

Relationships Australia | CUA  
Relationships Indicators Survey 2008



Issues and  
concerns that  
Australians have in  
their relationships  
today



## Acknowledgements

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The 2008 Relationships Indicators Survey is a joint initiative of Relationships Australia and CUA (Credit Union Australia) based on data collected, analysed and reported by Woolcott Research Ltd. Design is by Design Direction.

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## About Relationships Australia



For 60 years Relationships Australia has helped Australians to improve their wellbeing and make positive changes throughout their lives by building better relationships. We are one of Australia's largest community-based, not-for-profit organisations providing a wide range of relationship and family support services from over 130 locations across the country.

The 2008 Relationships Indicators Survey marks a decade since the first survey and for the first time, it has been undertaken in partnership with a sponsor. We very much appreciate the support of CUA as we celebrate our 60th anniversary in 2008 and the decade of the Relationships Indicators Survey.

## About CUA (Credit Union Australia)

CUA is Australia's largest member-owned financial institution. With more than 400,000 members and over 70 branches across the country, we have been a part of the financial lives of a great number of Australians for many years.

CUA is passionate about working with the Australian community to make a change for the better. In 2008 we welcomed Relationships Australia as our national community partner investing in a three year partnership to support the wellbeing of Australian families. We are very proud to sponsor this critical research into relationships today through the 2008 survey.



# Executive Summary

The findings of the 2008 Relationships Indicators Survey presented in this document portray a picture of Australian society in which social contact is a central part of a happy and healthy life.

## Research method

The survey has been completed five times since 1998, with the previous survey conducted in 2006. The survey provides information regarding the main issues and concerns that Australians have in their relationships today.

The research was quantitative and consisted of 1,200 randomly selected telephone interviews amongst the general population at a national level. Prior to fieldwork a pilot stage was completed, and 30 of the pilot interviews were included in the final dataset.

A random sampling approach was used based on Random Digit Dialling. Quotas based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population figures were applied to State and Age to ensure a representative sample by these variables.

The profile of the sample remains comparable by State and Age to that achieved when the survey was last run in 2006. Given the importance of Gender in determining response to the kind of questions included, a broad quota based on the 2006 male/female split was applied.

## Relationships today

The 2008 Relationships Indicators Survey highlights the fact that the vast majority of people have relationships of some kind - be they friendship, romantic or familial. Friendships in particular are highly important and for those who do not currently have a partner, are as sought after as a short-term or long-term relationship.

In terms of the type of partner relationship Australians are choosing, the proportion with a spouse or live in/de facto partner increased by 5% from 62% in 2006 to 67% in 2008. Although there was also an

increase in the proportion of respondents with a non-live in partner – it was a smaller increase of 3% (from 9% in 2006 to 12% in 2008).

Of other important relationships identified, over 80% had a close/best friend, or a sibling. Three quarters had a child and three in five had a parent. A third of the sample had a grandchild and a quarter had a grandparent.

## Looking for a partner

Four in ten respondents currently not in a relationship were looking for some kind of relationship. Of these respondents, one in five was looking for friendship with a similar proportion looking for a long-term relationship and 5% looking for a short-term relationship.

## Challenges in looking for a partner

There were three key themes in relation to the challenges people face in finding a partner: *there's no-one suitable; how do you meet people?*; and *lack of time*. Males were more likely to feel that *finding someone compatible/on the same wavelength* was a challenge. Females, on the other hand, were approximately twice as likely as males to report the following challenges: *finding appropriate places to meet people; people don't want to commit/take responsibility/selfish; lack of good people to meet/you just can't find them/gender ratio; lack of trust/people are suspicious/there's a lot of fakes, weirdos and emotional baggage*.

## Reasons why people get married

Respondents were asked to choose from a list, the reasons why they thought people get married these days. The most common responses were *love* and *companionship*, followed by *to signify a lifelong commitment* and *security for children*. Approximately three quarters agreed that people get married *to make a public commitment to each other*. Two thirds of respondents felt that people get married for the *legal status/financial security* or because of *religious beliefs*, which was stronger for females (64%) than males (56%). Half of all respondents (50%) agreed that people get married as a *response to family pressure* – particularly females (53% compared to 45% males).

## Reasons why people don't get married

When respondents were asked why they thought people don't get married nowadays, the main reason mentioned was because of a *bad previous experience*, with 95% of respondents currently separated or divorced agreeing with this reason. Eight in ten agreed that people don't get married because of reasons to do with commitment – either an *avoidance* of it or a belief that

*strong commitment does not need marriage*. Three quarters agreed that people don't get married because of *fear of making a mistake*, a *desire for a singles lifestyle* or due to a *fear of divorce*. Approximately half felt that people don't get married because it will *interfere with work and career*, because of a *desire for multiple relationships*, and because of a *desire for travel*.

## Sexual relationships

Approximately six in ten considered that they were sexually active, a third that they weren't and one in ten declined to answer. When respondents were asked how 'satisfied' or 'unsatisfied' they were with this aspect of their life, 71% of all respondents said they were 'satisfied', a third were 'very satisfied', and one in ten was 'unsatisfied'.

## Relationship problems

When asked to select from a list of factors that could negatively impact upon partner relationships, 68% of respondents had experienced *stress* and at least half of respondents said they had experienced *work pressures* and a *lack of time to spend with their partner*. *Financial insecurities or difficulties* were identified by 40%. Three in ten had experienced problems regarding *job insecurity, loss or unemployment* in a partner relationship.



## Causes of relationship breakdown

When respondents were asked why they thought partner relationships break down, the responses could be categorised into two main themes: *internal issues* and *external influences*, with the majority of responses falling into the internal category. The three main internal issues were: *communication, commitment and expectations*. Key external influences identified as contributing to relationship breakdowns were *financial stress and work pressures*.

## Reasons why older couples separate

All respondents were presented with the statement 'statistics show an interesting trend for couples over 50 to separate' – and asked to say why they thought this might be. The main reasons mentioned by a third of respondents were that couples over 50 only *stayed together for the kids* and that the couple had *grown apart* (32%). A quarter identified want a change as the main issue and approximately one in ten said *midlife crisis/feeling that life is too short* (13%) or *divorce is more accepted these days* (12%). A similar proportion said *so many options now/travell/new work opportunities/freedom* (9%) or *women are more financially secure/independent/feel they don't have to stay* (8%).

## Impact of technology on relationships

All respondents were asked if the use of new communications technology such as the internet, mobile phones, email, SMS and cheaper long distance landline calls had a positive or a negative impact on their important relationships. Sixty-nine per cent said this technology has had a positive impact, including 58% of those aged 60 years and older. Only 9% felt such technology has had a negative impact on their important relationships, and two in ten felt it had no impact on their important relationships.

## Community involvement

Respondents were asked whether they have as much to do with other people and members of the community around them, as they would like to. Although 60% said that they did, a sizeable proportion of 40% said that they didn't. The main barrier for respondents having as much contact as they would like was *work commitments*, followed by *family commitments*.

## Increasing happiness and wellbeing

When asked what would improve their happiness and wellbeing, the main response mentioned by a quarter was *more money or better finances*. One quarter gave a response that is based on people, such as the *happiness or wellbeing of loved ones, improving relationships, more time with family/partner, being closer to family, having children or finding a partner. Better health* was identified by 8%. Respondents in metro areas were twice as likely as those in non-metro areas to want *closer or better relationships* and *less stress*.

## A key finding: work, income and relationships

The experience of paid employment proves to be a negative force on relationships, regardless of income. Although the experience of unemployment impacts significantly on individual's lives and creates strain within relationships, what comes through strongly in this data is that there are also issues for those currently in employment.

