

Relationships Australia

**RELATIONSHIPS INDICATORS
SURVEY 2003**

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SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Approximately every two years, Relationships Australia conducts a survey of adults around Australia, to investigate current trends and issues in families and relationships. This report details the findings from the 2003 survey.

The survey was designed by Relationships Australia and conducted by AC Nielsen using a CATI (computer assisted telephone interview) system. In total 1215 interviews were completed during October 2003. The questionnaire took on average 12 minutes to administer.

Interviews were conducted across all states and territories. The sample was drawn by region proportional to population. Within multi-occupant households, a 'last birthday' method of respondent selection was adopted, where by the person in the household who was 18 years of age or over, and had had a birthday most recently was interviewed. Data were unweighted.

The total number of interviews by region was as follows:

TABLE 1 – *Number of interviews by region*

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

Demographics of the sample

Gender

Males 476 (39%), females 739 (61%)

TABLE 2 - *Age*

<i>Age grouping</i>	<i>Number of interviews</i>	<i>Percent of total number</i>
Under 20	51	4%
20-29	187	15%
30-39	255	21%
40-49	232	19%
50-59	213	18%
60-69	129	11%
70+	148	12%
TOTAL	1215	100%

TABLE 3 - Household income

<i>Income bracket</i>	<i>Number of interviews</i>	<i>Percent of total number</i>
Under \$25 000	301	25%
\$25 001-\$50 000	294	24%
\$50 001 - \$75 000	229	19%
Over \$75 000	283	23%
TOTAL	1107 (108 declined to answer)	91% (9% declined to answer)

TABLE 4 - Marital status

<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Number of interviews</i>	<i>Percent of total number</i>
Married	613	51%
Defacto	117	10%
Separated	49	4%
Divorced	93	8%
Widowed	94	8%
Single	249	21%
TOTAL	1215	100%

42 people (4%) were currently going through a separation (as opposed to a divorce) and another 28 (2) were considering going through a separation in the next 12 months.

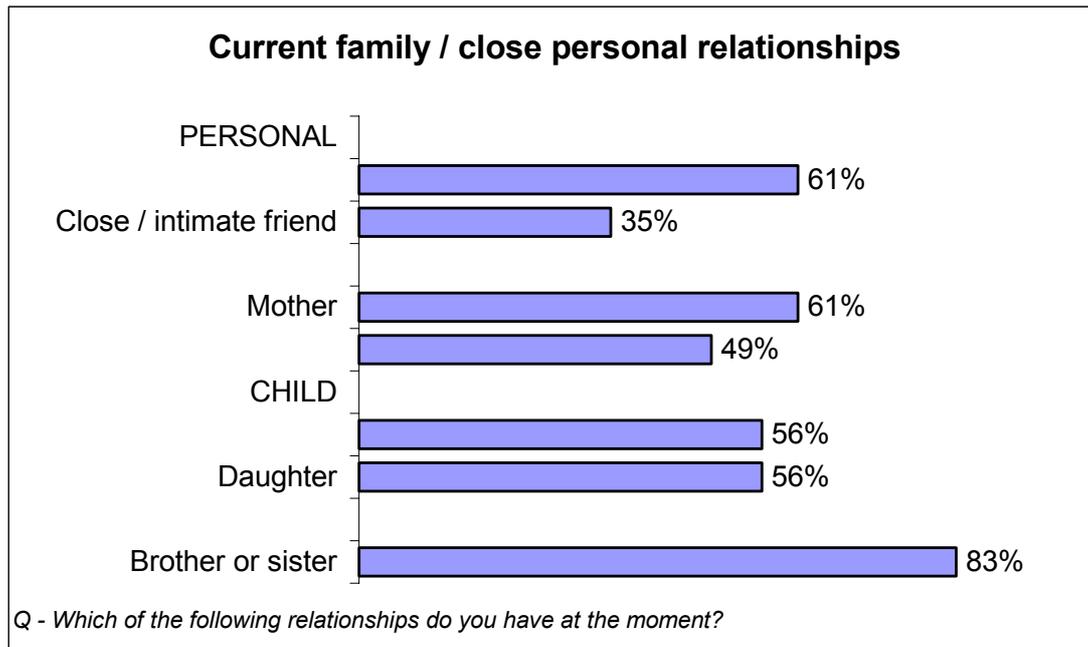
A total of 886 (73%) of the sample were parents. Those living in rural areas (79%) were more likely to be parents than those living in urban areas (70%) ($\chi^2=12.334$, $p<0.001$).

Respondents living in rural areas tended to be older, with more aged over 60 than those living in urban areas (28% vs 20% significant difference $\chi^2=16.127$, $p<0.05$). Logically therefore, more people in rural areas were retired or pensioners (25% vs 17%, significant difference $\chi^2=20.188$, $p<0.001$).

IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS

Since the first Relationships Indicators study was conducted in 1994, a question has been included asking which family relationships people have currently. On average in 2003 adults had 4 personal and family relationships. Chart 1 below illustrates the percent of respondents who have each type of relationship.

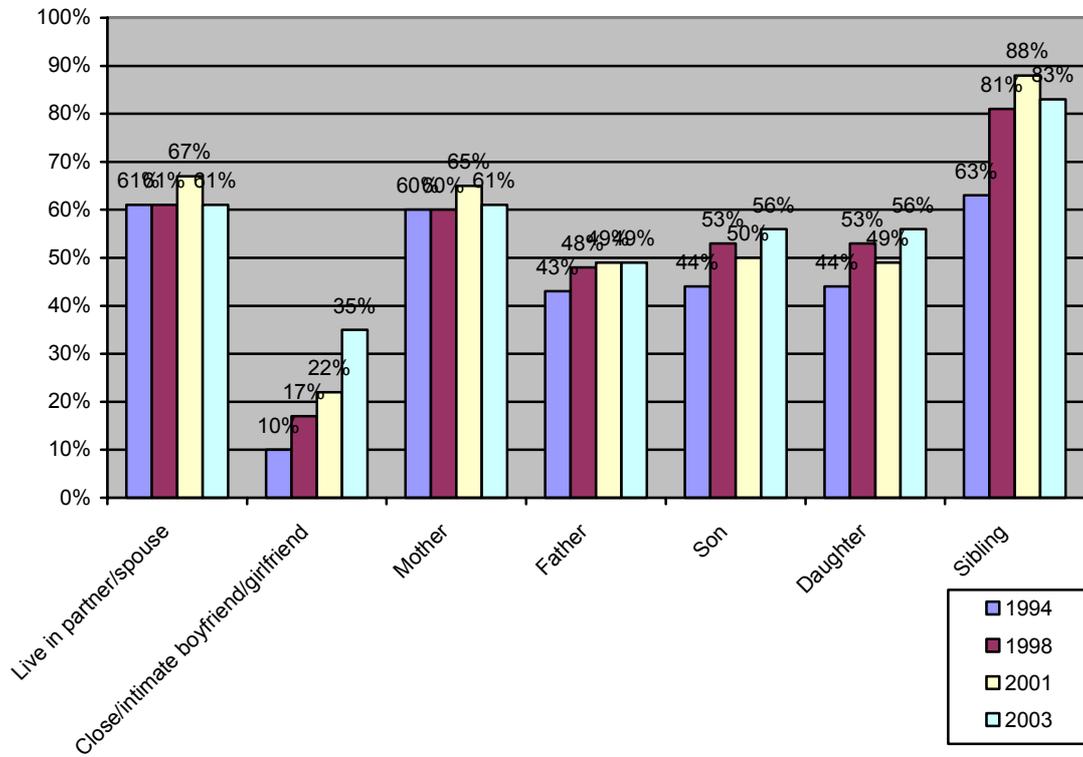
CHART 1



There has been little change in the results of the above question over time, other than a general increase after 1994. Given the stability of the partner/spouse results, it is unclear what the increase in the close/intimate boyfriend/girlfriend response means (Chart 2 below). Anecdotally, the interviewers mentioned that some respondents who had indicated that they had a spouse felt they were being asked if they were having an affair, when the follow up question was – do you have a close/intimate boyfriend or girlfriend. It is possible that in reassuring respondents, the interviewers may have encouraged them to answer 'yes' when thinking of a close friend with whom they were not in an intimate or sexual relationship. This may help to explain why over 95% of respondents indicated they were in an intimate relationship but 21% identified themselves as single.

CHART 2

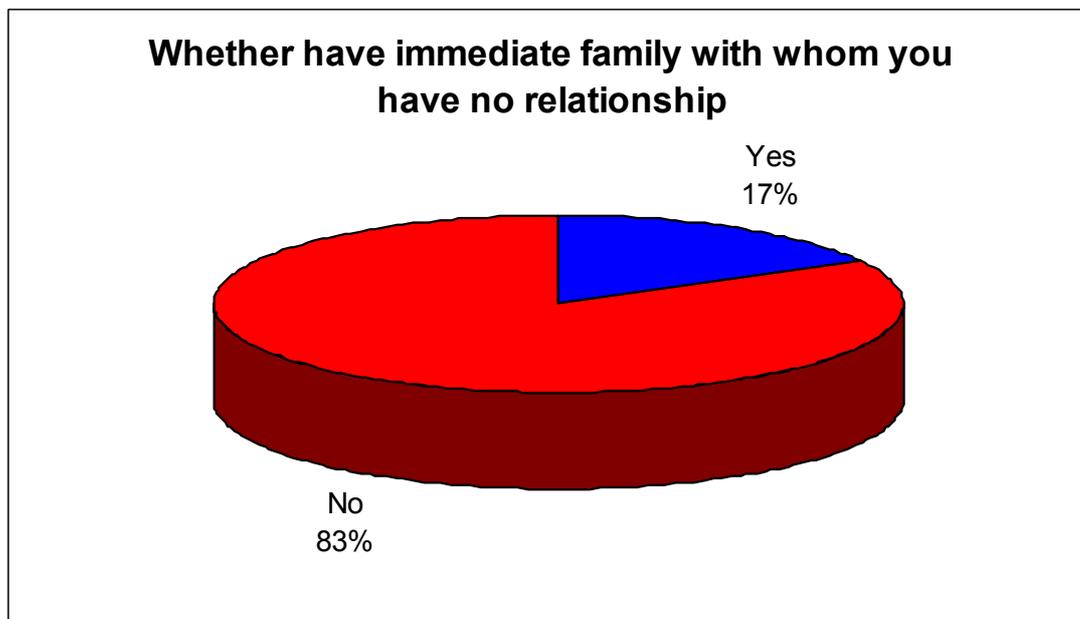
WHO DO YOU HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH? - 1994-2003



ESTRANGEMENT FROM FAMILY

As well as asking people about the relationships they do have, we asked if there were any immediate family members who were still alive with whom the person did not have a relationship currently. 201 people (17%) answered yes (Chart 3).

CHART 3



Q – Are there any members of your immediate family who are still alive, with whom you have no relationship?

As may be seen from Table 5 below, most commonly it is a brother or sister with whom the relationship has broken down. More than half of all estranged relationships are between siblings.

TABLE 5 - Immediate family members with whom you have no current relationship

Relationship	Number	% within total 201	Would you like to change that? - YES
Partner/spouse	3	2%	0%
Mother	21	10%	25%
Father	40	20%	30%
Son	11	6%	55%
Daughter	13	7%	46%
Sibling	107	53%	41%
Grandparents	9	5%	43%
Aunt/Uncle/Cousin/Niece/Nephew	18	9%	
Other	4	2%	
TOTAL	226		

201 people said there was someone in their immediate family with whom they have no relationship currently, but 226 such relationships identified, therefore some people had no current relationship with more than one immediate family member.

The figure in the last column of Table 5 represents the percentage of those who currently do not have that relationship, who would like to change the situation. Therefore, 25% of the 21 people with no current relationship with their mother would like to change that. Amongst those who have a relative with whom they no longer communicate, many would like to renew the relationship (38%). None of the 3 people estranged from their partner/spouse said they would like to change the situation. Of those who are estranged from someone other than their partner/spouse, 44% would like things to change. However, this still leaves the majority not looking to alter the current situation, or at least not at the present time.

People who are separated or divorced are more likely to be estranged from a family member than those with any other marital status ($\chi^2= 21.274$, $p<0.05$). As with the overall trend, it is most often with a brother or sister (see Table 6 below).

TABLE 6 – *Estrangements of separated or divorced respondents*

<i>Relationship</i>	<i>Number</i>
Partner/spouse	3
Mother	4
Father	5
Son	2
Daughter	8
Sibling	23
Other	2
TOTAL	39

It is interesting to note that there are more daughters than sons estranged from their separated or divorced parents. However with the small numbers, it is difficult to reach any conclusions.

THE BEST THING ABOUT PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS

Almost everyone who currently lives with their partner, whether married or not, had something positive to say about the relationship in response to an open ended question. There are many ways to express the benefits couples enjoy but most centre on either the common bonds of companionship, friendship and shared experiences or the caring, loving and trust that comes from the relationship (Chart 4 below). Being in love rated much lower at 5%.

CHART 4



Women were more likely than men to report that the best thing about their partner relationship is communication/understanding/listening ($\chi^2=14.507$, $p<0.00$). This was the only difference in gender found for the open ended question – what is the best thing about your partner relationship.

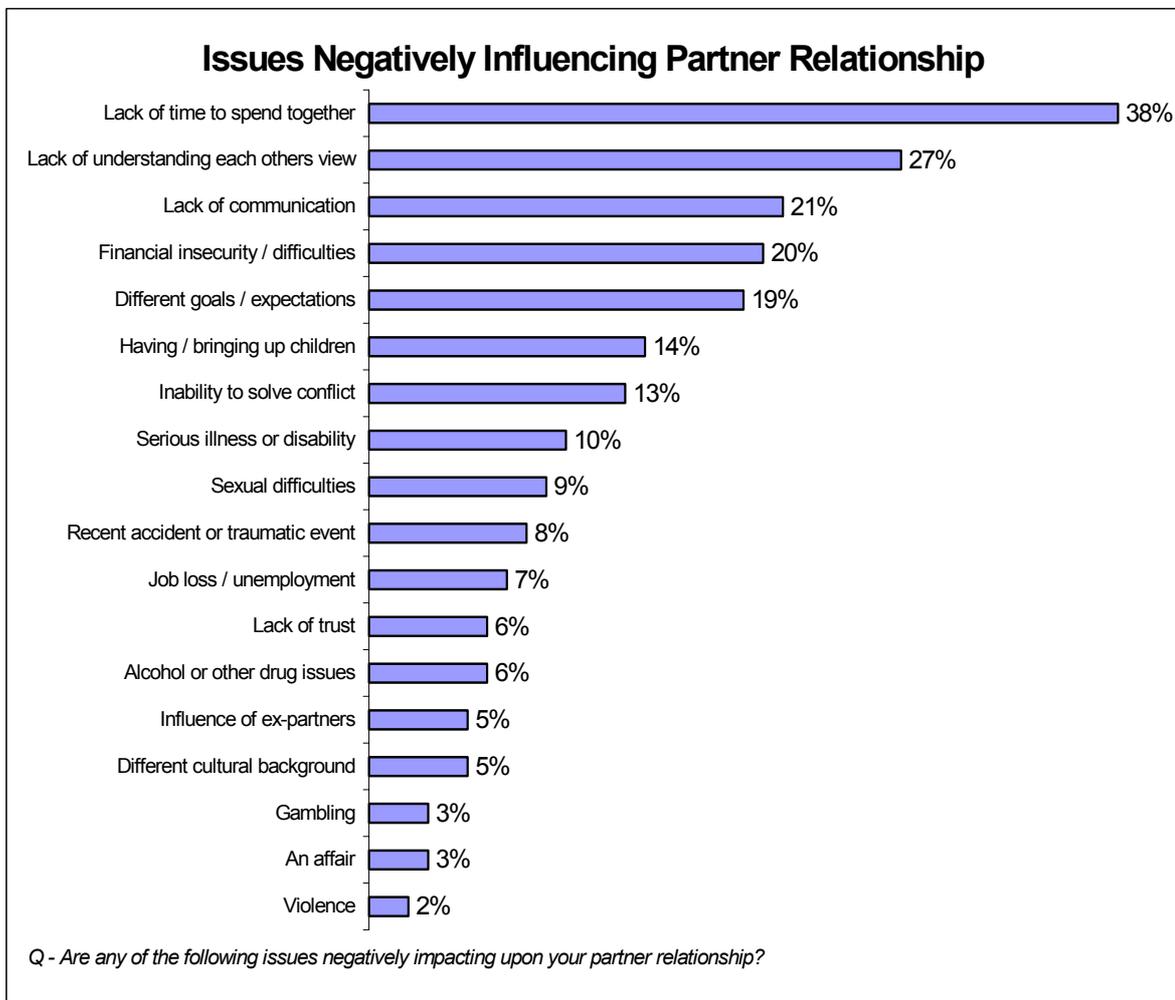
People living in urban areas were more likely than those living in rural areas to say that the best thing about their partner relationship was communication/understanding/listening ($\chi^2=5.810$, $p<0.05$). Conversely, those in rural areas were more likely to nominate companionship/friendship ($\chi^2=4.511$, $p<0.05$).

NEGATIVE INFLUENCES ON PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS

As well as positives, respondents were asked about whether or not certain things were currently negatively impacting upon their partner relationship. Unlike the previous question which was open ended, this question presented people with a list of possibilities and asked for a 'yes' or 'no' for each one.

The most common issue confirmed was a lack of time to spend together. Those aged in their 30s ($\chi^2=86.369$, $p<0.00$) and those with children still living at home ($\chi^2=40.545$, $p<0.00$) were significantly more likely than others to confirm this. Concern was also expressed about communication with ones partner, either the lack of communication or the lack of understanding of each others views. Similarly, many people found that financial or employment pressures put a strain on the relationship (Chart 5 below).

CHART 5

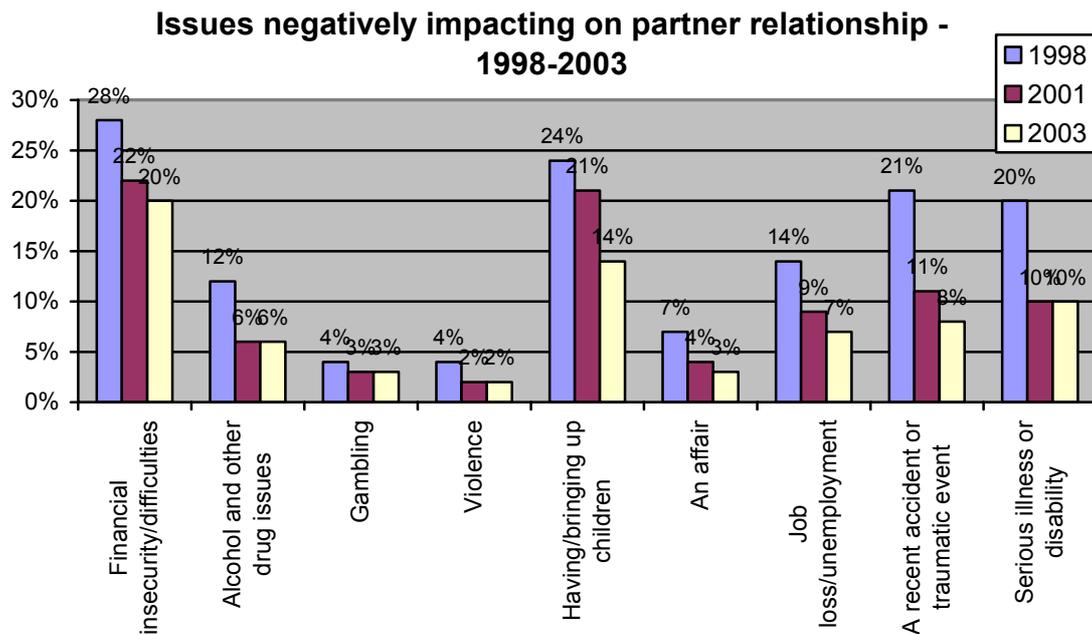


Differences were found between those respondents living in urban areas and those living in rural areas in terms of the negative influences on partner relationships. Those living in urban areas were significantly more likely than those living in rural areas to indicate a lack of time to spend together

($\chi^2=8.361$, $p<0.01$), financial insecurity or difficulties ($\chi^2=4.999$, $p<0.05$) and coming from different cultural backgrounds ($\chi^2=5.234$, $p<0.05$).

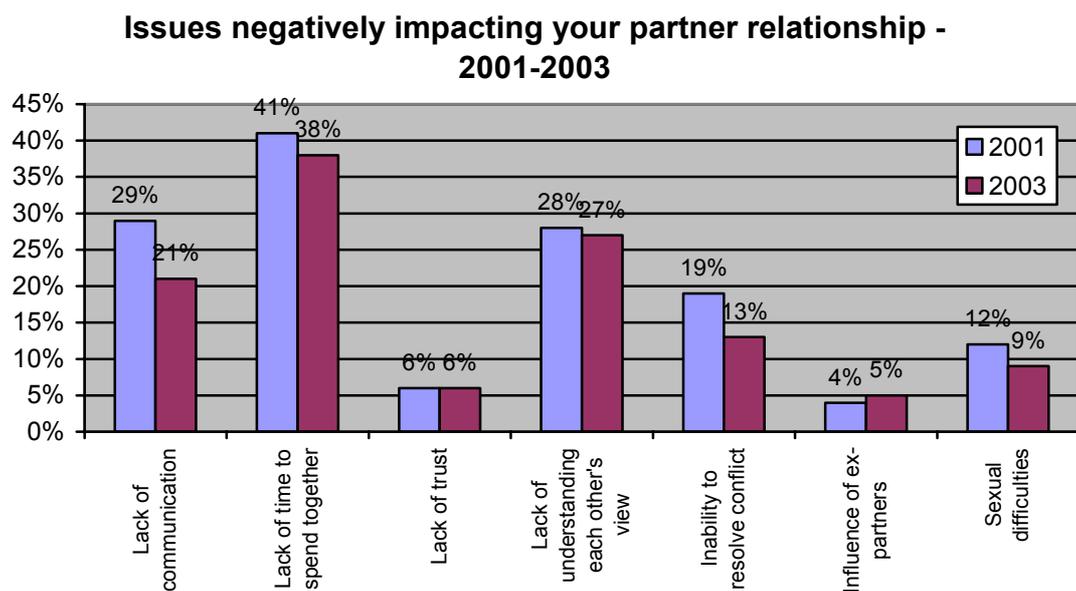
This question has been asked since 1998. The answer options were expanded in 2001 and therefore there are two graphs provided here – firstly for all questions common to 1998, 2001 and 2003 surveys, and secondly for the extra options which are common to the 2001 and 2003 surveys.

CHART 6



The results from some newer options:

CHART 7



While the responses to many options have dropped, a lack of time to spend together was consistently the highest concern in 2001 and 2003.

STRATEGIES TO ENSURE ENOUGH COUPLE TIME

Given this consistent result, respondents were asked about strategies they may use to ensure that they have enough time together as a couple. Interestingly, 41% said that they did not use any strategies or did not see a need to. Another 15% were either retired or worked together. Table 7 below outlines the most common responses to this open ended question.

TABLE 7 - *Strategies used to ensure couples have enough time together*

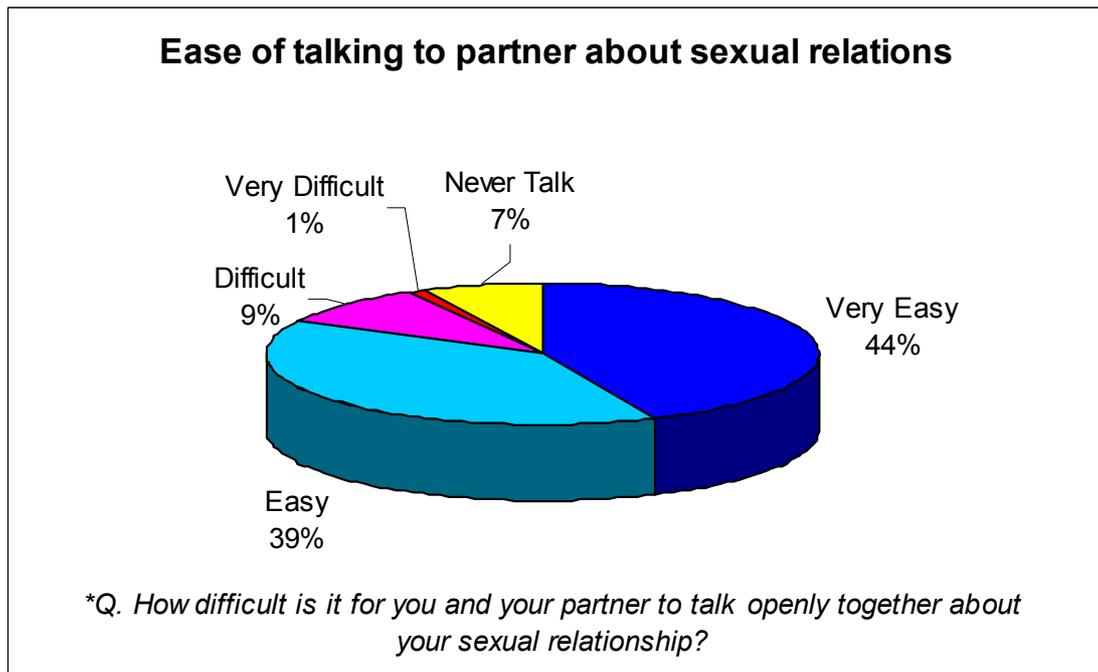
<i>Strategy used</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>% of those in partner relationships</i>
Roster/rearrange working hours	129	17%
Take holidays/weekends away	39	5%
Allocate weekends to spend together	54	7%
Have meals together	25	3%
Go out together \geq once per week	32	4%
Do things together (eg TV, sport, housework)	54	7%
Send kids to bed/have babysitter	26	4%
Do things as a family with kids	14	2%
Retired/work together	108	15%
Not really/no need/none	304	41%

It is clear that re-arranging work hours is the most common method of ensuring that couples have enough time to spend together. Unfortunately, as will be seen in later results relating to balancing work and family life, respondents feel that they do not have enough freedom to do this effectively.

TALKING ABOUT SEX

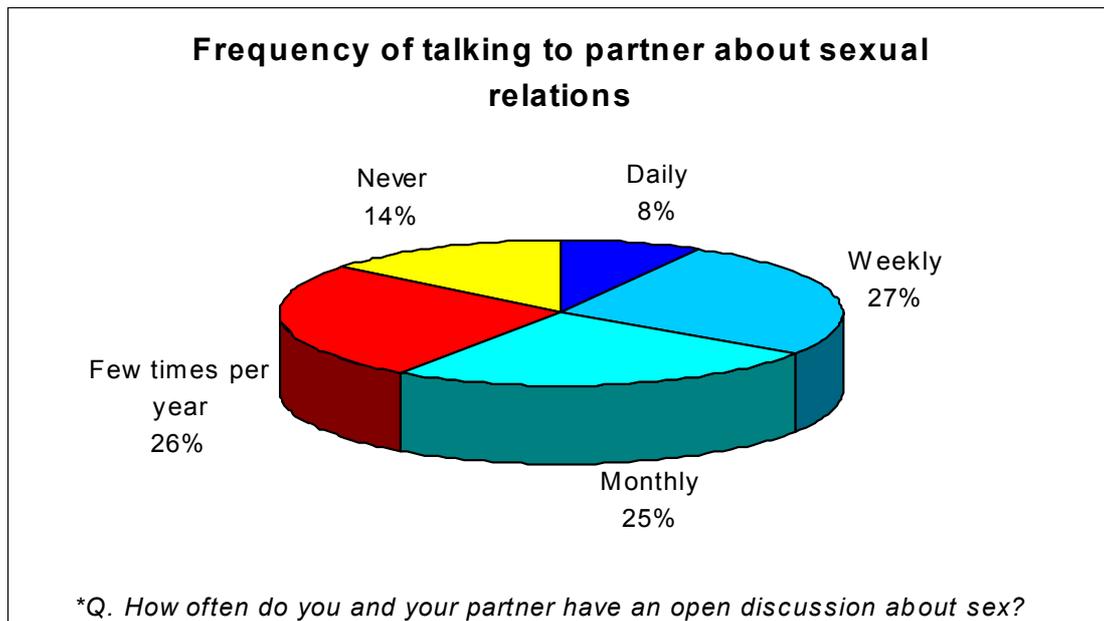
Participants were asked about communication within their partner relationship around sexual issues. 83% said it was either very easy or easy 'for you and your partner to talk openly together about your sexual relationship'. Only one in ten said they find the subject of sex within a live-in relationship difficult to discuss openly, although a further 7% say they avoid the subject altogether (Chart 8 below).

CHART 8



The frequency of these discussions however varied. Approximately one quarter of respondents each answered weekly, monthly and a few times per year to the question 'how often do you and your partner have an open discussion about sex?'. 14% of respondents said never (Chart 9 below).

CHART 9



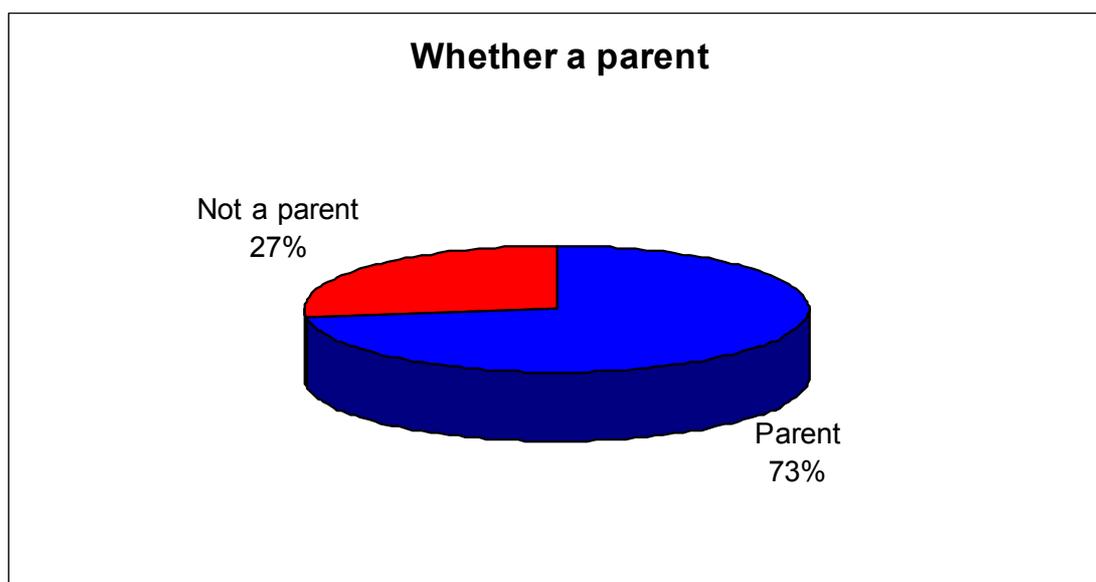
As might be expected, there were differences found in both the ease and frequency of talking about sex for younger and older people. Those aged 20-29 were the most likely to talk about sex daily or weekly, closely followed by those aged 30-39. Those aged over 60 were most likely to say they talk about sex a few times per year and those aged over 70 – never. These differences are significant ($\chi^2=161.008$, $p<0.001$). The pattern of differences for the question – how difficult is it for you and your partner to talk openly together about your sexual relationship – was very similar.

When it comes to gender, there is no difference for – how difficult is it for you and your partner to talk openly together about your sexual relationship? – between males and females. However for the frequency of talking about sex, males say they have an open discussion about sex with their partner more often than females ($\chi^2=15.083$, $p<0.05$).

BEING A PARENT

Three in four adults surveyed were a parent (Chart 10 below). The two groups of people least likely to have children were singles and those aged in their twenties – the proportion of those under thirty with children was 16% compared to 76% amongst those in their thirties ($\chi^2=428.613$, $p<0.00$). 58% of those who are not parents were aged 20-29 years.

CHART 10



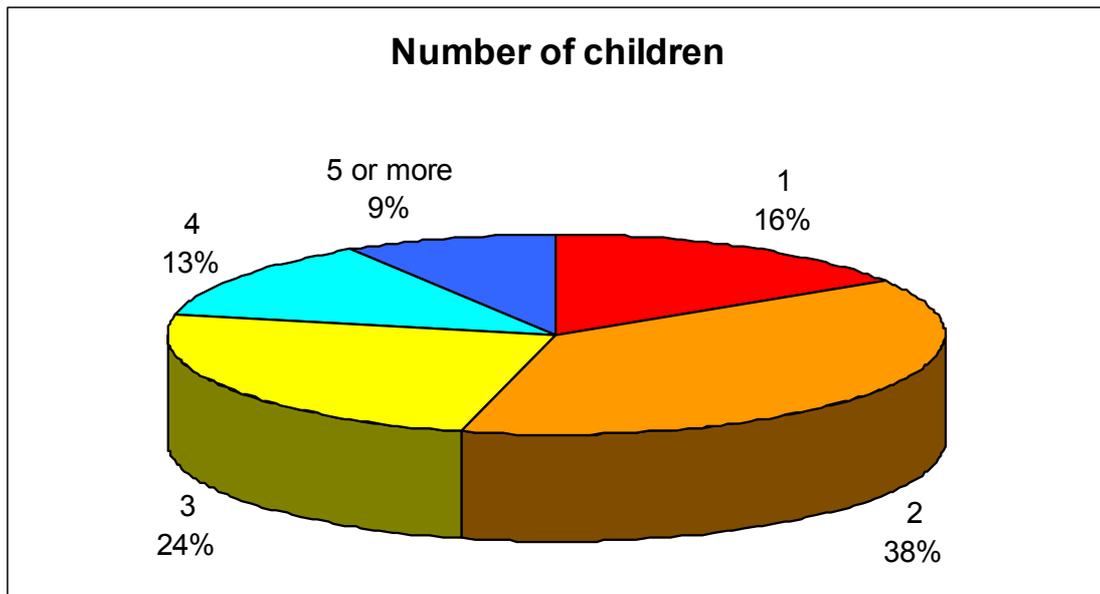
Q – Are you a parent?

As one would expect, most families with children have 2 or 3 children (63%). This still leaves more than one in five families with four children or more. Those living in rural areas were likely to have more children (average 3.9) than those living in urban areas (average 3.5) ($F=18.031$, $p<0.001$).

The number of children parents have is very much age dependent – the current generation of parents are having fewer children than their parents. People with one child only were very much in the minority (Chart 11 below). They tended to be people in their twenties. Parents aged in their 40s were more likely to have 2 children, whilst those aged in their 60s were more likely to have 3 children and those in their 70s to have at least 4 children ($\chi^2=168.547$, $p<0.00$).

Overall, 12% of parents said that they would like to have more children. Although those with only one child were more likely than others to say they wanted more children ($\chi^2=131.227$, $p<0.00$), 60% were happy with only one child. 4% of those parents with 4 or more children said that they wanted to have more children.

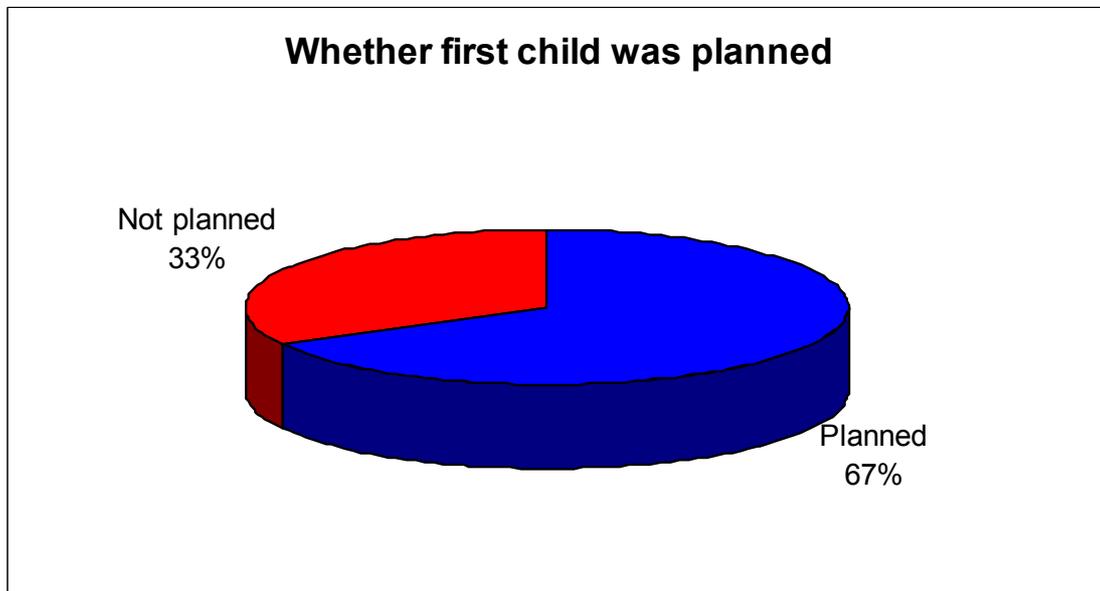
CHART 11



Q – How many children do you have?

One in three of parents said that their first child was not planned (Chart 12 below). It is not surprising that those whose first child was planned were most likely to be married. Those whose first child was not planned were more likely to be in a de facto relationship or separated and to a lesser extent, divorced ($\chi^2=28.165$, $p<0.001$).

CHART 12



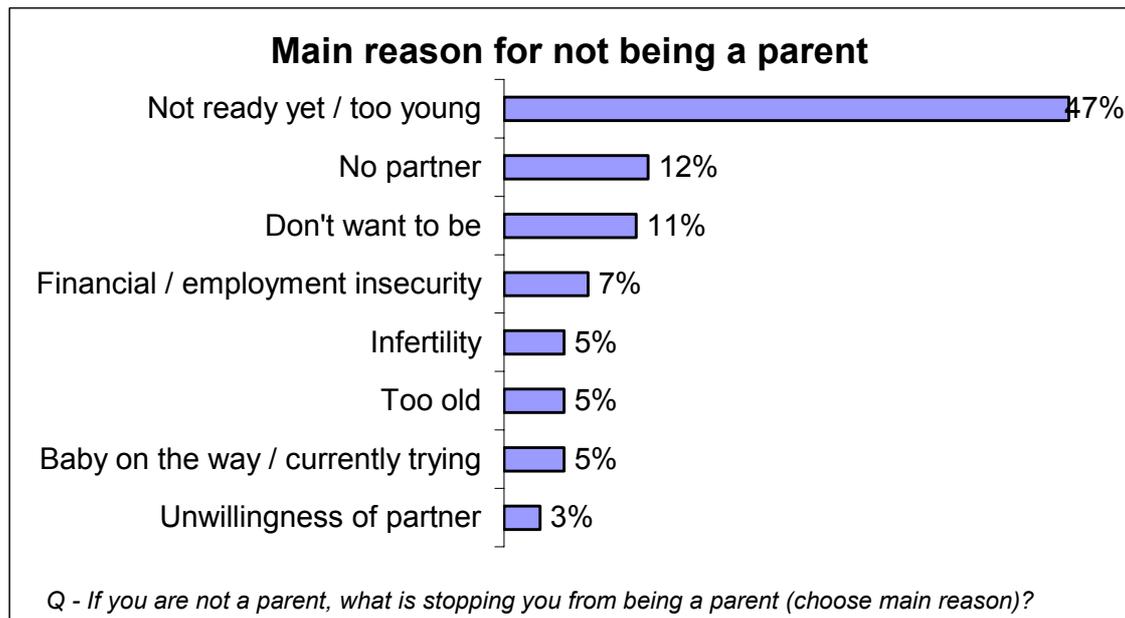
Q – Can I ask if your first child was planned?

NOT BEING A PARENT

For those people who are not parents, a forced choice question was asked about their main reason for not being a parent. Almost half of respondents said that they were not ready yet or too young (Chart 13 below).

The proportion who for whom there was a barrier to having children was relatively small and divided between those who were unable physically (5%) and those who could not afford to have children (7%).

CHART 13

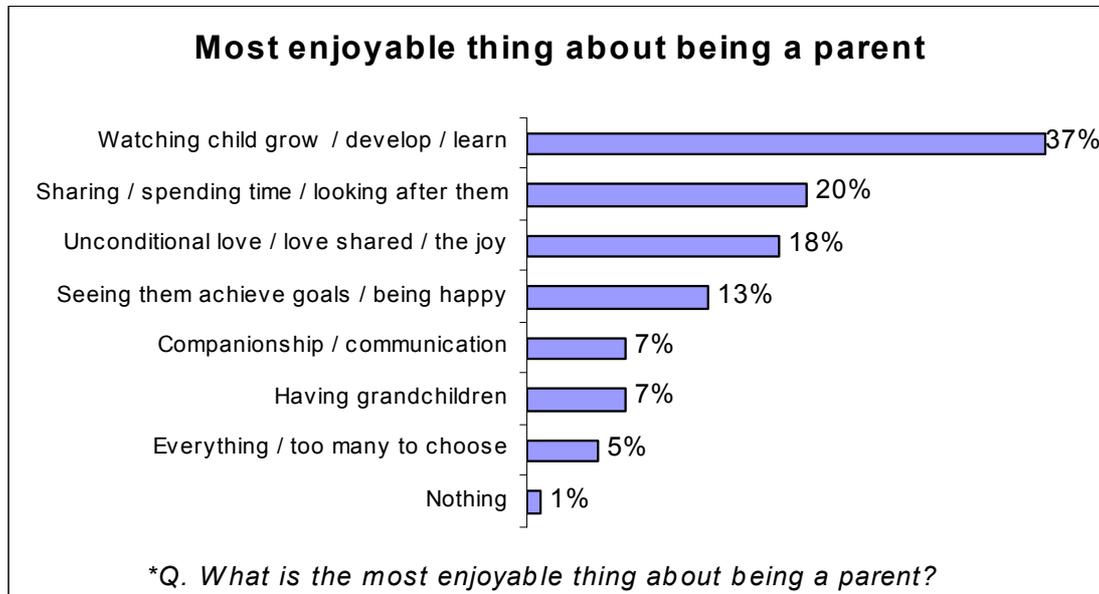


People in urban areas were more likely than those in rural areas to say that they were not ready yet or too young to have children ($\chi^2=22.167$, $p<0.01$). Overall, 13% of those who said they were too young or not ready yet were aged 30-39. For those aged 20-29, this was the major factor in not having children (65%). However by the time people are in their 30s, it had dropped to 32% and other more practical issues had increased in importance (eg no partner 24%).

MOST ENJOYABLE THING ABOUT BEING A PARENT

Parents were asked for the most enjoyable aspect of having children, in an open ended question. Most talked about watching their children grow and learn and spending time with them, sharing and looking after them (Chart 14 below).

CHART 14



Responses to this question changed when the children were no longer living at home. Those with children still at home were more likely to say that the most enjoyable things were watching the child grow, develop and/or learn ($\chi^2=12.361$, $p<0.05$). Once the children had left home, companionship and communication ($\chi^2=15.870$, $p<0.00$), and not surprisingly, having grandchildren ($\chi^2=63.741$, $p<0.00$) were more likely to be nominated.

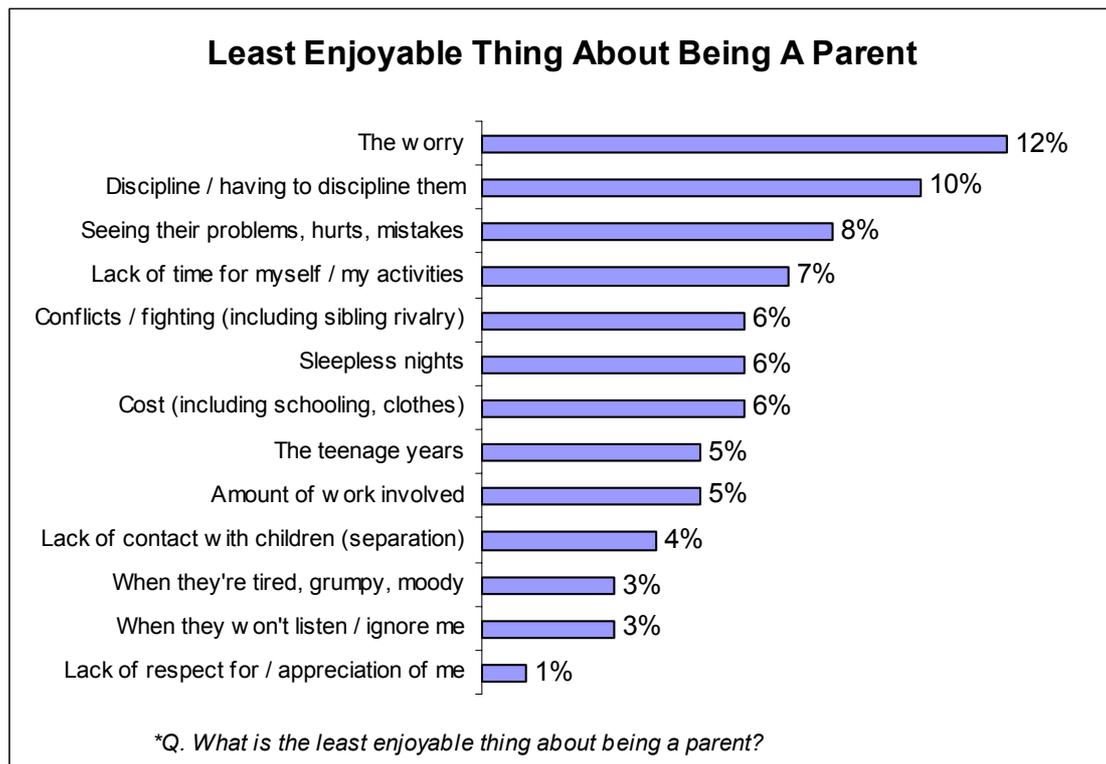
Those in urban areas were slightly more likely than those living in rural areas to say that companionship and communication was the most enjoyable thing about being a parent ($\chi^2=3.453$, approaching significance). Logically, given the older population, those in rural areas were more likely to say having grandchildren ($\chi^2=11.861$, $p<0.01$).

There were some differences in the responses from mothers and fathers to the question of the most enjoyable thing about being a parent. Fathers were more likely to say sharing/spending time with them/looking after them ($\chi^2=5.657$, $p<0.05$), or having grandchildren ($\chi^2=10.215$, $p<0.01$). Mothers were more likely to say the unconditional love/love shared/the joy ($\chi^2=13.304$, $p<0.00$).

LEAST ENJOYABLE THING ABOUT BEING A PARENT

On the negative side, parents were asked, again in an open ended question, to say what was least enjoyable about having children. There was more variation in responses to this question than to the previous question (Chart 15 below). The biggest concerns were worry, discipline and seeing their hurts and mistakes. Only 6% of respondents said that the cost was the least enjoyable thing about being a parent.

CHART 15



As for the most enjoyable thing about being a parent, the least enjoyable aspect changed when the children had left home. For those with children living at home with their parents, the least enjoyable things were more likely to be conflicts/fighting ($\chi^2=5.208$, $p<0.05$), discipline ($\chi^2=19.712$, $p<0.05$), when they're tired/grumpy/moody ($\chi^2=20.559$, $p<0.00$), sleepless nights ($\chi^2=16.292$, $p<0.00$) and a lack of time to myself ($\chi^2=20.627$, $p<0.00$). After the children had left the family home, the least enjoyable aspects of parenting were more likely to be the worry ($\chi^2=9.750$, $p<0.05$), seeing their problems/hurts/mistakes and not being able to help ($\chi^2=6.497$, $p<0.05$), or lack of time or contact with the children ($\chi^2=5.660$, $p<0.05$). Those parents whose children had left home were also more likely to say that there was no least enjoyable aspect of parenting ($\chi^2=39.140$, $p<0.00$).

Those parents living in rural areas were more likely than their urban counterparts to say that a lack of time or contact with their children, including being separated from them was the least enjoyable thing about being a parent ($\chi^2=6.770$, $p<0.05$).

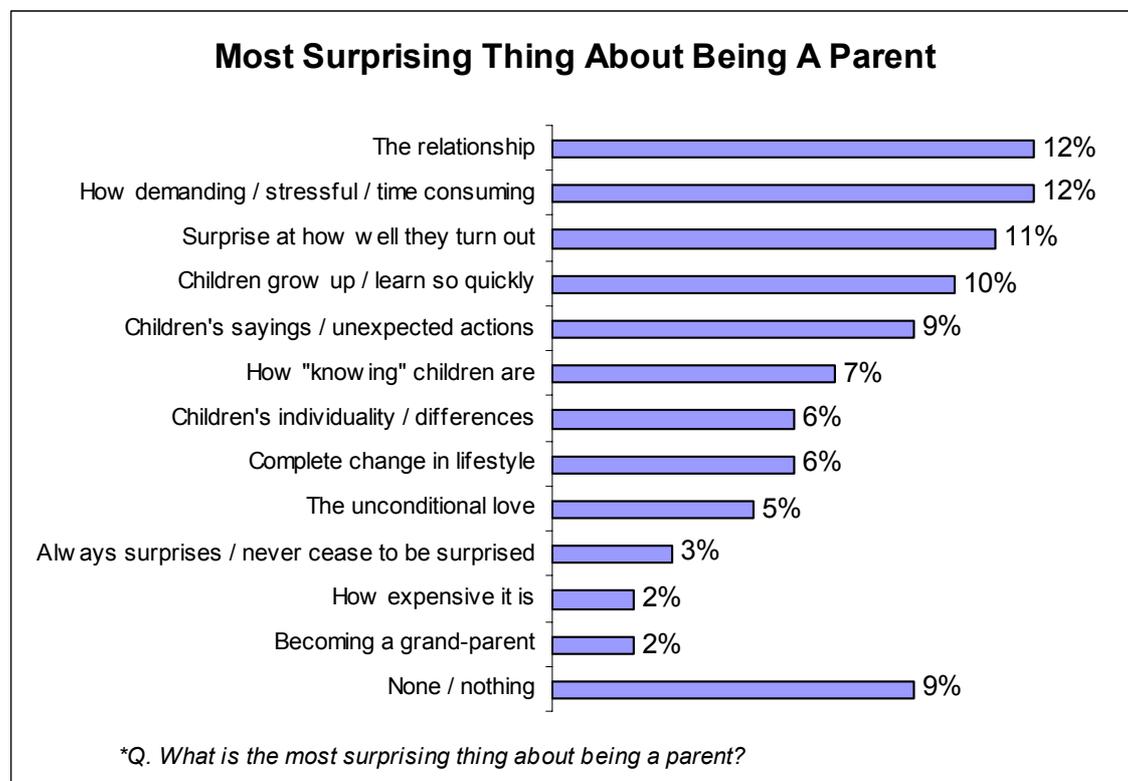
Mothers were more likely to nominate the conflicts/fighting ($\chi^2=4.632$, $p<0.05$), and the amount of work involved ($\chi^2=8.268$, $p<0.01$) whilst fathers were more likely to say a lack of time or contact with the children, including being separated from them ($\chi^2=5.608$, $p<0.05$) or nothing ($\chi^2=8.449$, $p<0.01$).

MOST SURPRISING THING ABOUT BEING A PARENT

When asked to say what was surprising about having children, responses tended to be positive rather than negative.

The positive surprises of parenthood centred on the joy of the relationship and the individuality of children (Chart 16 below). The main negative concerned the stress of raising children and how time consuming it was (12%).

CHART 16



Those parents whose children still lived at home were more likely to say children growing up/learning so quickly ($\chi^2=8.997$, $p<0.01$), how demanding/stressful/time consuming it is ($\chi^2=8.358$, $p<0.01$) or how knowing they are/how much children teach you ($\chi^2=7.027$, $p<0.05$) whilst those whose children had left the family home said the surprise at how well they turned out ($\chi^2=7.548$, $p<0.01$) or becoming a grandparent ($\chi^2=12.475$, $p<0.01$). Parents with children who had left home were more likely to say that nothing was surprising ($\chi^2=13.660$, $p<0.00$).

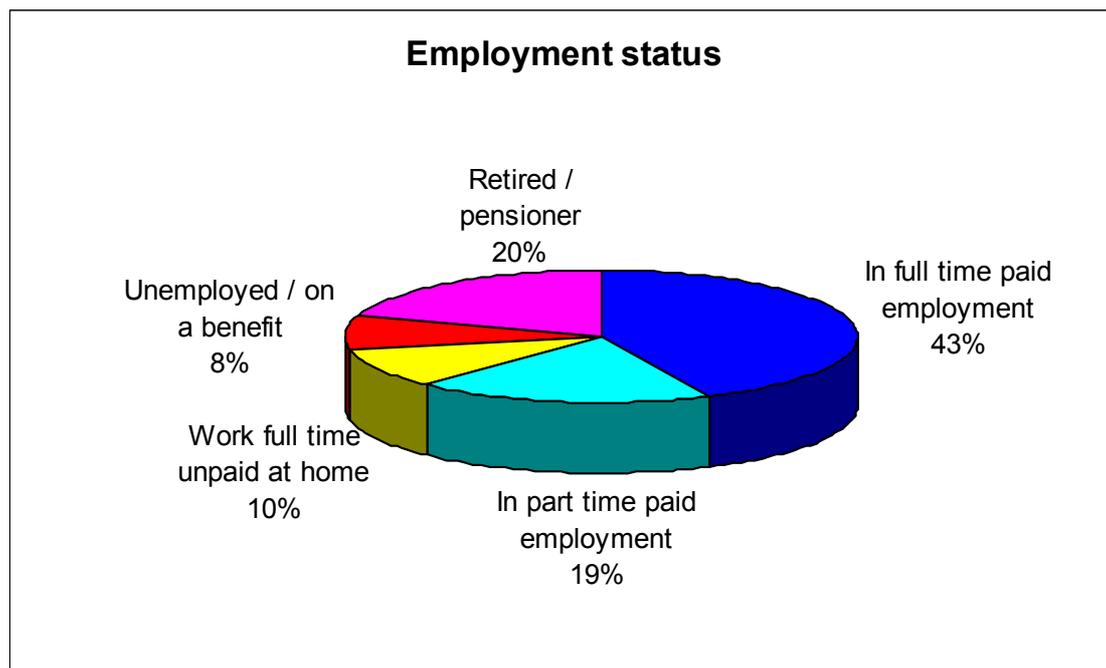
Some interesting differences arose between urban and rural dwellers in regards to the most surprising thing about being a parent. Those in rural areas were more likely to say children's individuality & differences ($\chi^2=6.543$, $p<0.05$) and those in urban areas were more likely to say a complete change in lifestyle/ refocuses your life ($\chi^2=6.037$, $p<0.05$).

Mothers were more likely than fathers to say that the relationship/ how much I love & enjoy my children ($\chi^2=7.834$, $p<0.01$), and the unconditional love ($\chi^2=4.679$, $p<0.05$) was the most surprising thing. Fathers were more likely to say that nothing was surprising ($\chi^2=4.341$, $p<0.05$).

ON WORK / LIFE BALANCE

The majority of people surveyed were in paid employment, either full or part time (Chart 17 below). For men, most worked full time (62%) as opposed to part time (10%). For women, the split between working full time and part time was more even, but most were in paid employment (55%), with 15% doing full time unpaid work at home. These differences between men and women were statistically significant ($\chi^2=150.019$, $p<0.00$).

CHART 17



Q – Now we would like you to think about balancing work and family life. Under your current circumstances, do you:?

Being a parent indicated significant differences in work status. Parents were more likely to be working full time unpaid at home, or retired/on a pension. Those without children were more likely to work full time in paid employment or be unemployed/on a benefit ($\chi^2=126.132$, $p<0.00$).

For 24% of people, their current work situation was not what they would prefer to be doing. Those who were currently unemployed or on a benefit were the most likely to not be satisfied with their situation ($\chi^2=29.196$, $p<0.00$). Almost 30% of those working full time in paid employment would also prefer a change. There was no difference between men and women in terms of satisfaction with current work status, nor between parents and those without children.

Those wanting a change were most likely to want to move to part time employment (Table 8 below).

Table 8 - Preference for work/family balance

Work status	% currently	% would like
Full time paid employment	43%	26%
Part time paid employment	19%	43%
Work full time unpaid at home	10%	10%

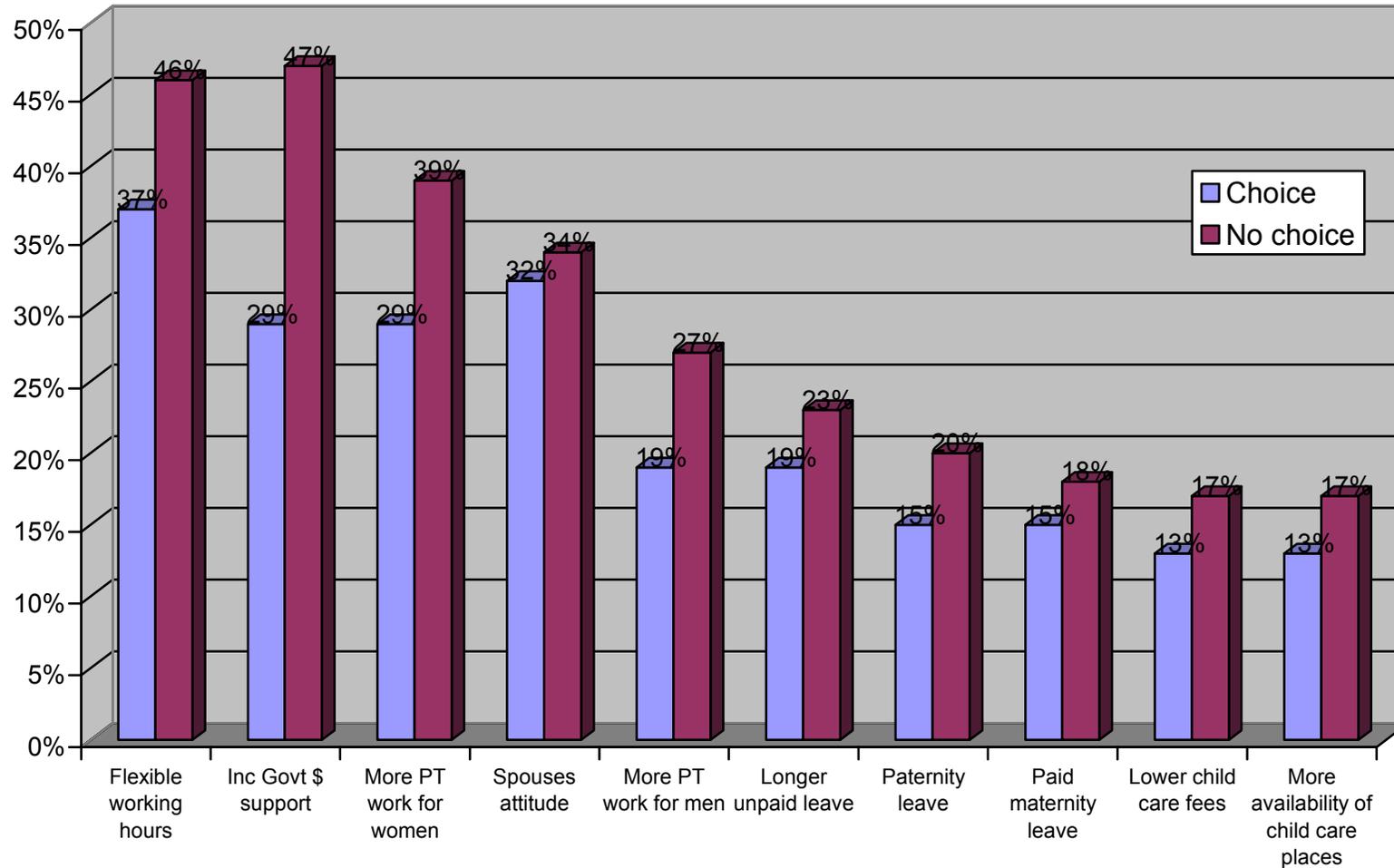
Men were more likely than women to prefer to be self employed or retired, whereas women were more likely to prefer to be working part time ($\chi^2=20.733$, $p<0.00$). Parents were more likely to prefer part time paid employment and those without children full time paid employment ($\chi^2=13.500$, $p<0.01$).

The difficulty of balancing family and work life is reflected in the finding that 40% of parents felt like they had no real choice. Those in rural areas were slightly more likely than those in urban areas to feel this lack of choice, although the finding was not statistically significant ($\chi^2=3.433$). Fathers were significantly more likely than mothers to feel that they do not have a choice ($\chi^2=4.047$, $p<0.05$).

Parents were then asked what would or does assist them in meeting their preferred work pattern. Chart 18 below, shows the differences in responses between those who feel they have a choice and those who do not in terms of work/life policies. More availability of child care places ($\chi^2=3.059$, $p=0.08$, approaching significance), paternity leave ($\chi^2=4.324$, $p<0.05$), more part time work options for women ($\chi^2=10.031$, $p<0.05$) and for men ($\chi^2=6.911$, $p<0.05$), flexible working hours ($\chi^2=6.849$, $p<0.05$) and increased Government financial support ($\chi^2=30.207$, $p<0.01$) were more likely to be mentioned by those who feel they have no real choice in balancing work and family life. These are therefore issues which clearly still need to be addressed.

There was no difference between those who feel they have a choice and those who do not, in terms of lower child care fees, paid maternity leave, longer unpaid leave and spouse's attitude. Therefore it was just as likely that those who feel they have no choice would like these policies and it was that they assisted parents in having a choice.

**Chart 18 - Balancing work and family:
what helps those who feel they have a choice &
what those who feel they don't have a choice would like**



There were no policies identified which are useful enough and readily available enough that they are not on the 'wish list' of those who feel they have no choice in balancing work and family life. This suggests that there is still a long way to go in many areas of balancing work and family life.

There were some interesting differences found in looking at this question, between various different areas within Australia. Those in urban areas who feel that they have no real choice were more likely than their rural counterparts to say that they need lower child care fees ($\chi^2=4.169$, $p<0.05$), more availability of child care places ($\chi^2=4.169$, $p<0.05$), and paternity leave ($\chi^2=4.320$, $p<0.05$).

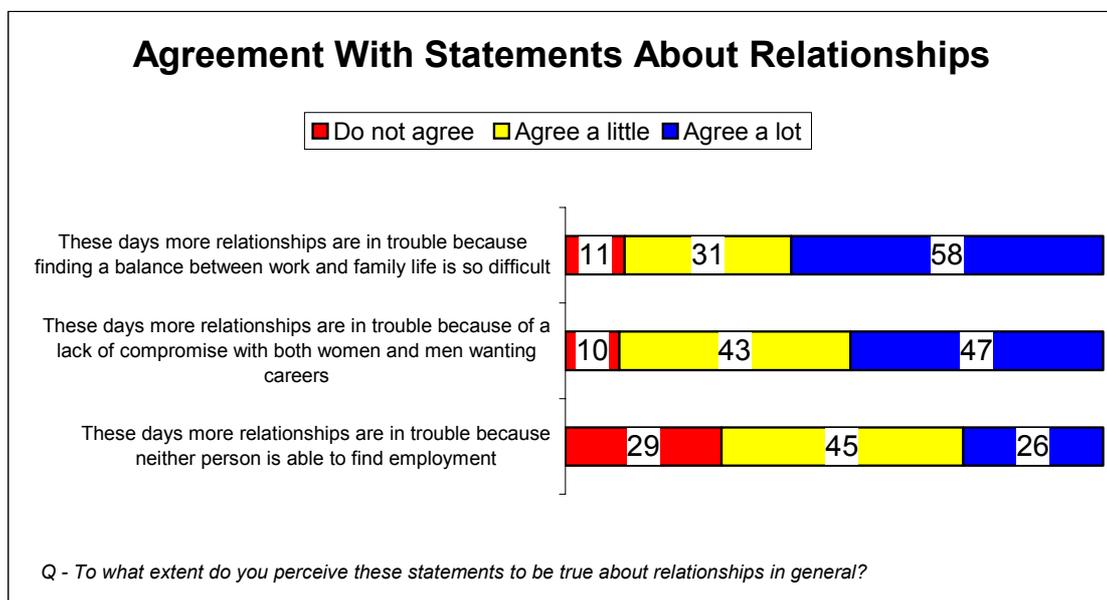
Whilst there was no overall difference between the States (NSW, Vic, Qld, SA and WA were included in the analysis, Tas, ACT & NT excluded because of low numbers) in terms of whether or not you feel like you have a real choice regarding balancing work and family life, there were clear differences between individual policies. Amongst those parents who feel like they do have a real choice, Queenslanders were more likely than those from other States to nominate the following as assisting in that choice – part time work options for women ($\chi^2=12.296$, $p<0.05$), and for men ($\chi^2=14.053$, $p<0.01$), and flexible working hours ($\chi^2=18.468$, $p<0.05$). For the parents without a choice, Queenslanders and South Australians were more likely than those from other States to be looking for lower child care fees ($\chi^2=9.904$, $p<0.05$) and paid maternity leave ($\chi^2=18.468$, $p<0.01$).

ATTITUDES TOWARDS MODERN RELATIONSHIPS

Asked about the stresses placed on modern relationships, most people surveyed expressed concern about work / life balance - 58% agreed a lot that these days more relationships are in trouble because finding a balance between work and family life is so difficult (Chart 19 below).

A lack of compromise between men and women wanting careers was also thought to be a factor in relationship being in trouble, with 90% believing this was true, to at least a little extent. There was no difference in perception between men and women.

CHART 19



Of least concern was the problem of unemployment – however, the majority (71%) still perceived that the lack of employment was the cause of at least some relationship difficulties. This was more likely for those in rural than in urban areas ($\chi^2=18.682$, $p<0.01$). This is an interesting result considering the earlier finding that those in rural areas were less likely to say that financial difficulties were impacting negatively upon partner relationships.

There was no difference between men and women in the responses to the statement about compromise in relationships. Women were however more likely than men to agree a lot to the statements about balancing work and family ($\chi^2=21.052$, $p<0.01$), and unemployment ($\chi^2=10.158$, $p<0.01$).

IMPORTANCE OF WORK Vs. PERSONAL LIFE

When asked about the importance of certain things about how people view themselves, results clearly showed that it is more important to be a good husband/wife and parent than it is to have a job or earn a lot of money (Chart 20 below).

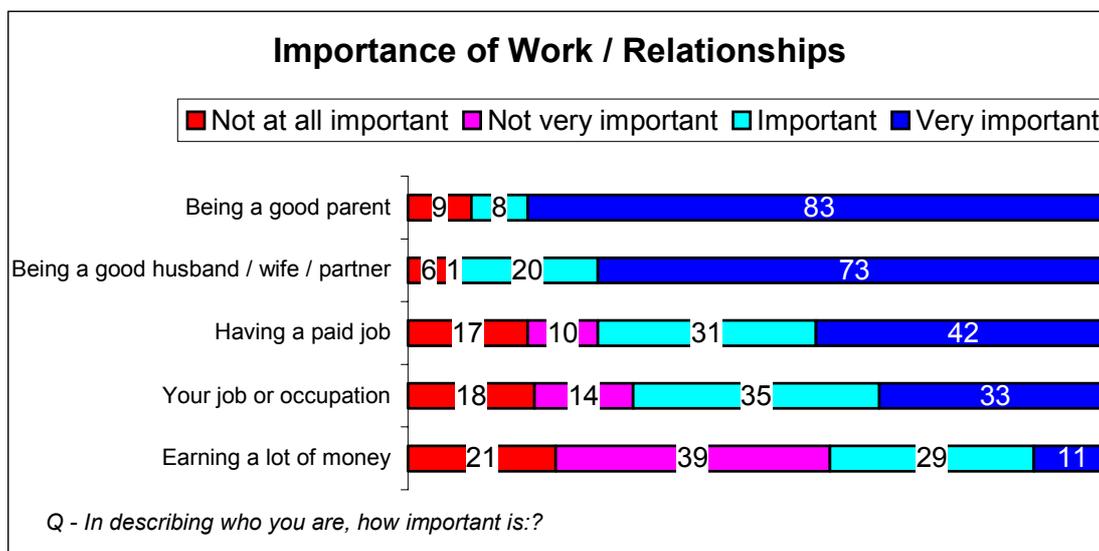
Men were more likely than women to feel that their job or occupation ($\chi^2=9.928$, $p<0.05$), having a paid job ($\chi^2=42.071$, $p<0.00$) and earning a lot of money ($\chi^2=25.246$, $p<0.00$) were very important. There was no difference between men and women in terms of the perception of the importance of being a good partner and parent.

Amongst people in a spousal/partner relationship, 99 out a hundred said it was important to be a good husband/wife/partner, whilst all with children under 19 years said it was important to be a good parent. Even amongst those with children over 18 years, 99% said being a good parent was important.

On balance, most thought that one's job, or at least having a paid job was important. Logically, those who said that employment or occupation was not important were most likely to be over 60 years of age ($\chi^2=247.944$, $p<0.00$).

The importance of earning a lot of money was a minority issue. Whilst those earning at least \$50 000 were more likely to say that this was important, they were not more likely to see it as very important. Even amongst those who had a household income in excess of \$75,000, only 13% considered that the amount one earned was very important. Those low income earners on under \$25 000 were the most likely to see this as being not at all important to how they view themselves as a person ($\chi^2=118.686$, $p<0.00$).

CHART 20



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