Longitudinal insights into the power of parenting: From early childhood to the middle years and beyond

Presented by
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And
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on
Friday 21 February 2014
at the

Helping Families Change
16th Annual Conference

Sheraton on the Park, Sydney
19 – 21 February 2014
This presentation has been greatly enriched by the work of my colleagues

Ms Ruth Weston  Dr Killian Mullan
Dr Lixia Qu      Dr Rae Kaspiew
Dr Ben Edwards   Professor Lawrie Moloney
Ms Kirsten Hancock Mr Mark Sipthorp
Professor Stephen Zubrick Ms Diana Smart
Dr Jennifer Baxter Ms Suzanne Vassallo
Dr Daryl Higgins  Ms Nancy Virgona

and the many others at the Australian Institute of Family Studies with whom I am privileged to work.

I also wish to thank Ms Fiona Skelton and Ms Deborah Kikkawa from the *Footprints in Time* group in the Department of Social Services for their valuable input.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and may not reflect the views of the Australian Institute of Family Studies or the Australian Government.
Acknowledgements

Much of the research data analysed in this presentation comes from studies funded by the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Attorney-General’s Department (AGD).

This includes unit record data from

- **Growing Up in Australia**: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). The study is conducted in partnership between the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

- **Footprints in Time**: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children. The study is conducted by the Department of Social Services (DSS) under the guidance of the Footprints in Time Steering Committee, chaired by Professor Mick Dodson AM.

- Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey conducted by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (MIAESR).

- The Australian Temperament Project (ATP) is a multidisciplinary collaboration between AIFS, the University of Melbourne (UM), the Royal Children’s Hospital (RCH) and Deakin University (DU).

The findings and views reported in this paper are those of the author and should not be attributed to DSS, AGD, AIFS, the ABS, the MIAESR, UM, RCH or DU.
Resources that enable “the long view”

Australia now has an extensive suite of longitudinal studies that represent key resources for

- undertaking developmental research
- informing policy and practice
Major longitudinal studies involving AIFS

- *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)*
- Australian Temperament Project (ATP)
- *Stronger Families in Australia*
  - Collected as part of evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy
- Longitudinal Study of Separated Parents
  - Collected as part of evaluation of family law changes
- *Pathways of Care: Longitudinal Survey of Children in Out-of-home care (NSW Pathways of Care)*
- Beyond 18: The Longitudinal Study on Leaving Care (Victoria)
- *Building a New Life in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants*
Evidence-informed policy

Long-term challenges demand a rigorous, evidence-informed approach to public policy
But policy relevant research

- may not always be available
  - “... needs to be the right evidence; it needs to occur at the right time and be seen by the right people.”

  (Banks, 2009, p. 8)

- may not always be timely
  - “Researchers aim for a detailed understanding of an issue—policy-makers/practitioners often need information quickly and simply to take action.”

  (Lewig, Arney, & Scott, 2006)
A key policy relevant data source

- *Growing up in Australia*: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)
  - Developmental pathways through life
Growing up in Australia: Study Overview

- First nationally representative birth cohort study
- Measures all aspects of children’s development and environment
- 10,000 families recruited in 2004, Wave 5 fieldwork completed Nov 2012
  - B cohort - aged 0-1 years; now aged 9-10 years
  - K cohort - aged 4-5 years; now aged 13-14 years
- Selected at random from Medicare (national health service) enrolment database
- Clustered by postcode (vary widely in both geographic and population size)
- Ongoing study – funded formally provided to Wave 8
Who’s doing it?

- Jointly managed and conducted by 3 government agencies:
  - Australian Government Department of Social Services
    - Funders and overall management
  - Australian Institute of Family Studies
    - Design, content, output and analysis
  - Australian Bureau of Statistics
    - Development, data collection (+Wave 2) and processing (+Wave 5)
- Advice from a consortium of academics and researchers
Background
Why do it?

- To provide major evidence base for policy and intervention initiatives
  - Awareness of importance of the early years for later outcomes
  - “New morbidities”, e.g. asthma, obesity, anxiety, depression, etc.
  - Changes in family life: non-parental childcare, mothers return to work, relationship breakdown, increased use of technology
  - Understand contexts of development and developmental trajectories that can not be understood in ‘one off’ studies
- Was no other study on the development of children that was *nationally representative, large-scale, broadly focused, recent, Australian, and longitudinal*. 

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Growing Up in Australia
Bronfenbrenner: ecological theory of child development

plus

Set of “Key Research Questions”
(recently revised)

The broad research questions cover:

- How well are Australian children doing on a number of key developmental outcomes?
- What are the child, family and community factors that are related to different child outcomes?
- What helps maintain an effective pathway, or change one that is not promising?
**Study design**

- Nationally representative of all Australian children in selected age ranges
- Cross sequential design

### Age of cohorts, Waves 1–8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 2</th>
<th>Wave 3</th>
<th>Wave 4</th>
<th>Wave 5</th>
<th>Wave 6</th>
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<th>Wave 8</th>
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<tr>
<td>Infant (B)</td>
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<td>8–9 years</td>
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<td>Child (K)</td>
<td>4–5 years</td>
<td>6–7 years</td>
<td>8–9 years</td>
<td>10–11 years</td>
<td>12–13 years</td>
<td>14–15 years</td>
<td>16–17 years</td>
<td>18–19 years</td>
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</table>
Study informants

- **Parent 1**
  - person in family who knows most about child, usually biological mother

- **Parent 2**
  - child’s other resident parent/guardian, or resident partner of Parent 1

- **Parent living elsewhere**
  - usually child’s other biological parent who no longer lives with Parent 1

- **Study child**

- **Child’s teacher (previously child carer/early childhood educator)**

- **Interviewer**

- **Linked data**
  - Medicare; National literacy and numeracy assessment; National childcare accreditation; Census data; School test score averages and school characteristics
Overall response

MAIN WAVE
- 10,090 families in Wave 1
- 9,070 families in Wave 2 (90% of Wave 1)
- 8,718 families in Wave 3 (86% of Wave 1)
- 8,405 families in Wave 4 (83.3% of Wave 1)

BETWEEN WAVE
- 7,157 (71%) responded to Wave 1.5
- 6,555 (65%) responded to Wave 2.5
- 5,990 (59%) responded to Wave 3.5
## Child assessments

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Highlights from Wave 5 for the 12-13 year olds

- Depression and anxiety
- Alcohol and drug use
- School disengagement
- Peers, peer support and peer influences
- Romantic relationships
- Antisocial behaviour
- Bullying
- Use of ICT and the internet
- Mobile phone use
- Children views of parent’s jobs and their own expectations
- Discrimination
- Parent chronic illness
Linked data

- Medicare;
- National childcare accreditation;
- Census data;
- National literacy and numeracy assessment;
- School test score averages and school characteristics.
LSAC Biomarkers

- Study concerning cardiovascular and lower respiratory diseases
- ‘Pop-up testing centres’ to collect a range of data from B cohort children aged 11-12 years
- Collect a broad range of measures relating to cardiovascular and respiratory health, risk factors (anthropometry, nutrition, physical health); health related quality of life, and service use
How do policy makers use LSAC data?

- Commissioning and publishing academic research
- Ad hoc in-house analyses
- **Modelling** behavioural responses to policy changes
- **Reviews and Statistical reports** *(A picture of Australia’s children)*
- **Validation** of indicators *(Australian Early Development Index)*
- **International comparisons** *(OECD)*
- **Benchmarking** for evaluating impact of smaller scale intervention
What policy issues have been informed by LSAC data?

- **Childcare and workforce participation** – DSS (formerly FaHCSIA) has commissioned numerous studies in this area.
- **Children’s Media Use**: Australian Communication and Media Authority 2009 report combines its data with LSAC.
- **Paid Parental Leave** – Productivity Commission's investigation into leave patterns of parents relied heavily on LSAC data.
- **Breastfeeding** (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing Breastfeeding Enquiry)
- **2006 Family Law Reforms**
Some illustrations of the value of longitudinal data for understanding the significance of the early years in family and community content
Resilience and vulnerability show their effects both early in life as well as across the life course, and reflect social gradients and developmental change.
Outcomes for infants to 8–9 year-olds

Outcome Index (mean=100, SD=10)

Parental socio-economic position (deciles)

Source: LSAC, Waves 1, 2 & 3
Outcomes for infants to 8–9 year-olds

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Source: LSAC, Waves 1, 2 & 3
Disadvantage defined

- Circumstances or conditions that influence choices, chances and life outcomes
- Emergence of these and their impacts may be evident from early life, as well as across the life span
- Is disadvantage better thought of as a state, rather than a fixed trait?
Where you live makes a difference

Social address can change the “state” that you are in …
Some addresses ...

are riskier than others
Risk burden of disadvantaged families and other families

Number of family and neighbourhood risk factors present

- Financially disadvantaged
- Not financially disadvantaged

Percentage of families

Number of risks present

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But risk is not destiny …

- Antisocial behaviour or mental health concerns in adolescence do not destine one to a life of problems

- For some, change can be the constant!
Family form and functioning...

are dynamic states that may affect outcomes
Assessing major legislative and policy changes

- AIFS evaluation of the 2006 family law reforms
Policy objectives of reform package

- Prevention
- Parental involvement and child protection
- Information, advice, family dispute resolution (FDR) to help parents reach agreement
- New entry points to family law system
- Reduction in use of the family courts
Living arrangements and children’s safety

The AIFS evaluation of the 2006 family law reforms showed

- Children can do well in a range of care arrangements

- However, where there are safety concerns, the outcomes for children are bad no matter what the arrangement (*but they are even worse where there is shared time)*

Source: Kaspiew et al (2009)
Family Violence - prevalence

LSSF W1 2008

Mothers

- Physical hurt (pre-sep): 26
- Emotional abuse, no physical hurt (pre-sep or during): 39
- No violence reported: 35

Fathers

- Physical hurt (pre-sep): 17
- Emotional abuse, no physical hurt (pre-sep or during): 36
- No violence reported: 47
Current safety concerns (for self/child) as a result of ongoing contact with the other parent

- Mothers: 21 safety concerns, 79 no safety concerns
- Fathers: 16 safety concerns, 84 no safety concerns
Vulnerabilities

- But toxic circumstances for children were also evident
  - History of family violence
  - Parental mental health, substance misuse, (other) addictions
  - Conflict between parents
  - Safety issues relating to ongoing contact
    - are even *more* damaging for children with shared care time
Prevalence of child abuse, neglect and sexual assault in the community

- **Australian prevalence rates**
  - Physical abuse: 8–10%
  - Sexual assault:
    - Males: 16–20%
    - Females: 30–48%
  - Emotional maltreatment: 6–18%
  - Witnessing domestic violence: 4–23%
  - Neglect: 2–3%

- No national prevalence or incidence study
- Estimates vary dependent upon sample and definitions of abuse/neglect

Child Protection Statistics 2010-2011

- 237,273 notifications to child protection services were made nationally
- 40,466 substantiated
- Emotional abuse (including witnessing DV) and neglect most commonly substantiated
- 37,648 children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2011
  - 12,358 were Indigenous
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children over-represented in:
  - child protection (6 x more likely to be substantiated)
  - out of home care (9 x more likely to be in care)
- Sexual assault is a significant, but under-reported, problem
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence-related assaults

Bromfield & Berlyn, 2008; Keel, 2004
Impacts of child abuse and neglect in childhood and adolescence

- Attachment and social interaction problems
- Physical health problems
- Learning & developmental problems
- Behavioural problems
- Trauma & psychological problems
- Mental Health problems
- Youth suicide
- Eating disorders
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Aggression, violence and criminal behaviour
- Teenage pregnancy
- Homelessness
- Death (fatal abuse)

Rationale for the current analysis

- Child protection systems focus on the ‘high-risk’ end of the continuum of families in need.
- Public health approaches suggest focusing effort on universal services – but also need to target families who have a range of needs.
- Little research exists in Australia or internationally about how children’s wellbeing is affected by different family environments in the broader population.

Mullan and Higgins (in press)
“Our results suggest to some extent that potentially problematic dynamics within the families are not concentrated in particular socio-economic groups”

Mullan and Higgins (in press)
Significant differences in SDQ prosocial scores in different family environments across a broad age-span. Children in disengaged families fared worst, followed by children in enmeshed families. Children in cohesive families had highest levels of SDQ prosocial scores.

Mullan and Higgins (in press)
The challenge

- How to support parents and communities to promote child safety and wellbeing?
- How to identify which families might be struggling and need extra services or support? Is risk mostly in low-SES families?
- Do we know definitively the risk factors for child abuse… or poor child outcomes?
- A public health approach… or progressive (proportionate) universalism?
Life events change families, and have impacts that can span lives and cross generations
Relative low wellbeing in 2009 and 2010, by experience of life events prior to 2010

Number of life events experienced in the previous 12 months

Source: HILDA, Wave 9 and 10
Mothers' distress at 2008 and 2010, by number of life events experienced in the 12 months prior to 2010

Number of life events experienced in the previous 12 months

Source: LSAC, B and K cohorts, Waves 3 and 4
Percentage reporting to have been victim of physical or threatened violence in last 12 months by number of financial stress indicators

Source: 2006 ABS General Social Survey

Financial stress indicators
- Unable to pay electricity, gas, or telephone bills on time
- Unable to pay mortgage or rent payments on time
- Unable to pay for car registration or insurance on time
- Unable to make minimum payment on credit card
- Pawned or sold something because cash was needed
- Was unable to heat home
- Went without meals
- Sought financial help from friends or family
- Sought assistance from welfare or community organisations
Children with social-emotional problems, by history of family separation over two generations, mothers’ and fathers’ experiences LSAC Wave 4

Notes: B cohort: mother (n = 3,958), father (n = 3,836); K cohort: mother (n = 3,823), father (n = 3,721). Maternal history, G2 only vs No history: B cohort: χ²(1, n = 2,936) = 72.4, p < .001; K cohort: χ²(1, n = 2,895) = 40.5, p < .001. Maternal history, G1 + G2 vs G2 only: B cohort: χ²(1, n = 734) = 0.7, p = .489; K cohort: χ²(1, n = 846) = 4.3, p = .062.

Hancock, Edwards and Zubrick, 2012 (based on LSAC data)
Children’s literacy scores, by history of family joblessness over two generations, mothers’ and fathers’ experiences LSAC Wave 4

Notes: B cohort: mother (n = 3,146), father (n = 2,631); K cohort: mother (n = 3,010), father (n = 2,572). Maternal history, G1 + G2 vs No history: B cohort: t(2,382) = 8.9, p < .001; K cohort: t(2,326) = 9.4, p < .001. Maternal history, G1 + G2 vs G2 only: B cohort: t(433) = 2.4, p = .019; K cohort: t(409) = 1.9, p = .056

Hancock, Edwards and Zubrick, 2012 (based on LSAC data)
Children’s numeracy scores, by history of family joblessness over two generations, mothers’ and fathers’ experiences LSAC Wave 4

Hancock, Edwards and Zubrick, 2012 (based on LSAC data)
Children with social emotional problems, by history of family joblessness over two generations, mothers’ and fathers’ experiences LSAC Wave 4

Hancock, Edwards and Zubrick, 2012 (based on LSAC data)
Footprints in Time: The longitudinal study of Indigenous children (LSIC): Study overview

- Guided by a Steering Committee chaired by Professor Mick Dodson
- Includes Indigenous children in remote, regional and urban areas
- Commenced annual interviews with parents and carers in 2008
- Follows two cohorts: aged around 1 year and 4 years in 2008
- Data from Waves 1 to 4 are publicly available.
**Footprints in Time**: The longitudinal study of Indigenous children (LSIC): Study overview (contd)

- LSIC includes interviews with up to 1759 parents and carers, the children themselves, their fathers and their teachers.
- LSIC is committed to feedback to families and a focus on positive outcomes.
- Interviewers are Indigenous people employed by the Department of Social Services, usually from the area where they do interviews.
Where are *Footprints in Time* families

Source: Department of Social Services

![Map of Australia showing the locations of Footprints in Time families](image-url)
Percentage of children experiencing three or more life events by number of waves

1% increase in number of major life events

Source: Department of Social Services
Children's social, emotional and behavioural difficulties scores, by number of life events

Number of life events experienced in Wave 4 of LSAC and LSIC

Source: Department of Social Services
The impact of primary carers’ mental health on children’s SDQ difficulties scores

Source: Department of Social Services
The prime value of the very long view ….

The Australian Temperament Project (ATP)

The ATP is a collaboration between the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Deakin University, the University of Melbourne and the Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne
The Australian Temperament Project: Study overview

- Commenced in 1983, with a representative sample of 2,443 Victorian infants aged 4-8 months
- Two-thirds still participating after 30 years
- 15 waves of data, the latest in 2010-11 (27-28 years)
- Multiple informants (parents, Maternal & Child Health Nurses, teachers, children)
- Now collecting data on study members own children
ATP: Insights from first 30 years

Temperament

- "Differences between individuals, visible from birth, in how they typically behave and react to their social surroundings" (Sanson & Oberklaid, 2013, p 4)

- Remains fairly stable over time

- Can be modified (e.g., parenting style)

- Strong connections with wellbeing
  - 'easygoing' temperament ➔ more positive outcomes
  - 'difficult' temperament ➔ more adjustment difficulties
ATP: Insights from the first 30 years

Learning difficulties

- 16% had reading difficulties at 7-8 yrs
- Nearly 80% of this group, had problems in reading, spelling and/or maths at 13-14 yrs
- Nevertheless, recovery was possible
- Seeds of learning problems evident early on

Outcomes of children with early reading difficulties

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<tr>
<th>Number of areas with learning problems (at 13-14 yrs)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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Anxiety and depression

- Females more likely to be anxious or depressed over adolescence / early adulthood.
- Shyness, irritability and relationship difficulties found to increase risk for internalising problems. Genetic factors appeared to increase risk for some.
- Early intervention important. Anxious / depressed children more likely to overcome symptoms if they had:
  - good social skills,
  - positive relationships with parents and peers
  - and positive school experiences.
ATP: Insights from the first 30 years

Antisocial behaviour

- Collaboration with Crime Prevention Victoria
- Engagement tended to be transitory, peaking in mid to late adolescence
- Risk factors included: reactive temperament style, childhood behaviour problems, & family, peer and school issues
- Key transition periods– start of primary school & secondary school, & post-secondary period

High antisocial behaviour (3+ different types in past yr)

- Percentage
- Age (yrs)
- 13-14
- 15-16
- 17-18
- 19-20
- 23-24
Alcohol use

- Heavy alcohol use was quite common among adolescents
- For many, but not all, heavy use resulted in short-term harms
- Abstainers (at age 17-18) were more likely to have parents who did not allow them to drink at home
Risky driving

- Collaboration with TAC & RACV
- Occasional risky driving was common but few frequently drove in a risky manner
- Risky drivers could be distinguished from other drivers from mid-childhood
- Risky driving was fairly stable between 19-20 & 23-24 yrs, but had decreased by late 20s
- Risky drivers were more likely to engage in other risky behaviours
ATP: Engagement in high antisocial behaviour

Three groups identified

- **Group 1: “Transient behaviour”**
  - Transient during teen years
    - i.e., highly antisocial at only one point during early-to-mid adolescence

- **Group 2: “Persistent behaviour”**
  - i.e., apparent across teenage years

- **Group 3: “Adult onset”**
  - i.e., became highly antisocial in adulthood
Subgroups with differing trajectories of depression, personal reports of young people

- Stable low (51%)
- Moderate to low (23%)
- Increasing (13%)
- Decreasing (7%)
- Stable high (6%)

Smart and Sanson, 2008 (Based on ATP Data)
Childhood family experiences and psychosocial outcomes at 23-24 years

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<tr>
<th>Adult outcomes</th>
<th>Childhood Experiences</th>
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<td>Good parent-child</td>
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<td>relationships</td>
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<td>increased</td>
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<td>increased</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>decreased</td>
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<td>increased</td>
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<td>increased</td>
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<tr>
<td>Binge drinking</td>
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<td>Total number of problems</td>
<td>decreased</td>
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ATP: Insights from the first 30 years

Positive development

- Many studies simply focus on what is going wrong in people’s lives – the ATP has also collected data on young people’s skills and successes
- The majority of study members developing positively and functioning well
- Earlier life experiences related to positive development included: close relationships with others (parents, friends), being tuned into school, better control over emotions, an easygoing temperament style and being community-minded
General insights from the ATP, 30 years on

- Several important transition periods when children’s pathways seemed to change
  - Start of primary school
  - Start of secondary school
  - Immediate post-secondary period

- Efforts to help children at these developmental crossroads would be particularly beneficial

- Could identify risk factors for development of antisocial behaviour
  - In the home, peer, school and community contexts, and

- Findings provide valuable pointers to areas in which intervention efforts may be most useful
Summary

- The extensive set of Australian longitudinal studies provides a valuable resource for research, policy and practice.
- Developmental research is an increasingly valuable resource for broad spectrum coordinated approaches to addressing the needs of children, families and communities.
- Partnerships are powerful and engagement with policymakers present new opportunities for rigorous, relevant and responsive contributions.
Getting and learning about the data

- LSAC Website
- ATP Website
- HILDA Website
- LSIC Website
- DSS Guide to Australian Longitudinal Studies
- DSS Longitudinal Surveys Electronic (FloSse) Research archive
Thank you very much
Families in a rapidly changing world

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13th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference

30 July – 1 August 2014 Melbourne Convention Centre

www.conference.aifs.gov.au
The 13th AIFS Conference will showcase cutting-edge research on topical issues relating to how families are adjusting to a rapidly changing world.

Three excellent keynote speakers headline the program:

- **Trevor Huddleston CBE**, Department for Work and Pensions, UK
- **Emeritus Professor Dorothy Scott OAM**, Director, Bracton Consulting Services Pty Ltd (and was Foundation Chair and inaugural Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia)
- **Professor Paul Amato**, The Pennsylvania State University, USA

**Call for abstracts closes on 28 February 2014**
**Early Bird Registrations close 8 May 2014**

For abstract submissions and registration go to the conference website
www.conference.aifs.gov.au