overwhelming majority – 90 per cent – intend to have children. It seems that the anticipation of childlessness amongst this group at least (about ten per cent) is much lower than that actually predicted for their cohort in the population (around 25 per cent), suggesting that the explanations for declining fertility may lie more in disappointed expectations than in early, planned childlessness.

Most young people in this study assume they will live in dual-earner couple households and share the care of their children with their partner. These objectives can be expected to drive a continued decline in the traditional male breadwinner household and continued growth in dual-earner households.

Although most young men and women plan shared parental care of their children, some young men take it for granted that their partners will assume this role. By comparison, a much smaller proportion of young women plan traditional maternal care while a larger proportion foresee a pattern of intermittent maternal care, shared with extended family, partners and formal childcare. The plans of these young people with respect to the division between work and childcare demonstrate some significant mismatches between the genders.

While young women anticipate working around their care responsibilities, the reverse is true of many young men who expect to engage in care around their work with plans for childcare being contingent upon job flexibilities. They will 'lean against the door' of workplace flexibility, but if it does not fall open they will leave the nurturing to their partners, the default carers.

Many young women hold high expectations that their own mothers will back them up in their labour market participation by taking care of their grandchildren. There are few signs of 'A New Australian Wife' who, having witnessed her mother's efforts to hold down a job while performing the bulk of the child raising, is intent upon finding a wealthy male breadwinner to earn while she devotes her time to the children. It is likely that the plans of young people with respect to extended family care and shared care with partners will be sorely tested by reality – both in terms of workplace flexibilities such as leave, and availability of grandparents. This will probably drive continuing growth in the demand for formal childcare.

Around a third of the children and young people in our study had experienced formal childcare. Two thirds of those who had been in long day care remembered it positively in contrast to the memories of those who attended out-of-school-hours care, which were less positive. Issues of quality are very significant for these young people whose experience of childcare, whether agreeable or disagreeable, is positively associated with their plans to use formal care for their own children.

Three models for the allocation of domestic work are evident from the ideas of these young people: shared, outsourced or performed exclusively by women. There is evidence of tactical planning on the part of both sexes as they attempt to manipulate the situations that they want. Male resistance to housework is strong. Young women, however, are keen to share and know they will have to 'start strong and stay strong' to persuade their partners to agree.

Over half of those in the focus groups would like to see domestic work generally shared, an impulse which is stronger amongst young women than it is amongst young men who, in surprisingly large proportions, expect that their partners will do it ('fingers crossed' as one put it). A small proportion of young women anticipate this and some hope young men will 'mature into' housework. Thus a significant mismatch of preferences is evident, with a gender struggle over housework likely to persist. A quarter of young women look to the market for help with domestic work, and this is likely to fuel continuing growth in the commodification of all forms of domestic work – pre-prepared food, childcare, cleaning, gardening and so on.

A significant group of young men in both higher and lower income groups intend to share housework, but there are signs of a planned evasiveness - a hope that they can find a wife who will do it, that women won't notice unequal sharing or that their monitoring will weaken with time. These trends suggest that inequality in housework is likely to be very long lived, that gender troubles around domestic work will persist and that, consequently, the market in domestic services can be expected to continue to expand strongly.

Working class and young country women are more likely to espouse equal sharing of housework, while women from higher socio-economic areas appear more resigned, or will do it themselves to ensure high domestic standards and feelings of virtuous accomplishment. Young working class women tend to employ a more assertive discourse of fairness. For these young women, the institutions that shape their labour market and care transitions remain critical. A supportive regime of parental leave, integrated quality part-time work and quality accessible childcare is of primary significance. Without supports that facilitate their work/care transitions, young women's responsibility for children will jeopardise their labour market position, and they will be forced to make care 'choices' from limited options.

1. Future work and care: Why it matters and how we studied it

1.1 Gender troubles

Much has been written about the need for the labour market to be flexible and responsive but there has been little said about the likely preferences of workers in ten to 15 years time. This report considers how young people plan to organise their own work and households in the decades ahead. For several reasons, this issue is of particular interest to the current debates on work and family, childcare and fertility.

Some key social issues are highlighted by exploring the thinking of young people. Fertility rates are predicted to continue to fall in coming decades, a decline in total fertility that some in Australia find alarming (Costello 2002). If this expected decline is the result of clear preferences for childlessness, then it might be predicted that the current work/family pressures will diminish over time as a natural expression of the preferences of new generations of citizens. If, on the contrary, preferences for both work and children reveal a desire for children that is disappointed later in life, then the reasons for this disappointment come into focus. Further, if the next generation plans a continuation of recent trends in favour of paid work and dual earner/carer households – amongst those most pressured for time – then the work/family policy challenges Australia currently faces can be expected to intensify.

The intentions of coming generations with respect to children and paid work will affect the future demand for childcare – whether formal or informal - to supplement parental care. At present, many women work a ‘double day’, holding down a paid job and simultaneously shouldering a disproportionate share of domestic work (Bittman and Pixley 1997). The expectations and plans of young people will shape whether future generations of women experience more or less pressure arising from the double day, and from unpaid care of children, households and communities. The double day is therefore of interest to policy makers.

The issues of domestic work, and the distribution of care and paid jobs, are causing gender troubles in a significant number of Australian homes (Pocock 2003). Current trends among adult men and women are out of step with long established cultures that have shaped work, workplaces and homes, and institutions that have not kept pace with new family and workplace demands (Watson *et al*. 2003). The preferences and expectations of young people as they enter work and care are relevant to the continuity and intensity of this clash between behaviours, cultures and institutions (Pocock 2003).

Beyond policy, the issues of domestic and paid work and care of dependents have long been of interest to sociologists and feminists. Some commentators assume that, as young women assert their right to equality in both the workplace and the home, a slow and inevitable convergence will occur in both the sharing of domestic work between men and women and in participation rates in paid work (Mackay 2001). Others are less sanguine, pointing to a cloaking discourse of ‘pseudo-mutuality’ that clouds a true assessment of men’s under-participation in unpaid work (Bittman and Pixley 1997; Bittman, 1998). As long as women experience an over-allocation of unpaid work while increasingly involved in paid work, then much of the promise of second wave feminism is, at best, deferred (Oakley 1976). Instead, women ‘liberated’ into

economic independence by means of a paid job must carry the burden of the double day and over-responsibility for all forms of unpaid and paid care.

The paper falls into six parts:

- the remainder of this section sets out the method for collecting data;
- Section 2 examines the job and parenting plans of young people;
- Section 3 discusses the implications of these plans for family type and for childcare;
- Section 4 outlines the experiences of these young people in childcare and how this affects their own plans; and
- The final section explores young people's plans and perceptions in relation to housework, prior to drawing some conclusions.

1.2 Method and data

The methodology for this study is set out in detail in Pocock and Clarke (2004). To summarise, the perceptions, views and plans of 93 young people were collected in late 2003 in 21 small focus groups. Each person in each focus group was individually asked their views on the key questions in the study (except in one case, where the focus group was cut short by a school excursion). In this way, the methodology permits quantitative analysis of individual views, and qualitative analysis of discussion among participants.

Attended by both a note taker and a facilitator, the focus groups were recorded in two ways as they were conducted – on tape and by the note taker. The tapes were then transcribed and, based on the notes, we identified each response made by the pseudonym of the speaker. In this way we could assess the proportion of viewpoints held amongst participants as well as review various ideas and different perspectives as participants exchanged opinions. This method enabled the views of each young person in the study to be considered in the context of family, income and geographical situation.

Table 1 sets out focus group details. Stratified sub-groups of schools were selected from high and low socio-economic groups in two states, based on their score on the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (one of the five measures of disadvantage published by the ABS).[1] Parents of students in these schools were then approached to permit their children to participate (following ethics approval by

[1] A score of 1000 on this index is the Australian average. We selected schools located in areas above the average for 'Comfort' and 'Leafy' Schools and below it for 'Strive' and 'Struggle' Schools. This is an imprecise means of approaching the income level in young people's homes. In fact, a wide range of income households was represented in most groups, for example children in Struggle High spoke of being 'comfortable'. On the whole, however, households in the lower income schools tended to be poorer on average than those in higher income schools, and vice versa.

education departments and the University of Adelaide)[2] and focus groups were organised amongst the children of those parents who agreed that their child could take part.

The schools are described by five names that are suggestive of socio-economic and geographic location:

- Strive (western Sydney)
- Comfort (south eastern Adelaide)
- Country (country South Australia)
- Struggle (northern Adelaide)
- Leafy (northern Sydney)

The two higher income schools are Leafy and Comfort. The two lower income schools are Struggle and Strive.

Table 1 Focus group details

Location	No. groups	No. participants	Per cent
Country Primary	2	5	
Country High	2	8	
Struggle Primary	2	7	
Struggle High	2	9	
Strive Primary	2	9	
Strive High	2	7	
Comfort Primary	2	9	
Comfort High	3	15	
Leafy Primary	2	12	
Leafy High	2	12	
Total	21	93	
Higher income areas	9	48	52
Lower income areas	8	32	34
Country	4	13	14
Female only groups	9		
Male only groups	7		
Mixed sex groups	5		
Females		57	61
Males		36	39
Family Type			
Two-parent, dual earner		53	57
Two-parent, single earner		20	22
Two-parent, no earner		2	2
Single-parent earner		13	14
Single-parent no earner		5	5
Total participants		93	100

[2] Two levels of formal ethical approval were necessary, and five levels of permission were required before focus groups could proceed (university, education system, school, child's parents, and child).

Five of the focus groups were mixed sex while 16 were single sex (nine female groups and seven male groups). All the groups were age-specific, either Year 6 (11-12 years old) or Year 11 (16-18 years old).[3] Focus group discussions ran for between 60 and 90 minutes (except for two that were shorter (35 minutes) because of a school excursion) and were taped and transcribed.

Students in the focus groups comprised a good mix of family types and included young people living in blended households, in sole-parent households, in couple dual-earner households, and in traditional 'breadwinner' couple households with one earner – usually the father. Children from non-English speaking backgrounds were well represented in the sample, while Aboriginal children probably were not (we did not identify any specifically). The sample under-represents males and children whose parents are unemployed.

A set of open-ended questions was used to stimulate discussion but these were liberally pursued in relation to the themes of the research. Participants chose, or were allocated, pseudonyms and the identities of schools and individual participants, along with any other identifying details, have also been concealed.

Focus groups allow 'deep' analysis through the pursuit of complex issues within complex contexts, and they expose ambivalence and unanticipated factors rather more than closed questionnaires or even interviews. They allow an exchange of views amongst participants not always permitted by interviews and they rely upon questions that are asked intensively, one on one.

However, focus groups also have weaknesses. Some participants tend to 'perform' their views with some exaggeration, and there were signs of this in at least one mixed-sex group. Nor do they always elicit the gamut and balance of views representative of the larger population. We attempted to address this in several ways by:

- working through schools selected randomly within socio-economic groups (rather than, for example, a snowballing method working from a non-random group of individuals);
- randomly choosing a rural location; and
- including a sizeable number of people in relevant categories (by sex, rural/urban, socio-economic status and age).

However, the data can only be considered indicative of a range of views in the general population of 10-12 and 16-18 year olds. Their best use is as qualitative illumination of various points of view.

[3] Two of the older focus groups were actually conducted amongst Year 10 students because of exam constraints for year 11s in the school.

2. Having children, having a job: Who will, won't and when?

2.1 Having a job

All the young men and women in this study expect to work in paid jobs when they finish school and study. Most named an occupation that they were already interested in. Not one stated their intention of finding a breadwinner partner instead of supporting themselves by going to work, although most readily assumed that they would have a partner when asked to visualise their futures.

Many young people are positive about their future jobs and anticipate being skilled workers who will enjoy aspects of their work. Many recognised the positive effects jobs had for their parents and understood that their parents enjoyed elements of their work, especially the social connections and friendships that arise from the workplace. Many also described the pleasure their parents derived from using their skills and experience, from the tasks they did and the contributions they made (Pocock and Clarke 2004). The children hoped to share in the positive pleasures of their own future jobs, but they also recognised some of the more negative effects work had their parents.

On the other hand, some were concerned about being 'locked up' in a job later in life. Young people in Sydney felt they should be having fun now because 'you get locked up later'. Vanessa described her father, in the insurance industry, as a workaholic:

> *It's like his whole life … he puts so much emphasis on it, and just from seeing that, I don't reckon I'm going to get locked up in my work. Hopefully I'll find something that I want to do, so it won't be like working, it will be just like having fun (Vanessa, 16, Leafy High)*

Young people in both high and lower socio-economic areas hope for rewarding work, and a job they will enjoy. Many expect to be skilled. Where they have had a 'workaholic' or very hard working parent, many define their work patterns *against* those of that parent, hoping for work that allows them to 'have a life' (Pocock and Clarke 2004).

2.2 Having children

The overwhelming majority of young people in the study, 90 per cent (83 of the sample),are planning to have children, so the issue of combining paid work with care of children is going to be significant in their lives. Some are very specific ('two girls and one boy'), while others are less certain. Concerns about money and the difficulty of affording children are also considerations for some. Of the nine remaining participants, one boy said he definitely would not be having children, while two young men and six young women said 'maybe'. Greater ambivalence is evident amongst women in our group and all of it is found amongst those aged 16-18. Every young person in the Year 6 focus groups, aged 10-12 years, planned to have children.

2.3 A fertility gap?

The actual level of childlessness amongst the young people in the focus groups is likely to be higher than they now anticipate. While only ten per cent expect to be

childless now at this time of their lives, the predicted level of childlessness could be above 25 per cent for this group as it matures (ABS 2000, p. 38), suggesting that either the preferences of young people change or that their hopes will be disappointed over the next ten to twenty years. The size of the gap between *predicted* and *preferred* fertility, and the factors that might explain it, are of considerable interest to the current fertility debate. It is clear that many of these young people will wait until they have completed higher education, travelled and established their careers, and found secure housing before contemplating children. This will tend to increase the age at which young women, in particular, have their first child, a situation which is likely to be associated with a lower fertility rate as many then find it more difficult to become pregnant.

Some explanations indicative of such an outcome are evident from young people's discussion about having children. Many are tentative about future parenting, even those who expect to have children. They mention financial concerns, a desire for stability before having kids, concern about the loss of time for themselves or with their partners, risk of loss of their careers (especially women), and concern about the end of 'partying' implicit in parenting (one young man). Financial and security issues are especially to the fore: 'you need to get established first'. Financial issues seem more prominent in the minds of this group of young people than is suggested in earlier large surveys, for example the 1981 and 1996 surveys of young Australians aged 18-34 and 25-50 analysed by Weston and Qu (2001).

Shapiro Barrera has argued that a new generation of young women in America are choosing against their own mothers' working and caring lives in favour of being home-based mothers who are supported by well-off young men (Shapiro Barrera 2004). Our study revealed few signs of this, although a couple of young women mentioned the concern that their mothers, combining work and care, seldom have time to themselves. There is little evidence in support of the possibility that, at this point in their lives, the next generation of young women intend to refuse the work and family terms experienced by their mothers and are looking for a wealthy breadwinner as a way of avoiding them.

Of the nine participants who were uncertain about having children or who had decided against it, only two were from lower socio-economic areas with the remainder from the higher socio-economic groups. This is consistent with the higher fertility that currently prevails in lower socio-economic areas (Newman 2004). Uncertainty regarding the decision to have children was higher amongst young women: six of the nine who were uncertain or negative were female and all of these were from higher socio-economic areas.

Mike from Leafy High was very clear about financial issues. His father had told him that he and his siblings had cost 'about $250,000'. Although initially scathing about having children because he wanted to 'be rich' instead, he felt that children were not entirely out of the picture however. But like many young people (especially those in Sydney), his main concern was about money:

> *Basically you wouldn't want to have kids for the first few years of your adult life because you need to get yourself started, you know what I mean – house, wife, furniture, all that other stuff, and when you've got kids, where are you going to put them? You've got to pay for babysitting, pay for all this crap. (Mike, 17, Leafy High)*

In the same group, Smithy plans to defer having kids until he has 'done partying' which he considers he can do for a lot longer than the young women in the group: 'until I'm 50'. Young women in the same northern Sydney group mention concerns about being financially secure before having children, and young women from the western suburbs of Sydney agree, as did young men like Jack from western Adelaide:

> *I don't want to start too early … anytime after 25 is good. Get yourself settled down first. And then think about it (Jack, 15, Struggle High)*

A number of young people expect to make their work and fertility decisions mutually with their partners, a mutuality which would condition their choices:

> *I'd have kids. I don't know I'd probably still want to work if I had a job which I liked obviously, and, as for my partner, I would not want to make any kind of decision [for her]. (Claus, 15, Struggle High)*

Claus and his partner would work it out together, and William concurred, wondering whether he needed children if he and his partner were already happy:

> *Very much the same as Claus: make decisions together. That's if I was to have children, which - I don't know - they just seem a bit too much. Really they become a financial issue … And if you're happy in your life as it is with your partner and with a job if you love it, which I hope I would, why would you need the extra satisfaction for raising new life? Be quite happy [as you are]. (William, 15, Struggle High)*

This discussion suggests that most of these young people – at least at this stage of their lives – anticipate having both a paid job and children in the future, a situation that is fairly consistent between sexes and income groups. Some hesitancy about having children is already evident amongst young women and those in higher socio-economic areas, however. This discussion is indicative of a continuing juggling of work and family amongst a new generation of carers, most of whom anticipate a dual-earner couple household.

3. Having children: juggling jobs and care

3.1 Who will do the caring?

We asked the young people in our survey to consider how they would care for their children given their ambitions to combine paid work with raising a family. The most common solutions can be sorted into five approaches, as set out in Table 2.

Table 2 Young people's plans for care of children (%)

	Males	Females	Persons
Sharing between partners	39	40	40
Intermittent maternal care	15	28	23
Traditional maternal care	36	16	24
External care by family or formal institutions	9	14	12
Paternal care	0	2	1
Total (%)	100	100	100

Note: Total number of young people whose plans for care of children were known = 83.

Source: Focus groups. This table excludes ten young people whose preferences are unknown. While this list comprises the dominant forms of care indicated through discussions, many young people plan to supplement their main option with others, for example, shared parental care might be backed up with formal external childcare (see discussion in Section 4 below).

These data are only indicative given the small sample, but they show that for the 83 young people whose preferences are known, the form of care most commonly chosen is shared parental care. This is the preference of around 40 per cent of both young men and young women. A sizeable proportion of young men (nearly four in ten) prefer traditional maternal care: that is, female partners at home caring for young children while males have jobs. A much smaller number of young men have a preference for 'intermittent' maternal care: that is, their wives working and taking leave around young children and their jobs, 'backed up' by male partners, childcare or extended family, what might be called a 'modified traditional' household type (Pocock 2003).

While similar proportions of young women and young men prefer shared care, young women do not reflect men's preferences for traditional maternal care: only a small number of young women nominate traditional maternal care (eight of the 50 young women). Rather, they see themselves as intermittent carers who take time off work, for example when babies are born, and perhaps work part-time in preschool years or rely on the support of their own mothers and paid childcare.

Care by others outside the family is less preferred by both sexes with most young people favouring familial care, though a few would seek to combine this with some external care as we discuss in Section 4. Only one young woman anticipates her male partner caring for children while she works, and no young men envisage this.

3.2 A further decline in male breadwinning households

Household structures contain implications for employment and care arrangements. To the extent that our focus groups are representative, Table 2 suggests that, if their preferences are realized, present trends are likely to be intensified. Male breadwinning households, currently a third of all households with children (Pocock 2003) will shrink while dual-earner households with children, around 61 per cent at present, will increase. Of course the data are only indicative and may not be reliable for the whole population but they suggest that the trend towards dual-earning households is likely to increase to around three quarters of all households with children while those comprising the traditional form of male breadwinner/female carer will continue to decrease to around a quarter, even taking into account those young people who will divorce and live in sole parent/sole earner households. This suggests that the pressures of combining work and family, which are exacerbated by the growth in busy dual-income households, will extend to a growing proportion of household types in Australia. It is these households that are most exposed to time-pressures and to a clash between work and care (Jacobs and Gerson 1998, 2001; Bittman and Rice 2002). The pressures on work and family balance are likely to intensify rather than moderate.

Half as many young women as young men favour the male breadwinner structure of work and care, suggesting a significant mismatch between genders on this issue. If these inclinations are maintained, the outcome of the contest between women and men with diverging preferences is hard to predict.

We now turn to a detailed discussion of the ways in which these structures of work and care are expected to be played out.

3.3 Shared care between partners

The sharing approach to work and care involves contributions from both partners. It might be accomplished by alternating care with a partner, or by both taking time out of paid work as Smithy imagines:

> *I think it will pretty much depend on the financial situation. When I have kids I would love to be able to take a few years off and not work and spend it with my kids and with my wife and just starting a family and being there for my kids for the first few years of their life. But then I'd definitely go back to work when they start school, but I'd make sure I was there for them in the evenings, help them with their homework and on the weekends, take them to sporting activities and all that, and when they're older and think I'm just boring and not cool, let them do their own thing, but still try and sneak in some quality time. (Smithy, 17, Leafy High)*

Adam has similar hopes:

> *When they're young you could probably try not to work as much, so someone is there most of the time to help. When they're older you can work more after they've developed, I suppose. (Adam, 16, Country High)*

Some make it clear that their preferences are contingent. Smithy says that if the financial situation is right, his preferences may be relevant. Similarly, Adam will 'try' not to work too much. The provisional nature of the choices of these young men is

echoed by others, suggesting that Adam and Smithy are aware that their preferences could be constrained by institutions that might make achieving them difficult. These young men, like many others, are keen to be active fathers. Their sincerity is evident. However, they plan to lean against the door to workplace flexibility (for example, seeking time off their jobs or part-time work) but where it does not fall open – and they expect it may not – they are ready to concede. Their participation in caring is conditional: '*If* I can do it…'. Their preferences are fragile and perhaps inadequate in the face of even moderate resistance. The default is female care.

Some young men do not think that they can reasonably rely upon their partners to stay at home 'doing it all' and, like Smithy and Adam, many express a strong desire to be active fathers. Kevin from the country plans to spend time with his children and to share in care, housework and mutual decision-making:

> *If the children are younger, you probably want to spend time with them. I guess later you wouldn't put it on her that she has to sit at home and do all the housework. If she's got a passion or a desire to do a job that she wants to do, then fair enough, she can make that decision herself. You can't rule over her and say 'You stay at home and do this housework before the end of the day, look after the kids'. You've got to share the workload so she can do what she wants. (Kevin, 17, Country High)*

In Sydney, Peter also favours shared care so that children get 'both sides of genders':

> *I believe that both mum and dad should cut down, like, the same amount of hours so it's not just one side, just like giving all their love and then just the dad or the mum on the side they come in every night or something. I don't think that really works. I think while they are growing up they need both sides of genders put into the kids. (Peter, 16, Leafy High)*

In Adelaide Karl, a younger boy, wants to share responsibility. He 'hopes' for flexible working time, both for himself and his partner:

> *I suppose I would work and try and work hard so I can have flexible time so I could spend time with kids, and if my wife does work I would hope it would be flexible so she could also spend time with the kids while I'm working and vice versa. And hopefully not make them walk home from school too much. (Karl, 11, Comfort Primary)*

Zac is also ambivalent about how much flexibility he will have to undertake the kind of alternating care he would like:

> *If I could, I'd try and work when she's not working. (Zac, 12, Strive Primary)*

Like Adam, Karl and Zac will 'try'. At Strive Primary, three of the five young people plan to share care, while one expects to work while her husband stays home because 'I don't like being stuck at home sometimes'. Lee, a young woman in the same group, intends to work on weekends while her husband works during the week, with both doing housework when at home. Coco also proposes to alternate both paid and unpaid work:

I could work Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays and my husband could work Monday and Fridays and sometimes weekends and we could share it out and spend time with the children, if we had children. (Coco, Strive Primary)

Plans to share care are common in both Sydney and Adelaide and across income groups:

Well, I can be out in the morning when I drop off my kids at a really nice school or at the baby care thingy – what do they call it – childcare? And then I can go to work and I can come back, and my husband can go and work and come and pick the children up, and then I can come back at night and then we could all be together! (Brittany, 12, Leafy Primary)

If I had children under five then I'd probably just rearrange the times if my husband and I were both working. We'd have separate times so one of us was always home with the kids unless they were at kindy or something. (Sarah, 16, Comfort High).

Many young women from higher income areas intend to maintain a connection to the labour market, believing that women outside it are bored. They want to use their skills and education, and to earn and take pleasure in paid work. The schemes of Sarah and Amy to interleave care around their jobs, and to share it with their partners, reflect this concern and affect the timing of their children:

The same as Sarah. I wouldn't want to drop my job completely … because, I don't know, after studying I wouldn't want to drop my whole career just for kids. So I probably won't have kids heaps early. (Amy, 17, Comfort High)

Amy's group discussed the dilemma that occurs when 'you love your job and you have kids':

What if that's your ideal job and you want kids? (Susie, 16, Comfort High)

It depends how much you love it. (Amy, 17, Comfort High)

And if you can't get your job back, then you're screwed. You have no money and then, you might get a job you don't really like. (Susie, 16, Comfort High.

Interviewer: So it depends on how much you like your job?

And how much you like your children! (Chanel, 17, Comfort High)

Echoing this complex weighing up, Melissa at Leafy High in Sydney does not want to 'give up all my dreams of a career because of children'; Aislan is concerned both about her mother's lack of time for herself and the loss of freedom that having a child might mean for her. Most of the young women from higher income areas intend to have professional jobs and either to share housework or to find outside help with it. They are less certain about having children and they are much more concerned about issues like careers and sharing than young women from Strive school. In addition, they have much lower expectations of support from their own parents with childcare.

3.4 Intermittent maternal care

Many young men consider that their female partner will look after their children 'around' whatever work she might do, and some young women concur, adopting an 'intermittent' approach to care. For example, Ellie at Leafy High, who loves cars and expects to marry a mechanic, plans to follow her mother's pattern of being at home when her children are young and then doing part-time work when they go to school, building up to full-time work as they get older. She assumes her husband will be working full-time: 'he'll be doing the cars'. When it comes to housework, Ellie is clear that her husband will not be doing any. Instead she is planning on outside help – she will have a cleaner.

Many young women at Strive Primary resolve to work 'around' their children, and they expect their mothers to take over when they return to work, or when they or their partners cannot care for children themselves. Similarly Binh, having discussed things with her partner, would work out which days they are able to devote to care and 'when we're doing our job, we can give [our child] to a relative to look after'. Emma would 'make up a roster or timetable so then it will be easy and our parents will look after the kids' (Emma, 11, Strive Primary).

They have clear ideas about maternity leave:

> *I'll have a year off or something so I can look after them. (Sarah, 11, Strive Primary)*

> *I would be working and he could work as well, and then my mum could look after the kids as well … When I first have the kids I can just be on maternity leave for a year or something so I could look after them. (Haley, 12, Strive Primary)*

The expectations of these young women about maternity leave may be in advance of current Australian standards, which give a year's unpaid leave only to those with at least 12 months service with their existing employer, and some paid maternity leave to only about a third of working women (HREOC 2002).

This intermittent approach to care places initial responsibility at least with wives and mothers, and certainly they are assumed, by and large, to be the organisers of care. In these households, maternal care is the automatic default if men cannot obtain the flexibility they seek. For example, Rove hopes for a pattern of alternation with his partner, but if that is not possible, his wife will do it:

> *Yeah, all right, if I could work part-time then I would look after the kid or kids sometimes, and my wife would look after [them]. But if I was full-time, my wife would probably look after them. (Rove, 12, Comfort Primary)*

Once again, Rove's choices are contingent upon flexibility at work as he anticipates that he may not be able to find part-time work. Many young people's plans rely upon flexibility at work for *both* partners, but if it fails to materialise, then the default is maternal care. The implication is that, without improved workplace flexibility for women *and* men, maternal care will persist as the dominant type, regardless of maternal paid work patterns and regardless of the predilections of both men and women. Thus the preference is shaped and made contingent by institutional possibilities and its realisation is dependent upon the institutional paradigm. It is

likely that institutions will continue to dominate these preferences if current patterns of men's work are any indication. Young men's wishes to be active fathers and to share care may be wistful hopes in the face of determining realities.

3.5 Traditional maternal care

In addition to the pattern of shared or intermittent maternal care is the traditional breadwinner model, with men earning and women caring (and often earning as well). As we have seen, young men are more than twice as likely to choose this option as are young women. Bob is clear that his wife will be the primary carer, though he hopes to 'be there' for his kids 'as much as possible' and he sees that half care might be a possibility for him:

> *I think my wife, she would take care of them I suppose half or most of the time and I would be there for the kids as much, as often as possible. (Bob, 11, Comfort Primary)*

Sebastian opts for the traditional, but knows that he may need luck on his side if he is to get what he wants:

> *Fingers crossed - in my situation - I'd probably, with the kids, let my wife be at home, be a housewife, so when I come back from work she'd have the food ready, the house nice and clean just for me to relax and spend time with my kids and all that. (Sebastian, 17, Strive High)*

Even Sebastian, however, wants time with his children – in a clean house and after everyone has been fed.

Some young women also nominate traditional maternal care. For example, Sarah agrees with the other four young women from Struggle High when she opts for the traditional model:

> *I'd like to be able to stay home with the kids when they're young and that, in the first years of school, so I can take them to school and be there when they're vulnerable and little. And then have my husband working and that. (Sarah, 15, Struggle High)*

Acceptance of the model of full-time traditional maternal care, however, generally anticipates some maternal attachment to the labour market. The mothers of three of the five young women in this Struggle High group were now in paid work but, when their children were young, they had looked after them. Their daughters also expected to have a job before children, and to return to work after them. At Comfort High, Ann doesn't want to use childcare. Her children could be looked after by whichever partner 'actually wants to' but in the end it will probably be her:

> *I would be happy enough to stay home if I could be secure that my job would still be there. But if it wasn't going to still be there, I'd just have to work part-time or something. (Ann, 16, Comfort High)*

Like others in her group, she is concerned that her job remains open while she has time off; if it does not, then she will work part-time. Once again, her preferences foreshadow institutional limitations, in this case institutional refusal of extended leave which would keep Ann in the labour market when she might prefer to be at home full-time. Amanda is also concerned to keep her foothold at work: women who lose this

foothold 'get really bored … some people get so bored. Work fills that up' (Amanda, 16, Comfort High).

Most girls and young women in this study are clear that they will be in the workforce and will only be taking short breaks when their children are babies or very young. They intend to continue the revolution underway over the past two decades as workforce participation rates of women with children less than one year old have doubled from 17 per cent in 1976 to 35 per cent in 2001 (Pocock 2001b, p. 73).

Young women's preference for an 'intermittent' approach to their child bearing and rearing years holds for both higher and lower income areas and for whether their mothers work or not. For example, Amy in Adelaide plans to organise her work around her kids and is committed to putting her qualifications to work, while Melinda from a lower income area in Sydney's west is also committed to a career around her children – both in the interests of stability and to ensure a life 'of my own':

> *I'd take a year off maybe to get settled in and used to it, then I'd go back to part time if I had a job beforehand. My partner would be full time so for stableness and you need to money to support the family so I'd be at work. I'd still want a life of your own, not just the kids, so, I guess I'd work. (Melinda, 16, Strive High)*

3.6 External care by family or formal institutions

Most young people felt that it was important for one of the parents or grandparents to be with the children when they are young, although views about childcare were sharply conditioned by the young person's own experience, as we discuss below in Section 4:

> *I'd just try and use friends and family. (Judith, 18, Country High)*

Many would only consider childcare as a 'last resort'.

> *Oh yeah, [I'd use childcare if] I had to, I suppose, yeah. If myself and my missus was working.*
>
> *Interviewer: If you had to…?*
>
> *Yeah, probably wouldn't want to though. Yeah it would be last option.*
>
> *Interviewer: Last option after?*
>
> *Parents. (Robert, 17, Country High)*

Many nominate grandmothers or very close friends as their preferred care option, some seeing that this would be good for grandparents because: 'They will get to spend more time with the grandkids' (William, 15, Struggle High). For example, Audrey plans to work full-time, alongside her partner, while her mother cares for her children:

> *If I ever had kids, I don't think I'd even take a year off, I'd take what I needed and go back to work. And I would be full-time I wouldn't stay at home…. I'd be a nine-to-five worker my husband will be nine-to-five. (Audrey, 16, Strive High)*

Interviewer: And what [would be] happening with your child?

My mum. … Yeah, I've already worked it all out. … No, she doesn't know yet. (Audrey, 16, Strive High)

Other young women are also already planning this scenario with their mothers:

If I decide to be a physiotherapist I'll be working a lot, so I'll have the weekend off, so during that time, if I have a partner, we would work, my mum would be the nan, she said she will mind the children for me. (Sarah, 11, Strive Primary)

I would be working and he could work as well and then like mum could look after the kids as well and then when I first have the kids I can just be on maternity leave for a year or something so I could look after them. (Hayley, 12, Strive Primary)

I reckon first of all I should discuss with my partner, when to look after the children, what day and that, and if we're both busy on that day, like when we're doing our job, we can give it to a relative to look after. (Binh, 11, Strive Primary)

I would make a roster or timetable and our parents will look after the kids. (Emma, 11, Strive Primary)

3.7 Non-traditional male care

Only one young woman plans to keep her job while her male partner undertakes care at home. Susie intends to be a politician – perhaps Australian republic – and to have one child:

[In my imagined future] I have a job and my husband can stay home and look after the kids. (Susie, 16, Comfort High)

The group discussed what will happen if he can't cook: 'Well he'll just have to learn how to cook. Or I'll marry Jamie Oliver!' (Others point out that Jamie is already married.) Susie agrees it would be hard for her as a political leader when she has her child: 'It would be a bit hard [to work part-time] … Can I just quit for a year? But I want my job back immediately after!'

No young men expect to stay at home on an ongoing basis while their partners are in paid work, although some anticipate it for a limited period or feel that working from home is a good option:

I'd like to work at home so I could have time with my kids, whenever they want, help them out. (Matt, 12, Leafy Primary)

Several others agreed with him, seeing value in working part-time or only during school hours so they see their children and share care with their partners. Olaf from Struggle Primary is very keen to be a full-time father, although sharing care through alternating hours would also be 'really good':

Oh, I'd really like to stay home with the kids. I wouldn't mind having a part-time job either. I reckon it would be really good if I had a part-time job and my wife had a

> *part-time job so I see them this part of the day and my wife does the other part of the day. (Olaf, 11, Struggle Primary)*

Many young people indicate that they want to work in jobs that allow them to spend time with their children. Some specifically mention the weekend and hours that permit both partners to be active parents:

> *I'd like him to work too, just for security you know, just for support so my child can have a fairly good life you know … I wouldn't like him to do [too much], maybe full-time on the weekdays and on the weekends he'd have those days off, but like not later than five. (Tanya, 16, Strive High)*

Jack, 15, at Struggle High is clear that his plans to share care are dependent upon whether 'you can adjust the hours to allow that to happen'. He says that he would use childcare:

> *If you're both working full-time and you're unable to adjust your hours, yeah. If your office has got a crèche thing, use it. That way if you need a break [from work] you can go and talk to something that doesn't talk back. (Jack, 15, Struggle High)*

The plans of many young men are contingent upon what might be possible from the point of view of their jobs. Their participation in caring for their children depends on the shape of their jobs and whether they can fit childcare in around them. The desire of many young men to be active parents, to take 'time off' to be with their children and to share care with their partners, is widespread and a strong preference – but one they expect to be highly constrained.

3.8 Implications for grandmothers

Young people, especially 10-12 year olds from lower socio-economic and non-English speaking backgrounds, have high expectations of support from their own parents when they have children. Some feel they already have agreement from their parents for this back-up, and in many cases it is preferred to any other form of non-parental childcare. These plans are based on experience: many young people in western Sydney in our focus groups spoke of the role of extended family in their own households.

These arrangements depend upon several factors, however. Firstly, grandparents must be available for childcare rather than in the labour market themselves for longer periods as is now anticipated and encouraged by some policy approaches (Costello 2002). Secondly, families must remain geographically stable so that grandparents are nearby. Given the high mobility of Australian households, the bonds of geographic proximity will not survive many young people's entry to the labour market and into their thirties. Thirdly, grandparents will need to be available. Many may have other plans after years in the labour market and may not be easily recruited into regular or extensive hours of grand-child care. Indeed, qualitative research amongst Australian adults suggests that some are already resentful of involuntary grandparent care, and the element of conscription that exists for some (Pocock 2003).

4. Formal childcare: Past experience and plans to use childcare

4.1 Experiences of childcare

Parents' greater participation in paid work is increasing the use of non-parental care for children and, as paid formal care substitutes for informal extended family and parental care, its cost is accounting for a growing proportion of household income. At present, the requirements for formal childcare runs well ahead of provision, with unmet demand of 47,800 before and after school places, 46,300 long day care places and 37,600 occasional care places in 2002 (or 28, 15 and 103 per cent, respectively, of places currently provided) (ABS 2002; Flood 2004).

Table 3 shows that informal care is the most common form of non-parental childcare in Australia but it is decreasing, while children's participation in formal care has increased slightly in the past few years. The rise in formal care has been especially strong for young children: in 2002, 44.5 per cent of children under five years were in paid care compared to 34.0 per cent in 1993 (ABS 2002). Those relying on informal care fell from 38 per cent in 1993 to 33 per cent in 2002.

Table 3 Proportion of children in childcare in Australia, 1999, 2002

Types of Care	**1999**	**2002**
(Proportion of children 0-11 years old)		
Proportion of children in formal care (%)		
Before and After school care	4.9	5.5
Long day care	7.7	9.6
Family Day Care	2.8	3.1
Occasional care	1.4	1.2
Preschool	7.4	7.7
Other formal Care	0.9	0.4
Total children using formal care	**23.5**	**25.4**
Per cent of children in informal care		
Grandparents	21.2	19.1
Brothers/sisters	2.4	2.3
Other relatives	7.1	6.7
Other person	9.4	7.3
Total children using informal care	**37.2**	**32.9**
Total children using formal or informal care	**51.2**	**48.7**
Children who used neither formal or informal care	**48.8**	**51.3**

Source: ABS 2002

Many children in our study had experienced non-parental care – often by extended family, friends and neighbours. Others had experience of formal childcare services such as childcare centres, family day care, and out-of-school-hours care. What are the opinions of young people about the childcare they received, and how do their experiences affect their own plans for care when they have children?

Table 4 Childcare experiences and future plans of the young people in focus groups

	Per cent of total
Incidence of care	
Had no experience of formal care	59
Had experienced formal care	31
Experience unknown	10
(N=93)	100
Assessment of care	
Of those who had experienced formal care	
Had positive views of this care	6
Ambivalent	7
Had negative views of this care	28
(N=29)	100
Future plans	
Would use formal care themselves	41
Would not use	52
Unknown	8
(N=93)	100
Of those who would use formal care	
With experience of formal care themselves	55
Without experience of formal care	45
(N= 38)	100

Table 4 shows that of the 84 young people in our focus groups whose childcare experiences are known about, 59 per cent (or 55) had *no* extensive experience of formal non-parental care. None of the young people in our study who lived in the country had experienced formal childcare, because none was available. These young people were cared for by their mothers who were either at home or working only during school hours. There is also less experience of formal childcare amongst young people in low socio-economic areas (Flood 2004, p. 26).

Thirty-one per cent of the young people in the focus groups (or 29) had experience of formal care with just over half having been in centre-based care, a fifth in out-of-school-hours care, and a fifth in care such as family day care. [4] (These proportions are close to the national breakdown in 1993, excluding preschool care.)

Of the 'experienced' third in our study, two-thirds had positive memories of their care. Twelve of the 15 who had been in centre-based care remembered the time positively. The same proportion, two-thirds, would use childcare for their own children, compared to 44 per cent of all young people.

[4] ABS data for the period when these children were of preschool age indicate that around a fifth of children who were 0-11 years old at a point in time in 1993 and 1996 used formal care (ABS 2002). Not surprisingly, this is lower than amongst study participants whose answers apply not to a point in time, but over all their childhood years.

4.2 The effect of experience on future plans for childcare

Of all children surveyed, 55 per cent (or 48) do not plan to make any use of formal childcare with almost half saying they will rely upon the extended family, especially grandparents, if they need help with caring for their children. Those young people with experience of formal care, most of whom viewed it positively, could clearly articulate what they liked about it, and what they thought their own children would get out of it. They have strong ideas regarding what constitutes good care, and clear standards in mind. It is striking that the majority of those who have experienced formal non-parental care themselves would use it although their intentions are often conditional and depend on whether children like it, whether it is good care, and whether it is affordable.

Among young people who had not experienced childcare there was a reluctance to involve 'strangers' in the care of their children. Many expressed concern about who could be trusted, several saying:

> *As well qualified as they may be, you never know. I trust my mum. (Sarah, 11, Strive Primary)*

> *I use my family; I don't trust outside people because they can hit your kid or something can go wrong. (Vanessa, 16, Leafy High)*

Where young people had experienced childcare, they frequently identify its positive social impact.

> *I'd try not to use too much but a bit so that they could get used to other people and get social skills. (Carrie, 11, Comfort Primary)*

Bob and others will use it because of all their positive memories of childcare and its social dividends:

> *I think I would [use it] because they get to know kids their own age and what the others do and stuff like that. What they can expect going into kindy or school or high school or stuff like that and getting to know other kids as well. (Bob, 11, Comfort Primary)*

Many young people are clear that they would use formal childcare only if they are confident about quality and about their children liking it. Kelly, 11, from Struggle Primary, had had a positive experience of after-school care and said that she would use childcare 'but if they didn't like it, have someone they could ring'. Nicole adopts a similar monitoring approach:

> *I'd probably see what it is like and if they like it then they would go there. (Nicole, 12, Comfort Primary)*

Even though she had a negative experience of childcare, Jade was considering it for her children, but not without being confident of the quality of care:

> *I would probably really have to check it out, to be careful of the stuff. I'd probably go there a few times. Make sure they didn't know that I was there but just to see how they interacted with other children and that sort of stuff to see if they were okay by*

> *themselves. And if they weren't, I probably wouldn't send them back there again. ... [M]aking sure that the adults that were there and the other children were fair. (Jade, 16, Comfort High)*

For some young people the decision not to use childcare reflects the fact that they do not want to miss out on parenting experiences with their young children, even where they feel the social outcomes might be positive, and their own experiences had been positive:

> *I mean, it would have been good for them to interact with other children and things like that but if you've got friends who are home with their kids, it would be better off your child spending time with them. I mean I went to after-school-hours care, and I liked it, but - I don't know - I just don't think it would be good. I mean I've heard friends who put their kids in childcare who ... they've missed out on so much and it just doesn't seem worth it. (Ann, 16, Comfort High)*

Most young people with no experience of childcare are more sceptical about non-parental care and less likely to make use of it beyond the extended family. Many volunteer their parents for this task.

Intentions about the use of childcare in this group are constructed by experience. While the sample size is small and these findings must be interpreted with caution, it seems that *experience shapes childcare preferences*. The key experience in this group is of *actual childcare itself* – not just childcare that is viewed positively. Even generally negative experiences do not preclude plans for future use; children who were unhappy in childcare are more likely to say they will check its quality carefully and monitor the reactions of their child than to say they will not use it. In contrast, those who had no experience of childcare at all often viewed it as unsafe or dangerous and several were concerned about giving their children to 'strangers'. Where experience existed, *and* it was positive, the preference in favour of planning to use childcare was higher again. This is an illustration of how preferences are constructed by experience, rather than autonomously 'given'. It differs from Hakim's treatment of preferences, where she argues that preferences exist autonomously and define different types of women which in turn determine work/family outcomes (Hakim 2000).

4.3 What young people say about childcare

Young people have very clear memories about non-parental care. They can easily answer questions and recount in considerable detail specific events or characteristics of carers and facilities. In many instances their faces lit up with positive memories: 'I was the little *princess*!' We now consider, in turn, informal care, long day-care, and out-of-school-hours care.

Informal care

In the country and in many low socio-economic areas, rather than formal care, young people have experienced informal care by a woman in her home. Several described very positive experiences of this kind, their faces beaming:

When I was little I was looked after by relatives or friends – I wouldn't let [my kids] go to strangers. (Jenny, 11, Country Primary)

Interviewer: When you were looked after by a relative or a friend can you remember whether you liked it or not?

I loved it…I was the little princess! (Jenny, 11, Country Primary)

Kelly describes her carer as a second mother, someone outside her family from whom she can be confident of support. Similarly Ellie loved her care:

She was my favourite adult in the world! She was really, really nice. We played games – lots of fun … She is like a 'second mother'. If something bad happened in my family, I can talk to her. (Kelly, 11, Struggle Primary)

I remember because the lady who looked after me she had a daughter that was a couple of years older than me, and I got on really well with her as well. And I really loved it. (Ellie, 16, Leafy High)

Against these, Chanel from a higher income school spoke negatively of informal care. Her views were shaped by her carer's response to her habit of sucking her thumb:

I can remember I used to be really scared of them because they threatened to chop my thumb off … they put it on a cutting board…she used to give us mashed veggies… I didn't like having the nap because I thought I was too big for it. (Chanel, 16, Comfort High)

Long day-care

In the higher socio-economic areas where there is greater experience of formal childcare, many young people spoke positively of their experiences in formal centre-based childcare and were able to identify the things that they enjoyed about the experience such as varied toys and activities, space, movies, food and people:

I used to like going there and playing with the stuff. Because at childcare they have different stuff to play with that you don't have at home, and different people. (Carrie, 11, Comfort Primary)

It was good because they had a lot of play area. They watched movies, like kids' movies, Cinderella and stuff and they let you have pretty good food … they did pretty good activities. (Rove, 12, Comfort Primary)

Like many others, Rove identified the positive social contacts he made in childcare:

Well in childcare, I've had people from childcare who have gone through school with me. (Rove, 12, Comfort High)

Interviewer: It's been good to have those friendships all the way?

Yeah. (Rove, 12, Comfort High)

Older children also readily recalled positive aspects of their care experiences, including space, friendships and relationships with carers. Abraham, 16, from Comfort High remembers with pleasure the space to ride his bike and 'a really big sandpit all under cover', while Amanda remembers specific people and activities:

> *I went to the crèche and loved it - well what I can remember - only we were really little and I still know some of the people who I went there with and it was excellent, I loved it. (Amanda, 16, Comfort High)*
>
> *Interviewer: What did you like about it, can you remember?*
>
> *I just remember the people who worked there, especially like the chef guy who cooked all our food, oh he was really big, and I just remember him being like a bear kind of thing, that's just how I remember him. And just all the ladies who worked there were so nice and I just remember doing like activities, like for Easter once it was really hot and we had like a treasure hunt for the eggs and they melted and it was so much fun though and I just remember little things like that. It was really good. (Amanda, 16 Comfort High)*

Out-of-school-hours care

Memories of out-of-school-hours care were less positive. Many young people found it boring, or the equipment outdated, or felt that they had outgrown the childcare environment. These reactions reflect the different age groupings in out-of-school-hours care. Jade is an example and like a number of children talks about having 'snuck home'.

> *I hated it. Couldn't stand it. I was the kid who sat in the corner and got picked on. ... I was in OSHC [out-of-school-hours care]. I was the youngest there … and I sometimes snuck home cause there was a paddock and then I lived across the road from the paddock and I'd usually sneak home most of the time because I didn't like going there at all. I'd rather be home by myself than in after-school care. The teachers were mean and it was boring. (Jade, 16, Comfort High)*

Age is a significant issue for those who think they have outgrown formal care, although social connection with other participants helps:

> *At first I didn't like it, when I first went there, but then when I became friends with everyone there, it wasn't that bad, but then as I was getting older too in around year 4, or 5, in the holidays they would put me into those stupid school camps - not camps, just the school days where you go in - and I hate them. I ran away once. Went home and so they got angry at me, but yeah I didn't really like that. But the day care when I was young from like 3 to 7 or so wasn't so bad. (Peter, 16, Leafy High)*
>
> *I had to go three times a week, morning and night and it was crap because I was the oldest person there. (Mary, 17, Comfort High)*

In contrast Kelly, Smithy and Mark had fond memories of after school care:

> *I did it for a while, fun, huge play area, and lots of activities – used to play games, lots and lots of friends, different areas for younger and older kids – where older kids could go and younger kids could not. (Kelly, 11, Struggle Primary)*

> *I used to like that, heaps good fun, monkey bar and stuff and playing and trading toys with other kids. (Smithy, 17, Leafy High)*

> *I don't know, it was good. But not as good as being home. Couldn't wait to get home. (Mark, 17, Comfort High)*

Overall, in relation to childcare, young people are clear about what it is they like and do not like about it. They are positive about childcare environments with good teachers or adults they like, good play space and equipment, interesting, age-appropriate activities, good food and positive relationships. Where these are absent, the experience is negative, and in some cases, where they are older, they respond by running away. Young people stress the importance of quality care for their happiness and wellbeing, paralleling the concerns of parents (Pocock 2003; Brennan 1998). For those who consider using childcare in the future, the quality of that care – in all its various facets - is a critical factor.

5. Housework

5.1 Introduction

Australian studies suggest that the majority of Australian men and women believe that housework, childcare and shopping should be shared equally between the sexes (Bittman and Pixley 1997). However, this preference for equality is difficult to reconcile with the persistent inequality in the distribution of unpaid domestic work. According to Bittman this reconciliation is achievable by one of two means: either a theory of lagged adaptation, whereby the change to genuine equality is imminent, or 'pseudo-mutuality', whereby, in short, people kid themselves that equality actually exists. The latter occurs by means of an 'ideological embracing of mutuality without any adoption of mutual practices' (1998, p. 32). Bittman sees little evidence that a major take up of domestic work by men is underway in Australia, thus discounting the theory of lagged adaptation. Indeed, he finds much greater and faster adaptation amongst women as they turn to the market for help. He considers that the explanation for the disjunction between values and behaviour around domestic work lies in 'pseudo-mutuality', 'a regular and relatively stable outcome' as Australian men inflate the size of their actual domestic contribution and understate women's, sometimes with women's collusion.

In our discussions with young people we did not distinguish between different forms of care – whether of children or general housework and caring work. Bittman and Pixley (1997) have analysed different forms of care and it is clear that a range of activities make up domestic work (including outdoor work and childcare) and that some categories of care are performed simultaneously with other categories of care. These distinctions are not made in our study and young people generally did not differentiate between household tasks.

The evidence in this study of young people's attitudes and future plans suggests, on balance, a rather lopsided and gendered pseudo-mutuality at work, with only weak signs of lagged adaptation amongst the attitudes of some of the young men. While many young men and women espouse the principle of equality around sharing paid work and unpaid domestic work, this attitude is rather more widespread amongst young women than young men, with a sizeable group of young men paying it no heed at all and expecting their working wives to take up most of the domestic work. While this group of young men manifests little sign of lagged adaptation in attitude, reinforcing Bittman's analysis amongst adults, young women appear likely to continue the adaptive behaviour of their mothers, turning to the market for help on the domestic front.

5.2 Who will do domestic work?

When it comes to domestic work (which we take to include cleaning, cooking, laundry, gardening and care work), three allocative models are evident amongst the young men and women participants. The most common is a model of sharing. Next, and a long way behind, comes paid help (whether cleaner, maid or other). The third is male minimisation while 'my wife will do it'. Needless to say, this last model is more prevalent among young men. Overall, support for these models is highly gendered, and occasionally futuristic. When asked who will do housework in his future home,

Jack, 15, at Struggle High nominates 'robots' (which he predicts will do all housework in 'about five years'). The distribution of these different allocative plans is set out in Table 5.

Over half of all young people would like to see housework generally shared but this sharing, as their comments below reveal, is not always 50/50 (for example, Todd will do '35 per cent'). The impulse is clear, however, and preferred by sizeable numbers of both sexes although it is more popular among women than men.

Table 5 Plans for the allocation of housework (per cent)

	Males	Females	Persons
Sharing housework	47	59	55
External help will do it (cleaner, maid)	6	23	17
My wife will do it (male)	41	0	15
I will do it (female)	0	16	10
My husband will do it (female)	0	2	1
Other (eg robot)	6	0	2
	100	100	100
N=	*32*	*56*	*88*

Source: Focus groups. Table excludes ten young people whose preferences are unknown.

Table 5 shows that, beyond sharing, the sexes divide sharply. A surprisingly large proportion of young men are hopeful that their wives will do the housework, around four in ten males. They are joined by a significant but much smaller proportion of young women who anticipate doing it themselves. Less than two in ten young women intend this - or half the proportion of young men who expect it of their wives. This is a significant mismatch of preferences.

Only one young woman plans that her husband will do the housework while she works. However, almost a quarter of young women propose to use a cleaner to do housework or to supplement their own efforts, a much greater proportion than young men, only two of whom would consider hiring cleaners. In their comments, young women tend strongly towards shared housework, and many young men agree. However, 'sharing' for some young men is not even; they allocate lesser shares to themselves, or plan to share 'not quite evenly' as Kyle, 16, from Country High puts it. We now consider these three approaches.

Sharing housework

A sharing approach to housework is exemplified by a group of three young women from Strive High who put their views vigorously. They are led by Audrey whose parents unusually share all kinds of domestic work ('You should see my Mum, she was mowing the lawn. She's 54 – it's so cute'):

> *You know, I'll be helping full-time [in paid work], I expect shared responsibility. I am not going to do all the housework and look after the baby by myself. He will be doing it as well. No more the woman's work, you know, it's going to be a shared household. (Audrey, 16, Strive High)*

Interviewer: So, 50/50 shared?

Maybe 60/40. (Audrey, 16, Strive High)

Yeah I agree with that. I think we shouldn't be stereotypes, you know, we should both do an equal amount of work and bring in money as well as manage the household. (Melinda, 16, Struggle High)

Well it depends on how much money we have, but I'd hire a cleaner. But if not, it's 50/50. Just because we are female, why should we be in the kitchen? (Tanya, 16, Strive High)

Young women in higher income areas agree:

It shouldn't be all the girls get to stay home while he gets to work and have fun. (Vanessa, 16, Leafy High)

Women do it, while men minimise

A significant number of young men, however, see housework as mainly the job of their future wives. They are open minimisers, intent on doing as little as possible, or as little as they can get away with, discussing their strategies in a good-humored but sometimes wily way. Four in ten young men in the study group were straightforward about their desire to avoid housework and leave it to their partners:

Either I suggest my wife is a good cleaner and does all that, or she hires a cleaner, because I'm not doing anything. (Smithy, 17, Leafy High)

Interestingly, Smithy is very keen to take time off paid work when his children are young to share their care with his wife, but he is unswerving about housework. His classmate Mike agrees:

My lady is doing the cleaning. I'll just be on the porch having a beer! (Mike, 17, Leafy High)

'Welcome to the 1950s' comments one of his female classmates as they go on to discuss how men are not as tidy as women, and how hard it will be to get a fair balance:

It's the hardest thing to balance… (Hannah, 16, Leafy High)

[You have to be] like superwoman or something … I think, in the end, if he didn't contribute I'd probably end up cleaning it because I can't stand mess. It annoys me. So I'd get around to probably cleaning it myself. (Vanessa, 16, Leafy High)

Karl and Bob, younger boys from Comfort Primary, expect their wives – who will also have jobs, though perhaps part-time – to do the housework although they would quite like to do some cooking which they enjoy. Karl supposes that he 'would have to' mow the lawn, because his love for his wife would make him vulnerable to exploitation:

> *Well just the fact that, if I love her, and I could see she would probably try to exploit that from time to time. (Karl, 11, Comfort High)*

Girls in the country – who all plan to have jobs – expect to be doing the housework though they plan some help from their children and a little from their husbands: 'I'd make him put his dirty clothes away in the basket' (Bonnie, 11, Country Primary).

There were exceptions. Judith at Country High is convinced that things are changing, though male resistance is strong, as Abby agrees, and mothers are not always helpful to daughters in the face of male refusal:

> *My dad can't cook. My brother refuses to cook. Mum will say to him, you know, do something, get some wood for the fire or something and he'll say no, so mum will say 'Oh Judith, will you do it?' Just because I think it's a guy thing, you know, he won't do it, and he thinks that this 200 year old 'women-need-to-do-everything' thing continues. Well, it is starting to stop. (Judith, 18, Country High)*

> *That's interesting. My brother is 12 and mum's not really scared of him, but she won't force him to do anything, but she'll yell at me if I don't do it. Because I won't do anything else like scream the house down or anything. (Abby, 16, Country High)*

Several young women in the country expect peripheral help from men, most of which they would direct. Their male country peers fully support their willingness to do more housework. When asked who will be doing the housework in his house of the future, Daniel, 11, says 'Not me … I hate it. I'll probably have to do some things, like the lawns and mowers and things like that'. His peer, Nathan, will 'probably share it', but if he is working away from home as he expects to as an author, he won't be doing it. A number of young women neatly complement men's estimates, expecting to do more than their husbands, about 60/40.

Paid help: A continuing turn to the market

Among our participants nearly a quarter of young women, and a couple of young men, plan to use some form of paid help. The most common is a cleaner or 'maid'. A few plan to use their parents ('I'll pay them of course'). When faced with a partner who does not do housework, as Ellie anticipates with her mechanic husband, she plans to buy the support of a cleaner.

For a few at Comfort High, this option was set aside because of 'high standards' that a cleaner could not meet, while another felt you should not pay someone else to clean. Overall, however, these discussions suggest that in the face of continued male resistance to sharing, young women will continue the trend established by their mothers of turning to the market to buy help with housework and cooking to supplement their own efforts. Many recognise they will need help, that their husbands cannot necessarily be relied upon (despite the education and persuasion that they plan), and so they will buy help if they can.

5.3 Male resistance to sharing

Most young women are not sure how easy sharing will be when they consider their brothers and male peers. Some are optimistic - they place hope in their own powers of persuasion, choice, blackmail, and young men's gradual maturity:

> *I was having a discussion with one of my guy friends and – I think he was joking – he was saying 'I'm not going to clean, You'll have to do that'. That was a lot of them actually, but he works in a restaurant, so he cooks and cleans, you know. I'm expecting my husband or my partner to help me out. (Tanya, 16, Strive High)*
>
> *I have this guy friend who believes girls should be in their place – the laundry, the kitchen, the bedroom … yeah, just the traditional stuff, and I told him right off. (Audrey, 16, Strive High)*
>
> *Yeah, he's been asking me too, and I said we don't put up with that. (Tanya, 16, Strive High)*
>
> *Interviewer: So you're not going to put up with that. So what does that mean, you're not going to choose those people as your partner or…?*
>
> *I think we'll make them come to an understanding. You know, it's either help me out or, you know… (Tanya, 16, Strive High)*
>
> *Yeah. Right now they're still young … (Melinda, 16, Strive High)*
>
> *I think they'll change. Maybe. (Tanya, 16, Strive High)*

Anna asks 'Why should we do the work? It's their house as well!'

Similarly, girls in Adelaide had little confidence that their male school peers would easily share the housework. They hope for 'maturity' amongst young men, backed up by their own powers of persuasion and use of 'incentives':

> *Interviewer: So when you think about your brothers, and the boys you know of your own age, who will be your partners, how easy will it be to get them to share the housework?*
>
> *Not very! (Ruby, 11, Struggle High)*
>
> *The guys we know? [she rolls her eyes] (Brittany, 12, Struggle High)*
>
> *They're just lazy. (Chloe, 16, Struggle High)*
>
> *After they mature, they might mature … (Alana, 16, Struggle High)*

Alana thinks that if they are asked they will help out:

> *If I was in a relationship and they said no, if I asked them to clean, then I'd be very mad … Like I wouldn't be mean about it. If you just said 'Can you do the vacuuming this afternoon?' and they didn't do it, then I'd be angry. (Alana, 16, Struggle High)*

Sarah feels that her boyfriend is 'really grown up and mature' and that he would help. But her friends agreed that young men 'need incentives': 'Like I'd do the cooking'. They giggled at the various other incentives that they might try, including withholding cooking and caring for their partners. Across town at Comfort High, young women are doubtful when they consider their peers, especially their brothers who are already consummate minimisers ('He has to be told to do it. He won't go and do it willingly. It's really quite annoying'):

> *Oh God! They probably would have grown up by then, so they may be a bit different, hopefully … If they own the house too, they may want to help clean the house. (Jade, 16, Comfort High)*

Many young women felt that they undertook more housework than their brothers. Some saw that the struggle to get their brothers to contribute was hard work for mothers: 'It really stresses her out' (Emma, 11, Strive Primary). Binh agreed:

> *My brother, he only does his stuff, when his clothes need washing he does it himself, but all the other things in the house he thinks are our responsibility. (Binh, 11, Strive Primary)*

Concern about the challenge of sharing reached across income levels, with young women at Leafy High agreeing that 'it will be hard' to enforce sharing. Their strategy was to 'pick the right guy': 'Well, try our best to do that, yeah!' (Melissa, 18, Leafy High). Like their peers at Comfort High, their confidence is fragile, and Abraham confirms the soundness of their scepticism:

> *No, I don't think [men] will do as much as the women do. (Abraham, 16, Comfort High)*
>
> *They'll help if they're forced into it. (Ann, 16, Comfort High)*

At Comfort High, the consensus is similar:

> *Interviewer: Thinking about the boys you know, do you think that it is going to be easy to share housework straight down the middle as you plan?*
>
> *No way! (Chanel, 17, Comfort High)*
>
> *My brothers will be hopeless in the future. They already are! … They don't do the domestic type stuff. They work for my dad with the papers and all the physical stuff. (Mary, 17, Comfort High)*

Most young people recognised that the housework done by their parents was highly differentiated by sex, with rare exceptions. Some intended to replicate this and to avoid certain jobs:

> *Interviewer: Would you clean the toilet Claus?*
>
> *Um. I might hire someone. (Claus, 15, Struggle High)*

5.4 Gender tactics

In the face of male resistance, young women have considered their strategies. Young men have also considered their own strategies. This situation of the clash of gendered tactics suggests that young people already recognise, or have themselves witnessed, some heat around the issues of housework. Tactical planning is well illustrated by the focus groups of young men and young women in the country. The young men optimistically hope their wives will 'relax' about sharing as time goes by, while young women are determined not to marry anyone who won't help and recognise that they will have to start strong and stay strong if they are to avoid repeating the 'disgusting' current imbalance:

> *You've got to share, otherwise she'll divorce you. You should be able to help for the first few years [of marriage] then it might wear off… (Kevin, 17, Country High)*
>
> *Most girls today, they're not as into doing housework as 60 years ago. It was expected that housework would be their whole job, but I suppose nowadays they're not as 'Oh yes - I'll do the housework'. It's sort of share, work rate evenly, sort of thing. Maybe not quite evenly. (Kyle, 16, Country High)*
>
> *Interviewer: So do you think you'll be sharing but not quite evenly, is that your plan?*
>
> *Yeah, we hope we do. (Kyle, 16, Country High)*

Their female peers, who want to share housework, anticipate their strategies:

> *There needs to be a balance. I think it is disgusting the way it is. (Kate, 16, Country High)*
>
> *I was thinking the other day… I didn't want to end up like mum, having to do everything so … if they are good at home economics or something, they can cook maybe three times a week and I'd do the other bit, and make it balanced. (Judith, 18, Country High)*
>
> *[You need to share] from the start – because my parents started [not sharing] as they are from the start … I'm not marrying him unless he does the dishes. (Kate, 16, Country High)*

Judith in the country, like her peers in western Sydney, uses a clear discourse of fairness and contests the idea of the male breadwinner, although she does not underestimate the challenge:

> *It is still going to take a couple more generations for men to start realising they have to do something. That women are now going out to work and they are bringing home money and [men are] not all the time the breadwinner of the family but [women] are contributing equally as the men, so they need to. They're bringing in half the money, the guys are bringing in half the money, so they need to share the work around the house as well. (Judith, 18, Country High)*
>
> *Interviewer: Looking at your brothers, do you think that is going to be easy?*

> *No. My brother is incapable of doing anything for himself. He can make chips - that's the frozen ones. (Kate, 16, Country High)*

Young women also saw the possibility of 'not quite even' sharing, and were shaping up to meet it with education, persuasion or other strategies. They were especially doubtful about the success of sharing when they considered their peers – whether brothers or friends. Many are hostile to being left to do the housework, especially given their plans for jobs. All young women in this study intend to have paid work; and, in this context, many see justice in sharing housework along with care of the children. However, most young women expect to be the main carers of babies in their first year.

5.5 Socio economic background and the allocation of housework

Most of the young women at Leafy Primary hope for a maid and several live in households with cleaners at present. At Strive High, some young women also hope for a maid, suggesting that an expectation of help from the market is not confined to higher socio-economic areas. However, there are some socio-economic differences. Young women in lower income western Sydney and the country talk of strong persuasive tactics and angry rebellion if their partners don't do a fair share of housework. However, young women from higher socio-economic areas in both Sydney and Adelaide are more likely to accommodate the imbalance and to 'pick up the slack' themselves. For example, four in the group of six at Adelaide's Comfort High – each planning to have children and jobs alongside their partners – expect to do the cleaning, Sarah and Mary because they like to clean:

> *Because I think cleaning sort of cleanses your soul, sort of thing. (Mary, 17, Comfort High)*

> *Because I wouldn't trust a cleaner. I don't mind cleaning myself but I wouldn't pay someone to clean, if we keep the house clean all the time it shouldn't get that dirty anyway, so I'd clean myself. (Amy, 17, Comfort High)*

A pronounced difference in approaches to housework between higher and lower income areas suggests that young middle class women, who hold jobs alongside their partners and believe that their partners should share in the care of children, will do much more housework than their partners. They may find themselves doing an unfair double day because of their underestimation of housework, their enjoyment of housework's 'soul cleansing' properties, or their unwillingness to risk their cleaning standards or to confront partners and push for reallocation. They sound resigned. Jill from Comfort High will do most of it herself 'Because men are useless' and is resigned to an unfair distribution, one that she already resents in relation to her brothers.

These accommodating approaches amongst young women from higher socio-economic areas may reflect specific cultures of motherhood, and their internalised hopes of fulfilling the ever-competent, able and caring standard of 'proper' (middle class) motherhood, as well as being paid workers. Doing their own housework to a 'decent' standard, and virtuously enjoying it, may be part of their self-expectation of working motherhood. However, it sits uncomfortably alongside a busy household and a paid job, and perhaps a male partner who is resistant to doing housework.

Young working class and country women are more likely to talk of vigorous resistance, or go for the efficient, pragmatic solution. Ellie and her tradesman husband will have a cleaner because 'of course' he won't be doing housework, while in western Sydney Tanya, Melinda and Audrey will be insisting on getting a hand or their partners will pay a price. The picture is of flinty determination amongst young working class women as they mobilise an assertive discourse of fairness contrasted by a more resigned, virtuous willingness to do more rather than risk standards amongst most young women from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

5.6 Female control of housework

The young male peers of these women see their mothers doing most of the housework. Mark and Geoff remark on the habits of female control and perfectionism around housework and how these inhibit their own contribution. While these habits might be convenient cover for male minimisation, they seem sincere:

> *She's a real workaholic and insists that she does stuff even when I think there is nothing to do, she'll always be finding something else to do… and whenever I offer to help her with something … she'll say 'no, no that's fine! there's nothing to do'. When she's running around doing everything and I get really annoyed at that. (Geoff, 16, Comfort High)*
>
> *Interviewer: You'd like to do more?*
>
> *Well, I'd like to help her because I'm just slacking off, doing nothing and she's doing heaps of stuff and she'll say there's nothing that I can do because she likes to take control for some reason. I don't know why. (Geoff, 16, Comfort High)*
>
> *Interviewer: So mothers are in charge when they're home, and in control?*
>
> *It would seem that way, yes, because … she's the boss and it's kind of 'do what you're told' and I mean, if that's 'don't help!' then I don't help. (Mark, 17, Comfort High)*

Geoff wanted his mum to 'loosen up a bit' around control of the housework:

> *They [mothers] don't need to feel obliged that they have to do it. (Geoff, 16, Comfort High)*

He felt this loosening would allow his dad to help a bit more too.

5.7 Pseudo-mutuality or lagged adaptation?

Amongst young men, a sharing discourse has some traction for a significant group in both higher and lower income groups, but it is tempered by an open, wily evasiveness – one that brothers are already practising upon their sisters. They hope that they can find a wife who will do the housework, that women will not notice unequal sharing or that their monitoring will weaken with time. A pragmatic willingness to employ others as a means of avoiding the problem is evident across income groups, especially amongst women.

The over-allocation of housework to women has its supporters amongst both women and men, although here men outnumber women more than two to one, a mismatch that is a portent of long-enduring gender struggles around housework. An assertive group of young women deploy a discourse of fairness and change. There are not many militant young men on their side. The match is better amongst the majority groups of both sexes in relation to sharing, but this sharing is tempered by some deviations from 50/50, all to women's disadvantage. Many young women are clear that they have a battle in front of them based on their observations of their brothers and male friends; they see that young men will resist doing housework. Young women are already resentful about this, regardless of income. The gender struggle over unpaid household work is far from over.

This account suggests more support for a continued, if gendered, discourse of pseudo-mutuality where young women's hope for equality of domestic work jostles with their more realistic perceptions of their brothers and peers, and some young men endorse equality and 'sharing' though maybe not quite equally. However, a sizeable proportion of young men do not bother with pseudo-mutuality or even the pretence of sharing - they want women to do it. The theory of lagged adaptation and its hope that sharing is in the intergenerational pipeline is not supported here. Instead, as Bittman (1998) describes, the adaptation is by women who see more support from the further commodification of domestic work and its purchase through the market, a commodification that is likely to drive further spending on domestic labour replacements (childcare, pre-packaged food, gardening and cleaning services), all of which have shown strong growth in recent years (Pocock 2003, p. 127; Bittman 1998, p. 34). This, in turn, will drive the work/spend cycle at a faster pace, putting upward pressure on labour market participation rates of women and men (Schor 1998).

These trends suggest that inequality in housework is likely to be very long lived, that the market in domestic services, pre-prepared food and childcare can be expected to continue to expand strongly, and that gender troubles around domestic work will persist. The growth in the market for domestic services may also hold implications for overall labour market equity if it fuels growth in low paid, insecure, 'black market' feminised employment. Without decent, minimal labour market standards and protections, this might be seen as an outsourcing of the gender divide.

6. Conclusion: Jobs, care and housework

The qualitative data reported through this study suggest some interesting trends. There is little sign of young women turning away from paid work in reaction to the double day they have witnessed amongst their mother's generation and, in the minds of young women at least, there are few signs of a 'new Australian wife' (planning to be cared for in a male breadwinner household) contrary to the argument of Shapiro Barash (2004) in the US. There are, however, signs of this hope in the minds of many young men, four in ten of whom intend that their wives will run their households and do all or most of the housework.

Based on the perceptions of young Australians, the continuation of the long-term decline in male breadwinner households (with children) and the growth of dual-earner households seem certain. The suggestion is that, as more families face the demands of two parents who work while having responsibility for dependents, the tensions around work and family will increase rather than diminish in the future.

This analysis also indicates that many young people show a predisposition, although reliant upon flexibility at work, for sharing the activities of earning and caring for kids. The dominant work and caring preference is of sharing between parents backed by the extended family. Some might see this as suggesting – to employ Hakim's (2000) highly contested and imprecise terminology – that men are as 'home-centred' or 'adaptive' in their preferences as women. In this case, the interesting question is, given these young men's strong interest in active fatherhood, why do men's preferences have such weak purchase later in life? The low proportion of Australian men who take extended leave from jobs to care for children even on an intermittent basis, and their low participation in part-time work, attest to the power of their later experiences of institutions or cultures that over-ride the expression of their desire to be active fathers. It seems likely that their preferences may be overwhelmed by workplace and gender cultures and institutional arrangements that do not support their choice to care. Indeed, the contingent nature of young men's discussion of sharing care is suggestive of this possibility. They anticipate barriers and their plans remain contingent in their shadow.

Whatever its explanation, the implications for young women are clear – they are the default carers when men's preferences to share care fail to be realised. This cascading down of care to women suggests that maternal care, through modified traditional household structures that interleave maternal care around mother's jobs, is likely to remain the dominant family form well into the future.

For this generation of young women, the institutions that shape their labour market and care transitions remain critical to outcomes. A supportive regime of parental leave, of integrated quality part-time work and of quality accessible childcare is of primary significance. Without supports that facilitate these transitions, their responsibility for care (simultaneous with earning), will leave them making risky labour market and care 'decisions' between limited options, and paying a high labour market penalty in terms of earnings and job rewards. They may well also continue to experience high levels of private worry about the quality of care for children and equality in relationships.

Fewer young women are keen on exclusive maternal care than their prospective partners, disclosing an evident mismatch between the genders. This gendered gap regarding the traditional breadwinner model is suggestive of some lively debates about work and care in these households of the future. Whose preferences will prevail remains to be seen.

These young peoples' expectations about work and reproduction mean that most will face decisions about either building parental work patterns around parental care or making use of informal or formal care. Perhaps young women's hopes of shared care with their partners will be possible, but only if improvements occur in relation to part-time work and flexibility for male employees. Perhaps their hopes for the support of grandmothers will come to fruition but for many, their extended family is likely to be frayed or thinned by job-related mobility. A number use the language of 'a break' from work to have a child, and expect to return to work soon after giving birth or when the child goes to school. For many, formal childcare support will be critical to their work and care arrangements.

Their plans also have significant implications for those beyond their households, especially for grandmothers whose own preferences for retirement and grand-parenting may be heavily tested. Optimistic young women, principally in lower socio-economic areas, plan to rely upon their own mothers for childcare. Given that many of these grandmothers may still be in paid jobs themselves late in life, given their low retirement incomes, this optimism may be misplaced.

Young people's preferences also have significant implications for the institutions of work and care. The realisation of expectations about shared maternal and paternal care or intermittent maternal care is dependent upon workplaces and labour laws that permit and protect part-time work, allow flexibilities at work, and provide paid and unpaid leave – for both fathers and mothers. The gap between current scenarios and those these young Australians may need, and prefer, is very wide.

Beyond this, there are also implications for formal childcare. Some of the predictable gaps between childcare preferences and probable outcomes will require institutional solutions. Certainly the demand for out-of-school-hours care is likely to be high in these households, and many will turn to childcare centres in situations where they find they must maintain part-time work to keep their place in the labour market. If their own parents prove less forthcoming that they hope, if wives' preferences against exclusive maternal care dominate over husbands' hopes that women will do the job, and if both sexes' preferences for shared care are frustrated by workplace inflexibility, then demand for institutional childcare may grow significantly and will continue the steadily increasing demand for formal childcare places underway since the 1990s. The absence of quality, affordable, accessible childcare will undermine choice in such circumstances.

Familial care of children is the dominant preference in these households, most of which will be dual-earner households if personal choices are realised. For many women, this includes their own mothers helping to care for their children but a sizeable proportion of both sexes, four in ten, hope to share the care of their children within the home. However, many men hedge this preference with contingency: 'If I can'. Fulfilment of their plans will depend upon access to part-time work, extended parental leave, and flexible work options but, if these fail, it is assumed that mothers

will take over. The issue of quality childcare is vital to future work and care arrangements. It is already very important to young people who are determined, based on their own experiences, to find quality care for their children. This means good staff, facilities and food, and well-managed relationships with other children in care. Some young people are already concerned about standards of care. In one focus group, young women expressed concern about falling standards:

> *[Whether I will use it] depends. Especially if childcare is going down which is what I have heard … Like, if the standard of childcare is lowering, so if it got any lower, I would probably rethink my decision. (Sarah, 16, Comfort High)*

Many children experienced care when community-based childcare was a common form of centre-based care, being community managed, and receiving levels of government subsidy that have now been removed. Increasingly full-time childcare is provided by private 'for profit' companies. An environment of lower government support for centres themselves has led to pressures on staff levels and on the quality of care in both public and private centres. It is therefore reasonable to assume that some of the centres that the children in our study experienced between 1988-1992 for 16 year olds and 1993-1998 for 11 year olds were at a higher point of staffing and quality provision than prevails at present. There seems little to suggest that the quality of childcare provision in Australia has risen in recent years; and the accessibility and affordability of childcare, especially for children under two, is currently in decline in many parts of Australia (FACS 2003). In addition to availability, costs are likely to figure significantly in the decisions of young people when it comes to formal care of their children. Clearly, any presumption of choice is undermined by the absence of childcare, excessive costs and poor quality.

This analysis reveals the experiential basis of childcare preferences amongst young people. Centre-based experience in this group is seen as positive for most, with many good memories about the care young people encountered. Good carers and good centres, with age-appropriate activities, matter a great deal. They leave children, years later, with positive memories.

The study suggests a significant fertility gap between the plans of some young Australians and their predictable experience in the future. The analysis also suggests that the declining birth rate is explained not by an early election not to have children but rather by uncertainties about security, financial stability and quality of life arising from the decision to combine work and children under Australia's current work and life regime, in the context of rising personal aspirations.

Finally, the study gives no succour to the optimistic hope that the allocation of unpaid work is moving briskly to a fair division between the sexes, or that the heat of discussion around this issue is likely to be cooler than it has been amongst an earlier generation. Further, the study raises important issues about the future flexibility of the labour market and its need to accommodate working fathers and mothers who wish to care flexibly around their jobs.

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