



The longitudinal study of Australian children

2012–13 Annual Report

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Administrative Arrangements Orders changes

On 18 September 2013, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Services (FaHCSIA) was renamed the Department of Social Services (DSS). References in this publication to FaHCSIA and to DSS should be read in this context.

The opinions, comments and/or analysis expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Minister for Social Services or the Australian Government Department of Social Services, nor can they be taken in any way as expressions of Government policy.

Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

Growing Up in Australia is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. The study is being undertaken in partnership with the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, with advice being provided by a consortium of leading researchers from research institutions and universities throughout Australia.

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Overview of LSAC

Background

In 2002, researchers invited families from around Australia to participate in a nationwide study of Australian children – Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). The study commenced in 2004, with a nationally representative sample of approximately 10,000 children taking part.

Sampling methodology

The study sample came from the Medicare database provided by the Health Insurance Commission (HIC) and drew on 300 randomly selected postcodes from across Australia. The postcodes were stratified by state, capital city, statistical division/balance of state, and size of the target population in the postcode.

Study design

The LSAC sample comprises two cohorts, each of approximately 5,000 children. During the first wave of data collection the B, or infant, cohort was aged 3–19 months and the K, or child, cohort was aged 4–5 years.

The multiple-cohort design of LSAC means that results are not specific to one cohort but can be generalised to other groups of children. The cross-sequential design of LSAC means that, at different points in time, there will be data on children of the same age from the two cohorts.

Scope and purpose

LSAC investigates the impact of social, economic and cultural environments on the children's development, wellbeing and lifecourse trajectories. A major aim of the study is to identify policy opportunities for improving prevention and support for children, youth and families.

The overarching research question which guides the study's development is:

What are the childhood experiences and conditions (from pre-natal, infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood) that impact on child, adolescent and adult outcomes and on trajectories of development? What are the mechanisms underlying linkages and interactions and how do these change over time? What factors and processes protect children from events or contexts that increase the risk of poor outcomes?

Relevant factors and processes include:

- the prenatal environment
- child characteristics such as temperament, disabilities or illnesses
- childhood health and disabilities, and health service utilisation
- the nature of relationships that children form with parents, teachers and other important adults
- parental behaviour and wellbeing
- parenting behaviour
- the nature of relationships with peers and siblings
- significant environments such as the home, child care, school and
- neighbourhood
- socioeconomic circumstances.

Under the overarching question lie eleven more specific Key Research Questions (KRQs), developed in 2009 to replace an initial set of questions that had guided the study between 2002 and 2009.

The eleven KRQs are:

1. What factors influence a child's physical health and development over time? What is the effect of physical health on a child's overall wellbeing and on other specific outcomes, and how does this influence change over time?
2. What is the nature and impact of family composition, relationships and dynamics on individual outcomes, and how do these relationships and their effects change over time?
3. What is the influence of parents' labour force participation, education and economic status on individual outcomes and how does this change over time?
4. What are the effects of non-parental childcare on individual outcomes (particularly those relating to social and cognitive competence, attachment, impulse control, and control of attention)? How do these experiences and influences change over time?
5. What experiences influence children's school engagement and achievement and what impact do they have on individual outcomes? How do these patterns and effects change over time?
6. What are the impacts of children's use of time on their individual outcomes in physical fitness and obesity, family relationships, social skills and learning? How does the impact of different patterns of time use change over time?
7. What impacts do child, parental and community beliefs, attitudes and expectations have on outcomes? How do the patterns and effects of these beliefs, attitudes and expectations change over time?
8. What characteristics of children, families and communities help children develop resilience and cope with transitions or adversity? How do these factors influence individual outcomes, and how do these influences change over time?
9. What social connections and support are available to families and children, and what impact do they have on individual outcomes? How do the impacts of these social connections and support change over time?
10. What are the impacts of broad neighbourhood characteristics and community connectedness, engagement, trust and violence on individual outcomes, and how do these impacts change over time?
11. What is the impact of intergenerational characteristics on individual outcomes, and how does this impact change over time?

Study respondents

Study informants include the child (from the age of 6), parents (both resident and non-resident), carers (of pre-school-age study children) and teachers. Every two years, information from these participants is collected using a range of methodologies, including in-home face-to face and self-report interviews, telephone interview and paper questionnaire.

The methodologies are reviewed for each collection, to ensure that they protect the privacy needs of participants, respond to improvements in technology and reflect the increased capacity of the children to answer questions themselves.

As children increasingly undertake more activities away from their parents, more information is reported by the child and less by the parent; thus, over time, the children are gradually becoming the primary respondents of the study.

Data Collection

Wave 5 data collection

The first stage of Wave 5 data collection began in June 2011, and the second stage began in March 2012. Wave 5 data collection was completed in early 2013. During this wave, the B cohort children were 8–9 years of age, and the K cohort children were 12–13 years of age.

The data collection procedures for Wave 5 were unchanged from those used in Wave 4. The home visit consisted of separate, face-to-face interviews with the study child and with the parent identified as the primary caregiver (referred to as Parent 1), as well as a computer-administered self-interview for both participants. In addition, the other parent/caregiver in the home (referred to as Parent 2) answered a paper questionnaire either during or after the home interview. A telephone interview was conducted with the parent living elsewhere in separated families, and children's teachers were sent a paper questionnaire to complete.

Although it is important to maintain the consistency of questions across time in a longitudinal study, the development of the children and environmental changes make it necessary to modify some questions and to introduce new construct. All items are reviewed prior to each wave. This is to ensure that they remain age appropriate and continue to capture information relevant to the study child's age and to current and emerging policy and environmental development.

Study child

In addition to the face-to-face interview and the audio computer-assisted self-interview (ACASI), the interviewer obtained physical measurements of height, weight and body fat from each child.

In Wave 5, study children aged 12–13 years old were questioned on the following new content:

- romantic relationships
- drug taking
- alcohol use
- bullying and victimisation (additional questions)
- discrimination
- peers.

Teacher

Questionnaires dispatched to the study child's teacher, in the case of B cohort study children, also collected information. In Wave 5, the majority of the K cohort had moved from primary to secondary school, resulting in an increase in the number of teachers involved in the children's schooling. In Wave 5, for K cohort children, the study child's English teacher was asked to answer the questionnaire. This collection mode will continue for Wave 6.

Wave 5 data release

The data for Wave 5 of LSAC is scheduled for release towards the end of 2013. A full set of user documentation, including a data dictionary, a user guide and marked-up questionnaires, is provided with the data and will be available on the [Using LSAC data page of the Growing Up in Australia website](#).

Researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders can now apply to use the Wave 5 data. Information regarding applications for LSAC data is available at [Access to DSS Longitudinal Datasets page on the DSS website](#).

Data users should carefully read the Deed of Licence to ensure that they fully understand their responsibilities and obligations. The data are provided in SAS, STATA and SPSS formats on a password-protected CD. Full data documentation is included.

Mid-wave data collection

Following the first three waves, abridged data collection was conducted in the years between the biennial primary data collections (Wave 1.5, Wave 2.5 and Wave 3.5). These "mid-wave" collections comprised short mail-back paper questionnaires on a limited range of topics.

Wave 4.5, conducted in 2011, changed from a paper-based data collection to an internet-based form designed to confirm or update contact details. The online form also invited respondents to provide feedback on the worth of various study updates and newsletters they received.

Wave 5.5 will be similar in format to Wave 4.5. It will occur from July to September 2013.

It will allow the study partners to continue refining processes for online communication with study families, in order to increase the engagement of all involved in the study.

Wave 6

The development of questionnaire content for Wave 6 began in early 2012 and continued into 2013. This was in preparation for Wave 6 data collection to begin in July 2013 and to be completed in December 2014.

LSAC engagement strategies

Minimisation of LSAC attrition is an important issue, as in any longitudinal study. To maintain response rates, the study continually engages with the respondents in order to maintain their interest, demonstrate the use of the data collected by the study and emphasise the value of this nationally representative study. To maintain contact with study families and to foster their commitment to the study, a range of communication and engagement strategies are used, some of which are listed below.

- The LSAC website provides an overview of the purpose, scope and progress of the study. It is also an access and information portal for data users and contains copies of, or links to, LSAC-related publications and research.
- Tailored newsletters are mailed to parents of B and K study children twice a year. The newsletters provide details of study development and include information on the structure of the upcoming interview. They also contain summaries of, and references to, recent research using LSAC data and selected examples of aggregated data.
- Separate biennial newsletters are produced for B and K study children. The newsletters include information derived from the study, details pertaining to the structure and scope of the upcoming interview, and puzzles and activities.

- Birthday cards are sent to each study child.
- An LSAC calendar is sent to study families.
- Small gifts are given to parents, study children and teachers in appreciation for their participation. In past waves, parent gifts have included picnic blankets, cooler bags, mouse mats, family schedulers and gym bags. Examples of recent gifts to study children are gel pens, wallets, pedometers, earphones and store gift cards. Examples of recent gifts to teachers are mouse mats, fridge magnets and pens.

Many families enquire about the utility of questions asked in their interviews. Videos uploaded to the AIFStv YouTube channel help to answer some of these queries. The videos feature two of LSAC's academic advisers, Professor Ann Sanson and Associate Professor Lyndall Strazdins, who explain why LSAC asks questions about mental health and work/family life balance and outline some of the key results of their research in this area. These advisers are experts in their academic fields and conduct key research using the data from the study, working closely with the other members of the LSAC Consortium Advisory Group to guide study content.

To view the videos:

[Professor Ann Sanson, Principal Scientific Advisor, talks about the *Growing Up in Australia* study.](#)

[Dr Lyndall Strazdins talks about the value of the data gathered in the *Growing Up in Australia* study.](#)

Life at documentary series

Life at documentary series

Life at 7 screened over two weeks in October 2012 on the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC). *Life at 7* is the fourth instalment of the *Life at* series, which is produced by Heiress Films. The *Life at* series follows the lives of 10 children and their families and examines the impact of family relationships, finances, work, health and education on children's growth and development. LSAC provided a large portion of the evidence base used in the documentary series. The series uses the LSAC data and findings to relate the development and lives of the documentary children to other Australian children.

Two members of the LSAC Consortium Advisory Group, Professor Steve Zubrick and Professor Ann Sanson, provided in-program commentary and advice to the film makers. AIFS and FaHCSIA staff provided advice on the use and interpretation of the data and research.

Planning is currently underway for the next instalment. *Life at 9* will continue to explore the lives of the children as they become increasingly independent and self-reliant.

LSAC Child Health Checkpoint

LSAC Child Health CheckPoint

In October 2012, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) awarded \$3.14 million to a team of Australian researchers, led by Professor Melissa Wake, to assess the cardiorespiratory status of LSAC B cohort study children and one of their parents.

This sub-study is an adjunct to the main LSAC data collection. It will be an opt-in study conducted between Waves 6 and 7 of LSAC and will involve participants' undergoing a series of tests of their physical and biological functioning. Experienced staff will conduct the tests at specialised collection centres. The sub-study will collect data from each study child on heart and lung health, fitness, strength, vision, hearing, diet, activity and possibly genetic information.

The sub-study will explore three key research questions relevant to child and future adult health:

1. How do patterns of cardiorespiratory health and risk vary in 11–12 year olds in relation to mental and physical health and behavioural, family and socioeconomic circumstances during the first 11 years of their development?
2. What are the mechanisms by which socioeconomic inequity might influence these patterns?
3. What are the potentially avoidable costs, by age 11–12 years, that may be attributed to socioeconomic inequity, considering both quality of life and health expenditure measures?

When it becomes available, data from the sub-study will be included in the publicly released LSAC dataset. This will provide the first national dataset of the distribution of cardiovascular and respiratory health problems, risk factors for future disease and biomarkers in Australian 11–12 year olds. It will be an extremely valuable addition to the already rich LSAC dataset and will enable research in a broader range of disciplines.

Key personnel

DSS Management Team

DSS has overall responsibility for management of LSAC, on behalf of the Australian Government.

DSS Project Owner

Dr Judy Schneider

Section Manager

Dr Helen Rogers

Senior Research Analyst

Dr Helene Shin

Assistant Section Manager

Mr Leo Bild

Secretariat Manager

Ms Helen Harkin

Project Officer

Ms Amanda Knight

Secretariat

Ms Elaine Teran

Graduate Project Officer

Ms Emily Dann (2012)

AIFS Management Team

AIFS manages the development of the study content and design, and the output of study data.

AIFS Project Owner

Dr Daryl Higgins

Executive Manager Longitudinal Studies

Dr Ben Edwards

Design Manager

Dr Jacqueline Harvey (2012-13)

Dr Karena Jessup (2013)

LSAC Data Administrator

Mr Mark Siphthorp

Research Fellow / Data Manager

Dr Galina Daraganova

Senior Research Officer

Ms Jennifer Renda

ABS Management Team

ABS has responsibility for management of the LSAC sample and for data collection.

ABS Project Owner

Mr Bob McColl (2012)

Mr David Zago (from Nov 2012)

Director

Ms Michelle Marquardt (2012–13)

Ms Melissa Gare (from April 2013)

LSAC Field and Development Manager

Ms Joanne Corey

LSAC Content and Survey Instrument Manager

Ms Karen Mornement

LSAC Field Manager

Ms Jennifer Gallagher

Project Officer

Ms Leesa McNaughton

Consortium Advisory Group

The LSAC Consortium Advisory Group provides input into the design and development of the study and provides technical advice on child development, survey methodologies, survey instruments, and data dissemination and analysis.

Professor Stephen Zubrick (Chair)
Telethon Institute for Child Health Research
University of Western Australia

Dr Bruce Bradbury
University of NSW

Professor Ann Sanson
(Principal Scientific Advisor)
University of Melbourne

Associate Professor Linda Harrison
Charles Sturt University

Dr John Ainley
Australian Council for Educational Research

Professor Jan Nicholson
Parenting Research Centre

Professor Donna Berthelsen
Queensland University of Technology

Professor Bryan Rodgers
Australian National University

Professor Michael Bittman
University of New England

Professor Michael Sawyer
University of Adelaide

Professor Melissa Wake
Murdoch Children's Research Institute
Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne

Dr Peter Azzopardi
Murdoch Children's Research Institute
Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne

Associate Professor Lyndall Strazdins
Australian National University

Data Expert Group

The role of this group is to recommend or review the study's data management processes and to advise on issues relating to data manipulation.

Professor Stephen Zubrick (Chair)
Telethon Institute for Child Health Research

Professor John Carlin
Murdoch Childrens Research Institute

Dr Ben Edwards
Australian Institute of Family Studies

Dr Sheldon (Sam) Rothman
Australian Council for Educational Research

Mr Stephen Horn
Department of Social Services

Mr Mark Siphthorp
Australian Institute of Family Studies

Assoc. Professor Gerry Redmond
Flinders Institute of Public Policy and
Management

Mr Benedict Cusack
Australian Bureau of Statistics

LSAC Research

Overview

Academic and government use of LSAC data continued to grow during 2012–13, with over 550 registered LSAC data users across Australia and overseas. Twenty-seven per cent of users were from Victoria, 26 per cent from the Australian Capital Territory, 19 per cent from New South Wales and 11 per cent from Queensland. A small number of data users were from South Australia, Western Australia and overseas. No registered data users were from the Northern Territory or Tasmania.

In the past year, over 71 LSAC-based journal articles and reports were published and approximately 21 conference presentations delivered. Website visits to the *Growing Up in Australia* site increased from over 260,000 in 2011–12 to more than 352,000 in 2012–13.

LSAC Annual Statistical Report 2012

The second LSAC Annual Statistical Report was released in June 2013. The report, compiled by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, uses LSAC data to explore the multiple facets of children's lives that influence wellbeing. In doing so, the report provides a foundation for further research that can inform policies and programs to support the wellbeing of children and their families.

The report includes data from the first four main waves of the study, to provide a snapshot of the types of questions the study can answer.

The report chapters are:

- Financial support for children after parental separation
- Is it a just a matter of time? How relationships between children and their separated parents differ by care-time arrangements
- Echoes of disadvantage across the generations? The influence of long-term joblessness and separation from grandparents on grandchildren
- Is it OK to be away? School attendance in the primary school years
- School's out - After-school's in: Children's after-school care arrangements and activities
- Children's experiences of unfriendly behaviour
- Children's food allergies
- How engaged are children in organised sport and other physical activities during their late primary school years?
- The family characteristics and wellbeing of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.

Synopses of a selection of these analyses follow:

Financial Support for children after parental separation

Lixia Qu and Ruth Weston, Australian Institute of Family Studies

This chapter examines several issues relating to the provision of child support, other forms of financial support and non-financial support for both cohorts of children in LSAC. The analyses are based on the reports of resident parents only, almost all of whom were mothers.

In Waves 1, 3 and 4, approximately 70–80 per cent of resident parents, in each of the two cohorts, reported that they had a child support arrangement in place.

In Wave 4, at least 70 per cent of resident parents who had a child support arrangement in place indicated that they had primarily used the Child Support Scheme to develop their arrangement. Around 15 per cent said that they had mainly relied on discussions with their child's other parent. The most commonly cited reason for not seeking child support was that the other parent had limited income or claimed to be in this position.

The chapter suggests the existence of a link between non-resident parents' child support compliance behaviour and more active forms of engagement in their child's life. Specifically, non-resident parents who hardly see their children, most commonly fathers, appear to be less likely than other non-resident parents to comply with their financial support obligations.

Is it ok to be away? School attendance in the primary school years
Galina Daraganova, Australian Institute of Family Studies

This chapter provides an overview of attendance patterns among primary school children, as reported by both parents and teachers, and explores risk factors associated with higher levels of non-attendance.

The main reasons for non-attendance reported by teachers were child health (on average, 50 per cent of absences at all ages) and family events (varying from 13 per cent to 19 per cent across all ages). Around five per cent of children aged 6–7 and 10–11 years were reported to be absent due to the illness of a family member. For each age group, around 22 per cent of teachers reported that there were other unspecified reasons for the absences.

Parents reported that child health was the main reason for non-attendance (around 73 per cent across different ages), followed by a family event (around 15 per cent across different ages). A very small proportion of parents (around two per cent) reported that the child was absent because he or she did not want to go to school.

Consistent with previous research, the level of non-attendance was higher for the following groups of children: Indigenous children (Zubrick, Taylor & Christensen 2006), children from lone-mother families (Chang & Romero 2008), children who experienced bullying of any form at school (Learmont 1995; Reid 1999), and children with non-working mothers.

Parental involvement in school-related activities, such as talking to other parents, visiting school and volunteering in excursions or classes, was associated with higher attendance rates. However, helping children with their homework or talking about school activities were not associated with attendance levels at any age.

The overall results suggest that, as children grow older, level of attendance is strongly related to how children feel at school and what kinds of relationships they have with their teachers. The results were similar for both measures of attendance, as reported by the parents and teachers.

The results emphasise that non-attendance is a complex problem with a variety of causes. Therefore, to improve school attendance, the authors conclude that interventions should be implemented at different levels (individual, family and community). To improve attendance, children should be engaged in school life, should enjoy being at school and should have good relationships with their teachers, while parents should be engaged in the child's school life.

The authors recommend that future research on risk factors and long-term consequences associated with non-attendance should employ longitudinal analysis. This allows researchers to identify the time and quantity of attendance most critical for positive educational outcomes and also to identify family and school factors that can offset the adverse effects of school absences.

Children's food allergies

Nadine Bertalli, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, The Royal Children's Hospital
Katie Allen, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, The Royal Children's Hospital
Brigit Maguire, Australian Institute of Family Studies

This chapter provides a snapshot of the prevalence of, and factors associated with, childhood food allergies in Australia, using B cohort (6–7 year olds) and K cohort (10–11 year olds) data from Wave 4. The four most common types of food reported to cause a reaction were peanuts, eggs, cow's milk and other nuts, while soy and sesame had the lowest reaction rates. Eggs, cow's milk and soy were reported to cause reactions earlier in life than foods which are typically introduced to the diet later (such as other nuts and sesame). The "other food" category accounted for around two-thirds of food reactions and was associated with a later age of first reaction.

The risk factors for food allergies were investigated. Initial results suggested that the prevalence of food allergies was higher for B cohort children who lived in urban areas as well as for the B and K cohort with asthma or eczema. The strongest association with food allergy was co-existent eczema; in both younger and older children, those with eczema had up to seven times the odds of being food allergic than children without eczema. Additional lifestyle risk factors in older children were: not having been breastfed; and living in southern areas of Australia.

Analysis of future waves of LSAC data will allow for a longitudinal investigation of childhood food allergies and enable researchers to explore factors contributing to the persistence of food allergies and the development of tolerance.

How engaged are children in organised sport and other physical activity during their late primary school years?

**Killian Mullan, Australian Institute of Family Studies
Brigit Maguire, Australian Institute of Family Studies**

This analysis of organised sport shows that, over a period of one year, around 75 per cent of children engaged in organised sport, as reported by parents.

Children's engagement in physical activity was positively related to their health and wellbeing. Children from families with a lower socioeconomic position were less often engaged in organised sport and are less likely to visit a swimming pool or playground. The results also showed that this difference was concentrated in organised sport outside school.

In contrast, socioeconomic position had little relationship to other types of physical activity in the children's daily life. The authors felt that efforts to increase children's physical activity should consider the barriers to engagement in organised sport for some children, as well as exploring ways in which physical activity can play a greater part in the daily lives of all children.

The research demonstrated that children's enjoyment of physical activity and sport is a clear driver in promoting their participation. The analysis also suggests associations between earlier and later involvement in physical activity, suggesting that reaching children early in their lives will have beneficial consequences later.

As future waves of LSAC become available, adolescent engagement in physical activity can be explored, and possible links can be traced back to their earlier engagement or lack thereof.

[The 2012 Statistical Report](#) is available on the Australian Institute of Family Studies website.

LSAC and LSIC Research Conference 2013

Growing Up in Australia and *Footprints in Time*: the LSAC and LSIC Research Conference will take place in Melbourne on 13 and 14 November 2013. The conference will include presentations from national and international researchers using LSAC and/or LSIC data.

LSAC research highlights

The following synopses are of LSAC research released in 2012–13. They illustrate the breadth of child and family development domains that LSAC can inform.

Qu, L and Weston, R 2013, *Parental marital status and children's wellbeing*, Australian Institute of Family Studies and Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Occasional Paper Series No. 46, Canberra.

Based on the data of the first three waves of LSAC, this paper focused on the wellbeing of young Australian children who were living with their cohabiting or married biological parents or with their sole mother over a four-year period (Wave 1 to Wave 3).

Key findings

Prevalence and stability of different family forms over a four-year period

- Most married, cohabiting and sole-mother families in Wave 1 were in the same family form in Wave 3, with levels of stability being considerably greater for married families than for the other two forms.
- Children in cohabiting families were just as likely to experience parental marriage as to experience parental separation.

Sociodemographic characteristics, parenting practices and quality of the inter-parental relationship in different family forms.

- Compared with married parents, cohabiting parents and sole mothers were younger, were more likely to identify as Indigenous, had a lower level of education and were less likely to be employed.
- The proportion of cohabiting families experiencing financial hardship was higher than that of married families but lower than that of sole-mother families.
- Compared with married parents, cohabiting parents tended to describe the quality of their inter-parental relationship in more negative terms and to indicate higher emotional distress.

The wellbeing of children living in different family forms

- Compared with children with married parents, those living with their sole-mother appeared to fare less well in terms of social-emotional, learning and physical development, as reported by their primary caregivers (typically their mothers) and teachers.
- Most of the initial differences in outcomes in children from married, cohabiting and sole-mother families were explained by differences in the family environment but, by the third wave, the poorer progress of children from sole-parent families was not explained fully by family characteristics.
- The poorer progress of children from sole-parent families is consistent with previous research and literature and is attributed to the influence of factors such as poorer neighbourhoods, schools and friendship groups.

Farrant, B and Zubrick, S 2013, 'Parent-child book reading across early childhood and child vocabulary in the early school years: Findings from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children', *First Language*, vol. 33, Issue 3.

Vocabulary knowledge is a critical component of school readiness. This study investigated the extent to which low levels of shared parent-child book reading, across early childhood, can result in an increase in the risk of children having poor vocabulary around the time of school entry. Relevant data from LSAC were available for 2,369 children (1,211 boys) who had a median age of 9 months (M = 9.3 months, SD = 2.1 months) at Wave 1 and a median age of 58 months (M = 58.0 months, SD = 2.5 months) at Wave 3.

As hypothesised, children who had low levels of joint attention at Wave 1 were significantly more likely to have poor receptive vocabulary at Wave 3. Furthermore, children who had low levels of parent-child book reading across early childhood were 2.5 times more likely to have poor vocabulary at Wave 3. These results converge with the findings of training studies and underline the importance of educating current and future parents about the pivotal roles of joint attention and parent-child book reading for children's language development and hence their readiness for school.

Bittman, M, Rutherford, L, Brown, J and Unsworth, L 2012, 'Digital natives? New and old media and children's language acquisition', *Family Matters*, vol. 91.

The current generation of young children has been described as 'digital natives', having been born into a ubiquitous digital media environment. They are envisaged as educationally independent of the guided interaction provided by digital immigrants: parents and teachers. This paper uses data from the multiple waves of LSAC to study the effect of various media on children's development of vocabulary and traditional literacy. Previous research has suggested that time spent watching television is associated with less time spent reading and, ultimately, with inferior educational outcomes. The early studies of the new digital media (computers, games consoles, mobile phones, the internet, etc.) assumed that these devices would have similar effects on literacy outcomes to those associated with television. Moreover, these earlier studies relied on poorer measures of time spent in media use and usually did not control for the context of the child's media use. Fortunately, LSAC contains measures of: access to digital devices; parental mediation practices; the child's use of digital devices as recorded in time use diaries; direct measures of the child's passive vocabulary; and teachers' ratings of the child's literacy. The analysis presented shows the importance of the parental context framing the child's media use in promoting the acquisition of vocabulary and suggests that computer (but not games) use is associated with more developed language skills. Independently of these factors, raw exposure to television is not harmful to learning, as previously thought.

Giallo, R, D'Esposito, F, Christensen, D, Mensah, F, Cooklin, A, Wade, C, Lucas, N, Canterford, L and Nicholson, J 2012, 'Father mental health during the early parenting period: results of an Australian population based longitudinal study', *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, vol. 47.

The primary objective of this study was to report on the occurrence of mental health difficulties for a large national sample of Australian fathers of children aged 0-5 years (n = 3,471). Secondary objectives were to compare fathers' mental health against normative data for the general male adult population and to examine the course of mental health problems for fathers across the early childhood period. Secondary analysis of data drew on the infant cohort of LSAC at three waves when children were 0-12 months, 2-3 years and 4-5 years. Comparative data on the prevalence of psychological distress in the Australian adult male population were sourced from the National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing.

Results showed that approximately nine per cent of fathers reported symptomatic or clinical psychological distress at each wave, as measured by the Kessler-6. Approximately 30 per cent reporting distress at Wave 1 continued to report distress at a similar or worse level across Waves 2 and 3. Fathers not living with their children also had high rates of distress (14 per cent at Wave 1 and 10 per cent at Wave 2). Finally, fathers in the present study had 1.38 per cent increased odds (95 per cent CI 1.12-1.69) for psychological distress compared with the Australian adult male population.

The study concludes that fathers are at risk of experiencing postnatal mental health difficulties which may persist across the early childhood period for some fathers. The authors suggest that routine assessment of fathers' wellbeing be undertaken in the postnatal period, with mental health interventions and support provided across the early childhood period.

Nicholson, J, Strazdins, L, Brown, J and Bittman, M 2012, 'How parents' income, time and job quality affect children's health and development', *The Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 47.

Drawing on data from LSAC, this article firstly examines the evidence for intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic disadvantage from parents to young children. It then examines parents' jobs as another source of social inequality. Results confirm that children's healthy development is affected by family income, by parents' hours of work and by the quality of parents' jobs. Job combinations that include long work hours of mothers and fathers and poorer quality jobs are associated with elevated rates of parental mental health problems, less time spent in developmentally important activities with children and socioemotional developmental difficulties for children. The evidence suggests that these effects are greater within low-income families.

The findings highlight the need for social and economic policies to move beyond simplistic notions of promoting parental workforce participation as a way of reducing the adverse effects of social disadvantage. A more nuanced approach, which considers the additional impacts of the quality and characteristics of jobs, especially for the parents of young children, is required.

Sayers, M, West, S, Lorains, J, Laidlaw, B, Moore, T and Robinson, R 2012, 'Starting school: a pivotal life transition for children and their families', *Family Matters*, vol. 90.

This paper provides an overview of two measurement initiatives and two case studies that aim to support improved transitions to primary school. The Australian Early Development Index and Outcomes and Indicators of a Positive Transition to School are initiatives aimed at measuring development of children at school entry and the process of transition to school respectively. The two case studies – The Transition: A Positive Start to School Initiative and the Linking Schools and Early Years project – showcase approaches, strategies, resources and policies that aim to improve the transition to school process.

The case studies provide examples of the importance of local relationships and partnership approaches between families, services and schools, to plan, implement, evaluate and strengthen transition strategies and activities.

This paper argues that local stakeholders can support optimal transitions to school for children and their families, but what is also needed for the future is collection of, and access to, local data, to measure the process and outcomes of transition approaches across Australia.

Publications by LSAC data users 2012 – 13

Government reports

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2013, *Inquiry into the effectiveness of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy*: Submission from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing 2013, *Component 3: Working with parents and carers* – Summary of the literature, Canberra.

Australian National Preventive Health Agency 2013, *National preventive health research strategy: 2013–2018*, Canberra.

Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) 2013, *Report Card: the wellbeing of young Australians*, Canberra.

Baxter, J 2013, *Parents working out work*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Australian Family Trends 2013, No. 1.

Biddle, N 2013, *Education Part 2: School education 2013, Indigenous Population Project: 2011 Census Paper No 8*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra.

Daraganova, G, Edwards, B and Siphthorp, M 2013 Using National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), LSAC Technical Paper No. 8, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Dockery, M, Ong, R, Colquhoun, S, Li, J and Kendall, G 2013, *Housing and children's development and wellbeing: evidence from Australian data*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne.

Harrison, L, Goldfeld, S, Metcalfe, E and Moore, T 2012, *Early learning programs that promote children's developmental and educational outcomes*, Resource sheet no. 15 produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Melbourne.

Huerta, M, Adema, W, Baxter, J, Han, W, Lausten, M, Lee, R and Waldfoegel, J 2013, *Fathers' leave, fathers' involvement and child development: are they related? evidence from four countries*, Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Paris, France.

Qu, L, Baxter, J, Weston, R, Moloney, L and Hayes, A 2012, *Family-related life events: insights from two Australian longitudinal studies*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

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Baxter, J 2012, *New Father figures who live elsewhere*, Australian Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Occasional Paper Series No. 42, Canberra.

Baxter, J and Australian Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2013, *Parental joblessness, financial disadvantage and the wellbeing of parents and children*, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra.

Baxter, J and Hand, K 2013, *Access to early childhood education in Australia*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

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Hanel, B 2012, *The impact of paid maternity leave on labour market outcomes*, Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, Melbourne.

Smyth, B, Baxter, J, Fletcher, R, Moloney, L, Schwalb, D, Schwalb, B and Lamb, M 2013, 'Fathers in Australia: A contemporary snapshot', in David W. Schwalb, Barbara J. Schwalb, Michael E. Lamb (eds), *Fathers in Cultural Context*, Routledge.

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Clifford, S, Gold, L, Mensah, F, Jansen, P, Lucas, N, Nicholson, J and Wake, M 2013, 'Healthcare costs associated with underweight, overweight and obesity from 0–7 years: Australian population-based study', *Pediatric Academic Societies Annual Meeting*, Washington.

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Hancock, K and Zubrick, S 2012, 'Is highly protective parenting associated with child BMI?' European Child Cohort Network and Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies International Conference, Paris.

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Theses

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Data Access

Data from LSAC is warehoused at AIFS and is available to researchers approved by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. Prospective users must abide by strict security and confidentiality protocols and are required to complete a dataset application and to read and sign a Deed of Licence.

[Application forms and Deeds of Licence](#) are available on the DSS website.

A nominal fee is charged to cover the administrative costs of delivering datasets.

Data user support services are provided by AIFS. Datasets are accompanied by Fact Sheets that include a description of the sample design, how the fieldwork was conducted, details of weighting procedures and item derivations, and a listing of variable names, labels and response categories. Data user training sessions are conducted to expand upon the information provided in the Fact Sheets. Please contact the AIFS data manager if you are interested in attending a data user training session.

LSAC Website Visits

The *Growing up in Australia* website, <http://www.aifs.gov.au/growingup/>, allows easy access to updates from the study. The website has areas to cater for study participants (children and parents), data users, researchers and policy makers.

There continues to be an ongoing interest in publications and papers based on LSAC, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Website visits and downloads

	Release date	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Total site visits		107,890	155,144	182,263	202,264	202,233	260,204	352,918
All publications – downloads		37,387	51,501	55,919	88,172	94,417	127,695	168,370
2005–06 Annual Report	Dec 2006	8,026	4,817	1,339	426	1,755	1,293	1455
2006–07 Annual Report	June 2008		2,938	4,122	691	2,668	3,223	3921
2007–08 Annual Report	Dec 2008			1,970	998	2,509	4,030	1919
2008–09 Annual Report	Nov 2009				5,562	3,105		795
2009–10 Annual Report	Feb 2011					787*	805	1209
2010–11 Annual Report	Available online Nov 2012							3395
2011–12 Annual Report								Available online Oct 2013
2010 Annual Statistical Report	Aug 2011						92,863	22,238
2011 Annual Statistical Report	Aug 2012							112,023
2012 Annual Statistical Report	2013							3,338
Discussion Paper 1	March 2002	15,198	4,927	3,734	2,575	12,870	9,099	8307
Discussion Paper 2	Sept 2003	2,987	2,830	1,743	1,316	1,420	1,298	1879
Discussion Paper 3	May 2004	9,471	9,104	1,574	1,196	8,550	4,871	3577

Discussion Paper 5	June 2007	196	2,182	1,573	1,228	1,144	1,255	1792
Technical Paper 1	Sept 2005	3,401	4,702	8,823	6,042	4,751	6,331	5166
Technical Paper 2	Jan 2006	1,960	1,945	1,454	1,367	1,231	1,109	1260
Technical Paper 3	May 2006	1,351	1,188	1,165	1,030	1,245	1,298	1576
Technical Paper 4	July 2007		1,896	1,392	1,061	1,012	1,085	1398
Technical Paper 5	Oct 2007		671	1,210	936	911	1,059	1118
Technical Paper 6	Aug 2009				701	678	752	1111
Technical Paper 7	Oct 2011							1681
Technical Paper 8	April 2013							4801
Technical Paper 9	August 2011						931	1457
Study Newsletters		12,431	18,589	20,699	15,286	14,551	14,199	**
Data Dictionary		2,625	1,931	2,374	1,099	2,123	2,291	2,054

** Due to a technical error the statistics for this are unavailable.

* This number indicates the number of PDF versions of the report that were downloaded

For data enquiries, contact:

Growing Up in Australia Data Manager

Phone: (03) 9214 7803

Fax (03) 9214 7839

Email: aifs-lsac@aifs.gov.au

[The Growing Up in Australia study website](#) has more information about the study.

To receive regular information on the study by email alert:

People with an interest in the study can join the email alert group to receive regular information on the study.

To join, send the following email:

To: majordomo@aifs.gov.au

Subject: (leave blank)

In the body of the email, type:

subscribe growingup-refgroup

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