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The Flipside of Gen Y

Social background and full-time engagement
Personal and financial stress
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Satisfaction with life

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The Flipside of Gen Y

This brief paper is about young Australians who are not in full time study and work, their experience of social stress, their disappointments, and their participation in many social activities.

It finds that young people not in full-time learning or work experience more financial and personal stress and lower levels of participation and integration with civil society. They are less satisfied with their lives.

Youth engagement in learning and work is stratified by

- geography – young people in the capital cities are more likely to be working or learning full-time
- household and social-economic status – young people in households with a weekly income below \$350 are far less likely to be in full-time learning or work
- educational attainment – early school leavers are more likely not to be in full-time work or learning.

This paper draws on the ABS 2002 *General social survey* to examine these issues as well as health, family relationships, engagement with wider social networks, educational opportunities and outcomes, employment and other work, financial resources, living arrangements, personal safety, computer usage and access to transport.¹ The paper also presents some information on young people's satisfaction with aspects of their life drawn from the 2004 *Household, income and labour dynamics in Australia* (HILDA) survey.²

SOCIAL BACKGROUND AND FULL-TIME ENGAGEMENT

The proportion of 18 to 24 year-olds who are not studying or working full-time differs across several personal and background characteristics of young people (Table 2). Some of these differences include:³

- Young people who were born in Australia or another mainly English-speaking country were more likely to be less than fully engaged in work or study than were young people born in other countries. The differences were stronger for females than males.

These results are consistent with a range of findings on educational outcomes that show higher rates of Year 12 completion and transition rates to university by school students from non-English speaking backgrounds.⁴ Lack of English language skills may be a disadvantage in participation in education and the labour market, but it does not appear to offset other, probably cultural, advantages of coming from a non-English speaking background—

1 ABS, 2002. *General social survey. Summary results*. 4159.0. Results from this survey are broadly comparable with other results presented in this report, although it is smaller (based on only 15,500 respondents), includes only persons 18 years or older and was conducted from March to July.

2 The educational enrolment at the time of interview can be identified for the majority of respondents. Interviews in HILDA, however, are conducted from late August to February and risk miss-identifying full-time students in holiday jobs. As in the previous chapter, full-time education is defined by whether a respondent was enrolled full-time for a qualification at any time between July and December 2004. The results presented here from HILDA are therefore not necessarily comparable with results from the ABS surveys that define full-time enrolment on the basis of study at the time of interview.

3 The full-time educational and labour force participation of Indigenous youth is markedly lower than national averages. Information on Indigenous Australians is not available from the sources used in this report. See Long M, Frigo T & Batten M, 1999. *The school to work transition of indigenous Australians*, DEST and Boese M & Scutella R, 2006. *The Brotherhood's social barometer. Challenges facing Australian youth*, Brotherhood of St Laurence.

4 Fullarton S, et al., 2003, *Patterns of participation in Year 12*. LSAY Research Report No 33, ACER; and OECD, 2005, *From education to work: A difficult transition for young adults with low levels of education*.

although there can be substantial differences among cultural and national groups within this broad category.

- Young people living in regional areas were more likely to be not fully engaged in study or work than were young people living in major cities. Again the differences were stronger for females (about 20 percentage points) than for males (about ten percentage points). These differences are consistent with other studies.⁵ They may over-state urban and regional differences as some young people with better educational or labour force participation may move from non-metropolitan to metropolitan areas.
- Young people who did not complete Year 12 are less likely to be fully engaged than are young people who did complete Year 12. The fewer the years of schooling completed, the greater the likelihood of being less than fully engaged—Year 12, 18 percent; Year 11, 30 percent; Year 10, 41 percent; and Year 9, 62 percent. This pattern suggests that the disadvantages associated with poorer schooling outcomes persist, and points to the need to both address the reasons that lead students to leave school early and to provide arrangements that lead to better outcomes for those young people who do.
- Young people with disabilities are more likely to be not fully engaged than other young Australians and this varies to some extent with the degree of disability. Some disability categories in Table 3 do correspond to small samples.
- Young people who describe their health as only ‘fair’ or ‘poor’ (52 percent) are more likely to be not fully engaged in study or work than are young people who report their health as ‘good’ (31 percent) or as ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ (52 percent). Much of the lower level of full-time engagement for those who describe their health as good is due to the substantially higher level of young women who are not fully engaged.
- Young people in households with lower incomes are more likely to be not fully engaged than are young people in households with higher incomes. For instance, 60 percent of young people in households that received less than \$350 per week are not fully engaged in study or work compared with only nine percent of young people in households with weekly incomes greater than \$1,565. This difference is partly due to young people not fully-engaged coming from families at the lower end of the socio-economic profile. These young people are less likely to have family resources to help them through the transition from school.

PERSONAL AND FINANCIAL STRESS

Young Australians not in full-time learning or work are more likely to experience a range of personal stresses, financial difficulties or issues of personal safety than are other young people.⁶ Figure 1 shows some of these differences (Table 4).

Young people not fully-engaged in study or work experience more financial hardship

Young people not fully engaged in study or work are more likely to experience a range of financial difficulties. At the most basic level, 15 percent missed meals because they did not have money available to purchase food compared with six percent for other 18 to 24 year-olds. In order to raise cash, 20 percent of those not fully engaged had pawned or sold something compared with 10 percent of those who were fully engaged. And 41 percent had sought financial help from friends or family compared with 19 percent of those who are fully-engaged. These differences indicate greater financial stress among young people not fully engaged in study or work.

While 82 percent of young people fully engaged in study or work could raise \$2,000 within a week for something important, only 56 percent of young people not fully engaged could do so.

5 Spierings J, 2005. Young people at risk in the transition from education to work, in ABS, *Australian social trends* 2005, 4102.0, p. 96.

6 See Boese M & Scutella R, 2006. *op cit*.

Young people not fully-engaged in study or work are more frequently victims of crime

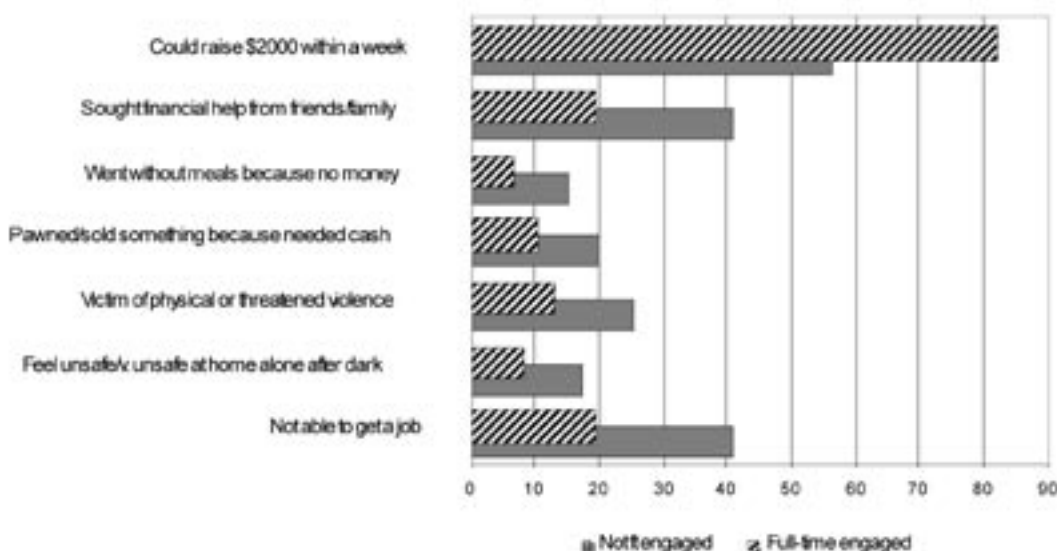
The greater financial distress of young Australians not fully engaged in work or study might be expected to follow from unemployment and underemployment. Personal safety, however, is a separate dimension. Figure 1 shows that 25 percent of those not fully engaged had been the victim of actual or threatened physical violence in the last 12 months compared with 13 percent who were fully engaged.

Young people not fully-engaged in work or study experience more social stresses

Table 4 shows a number of stressful events where the experience may have occurred to the individual or to someone close to the individual in the last 12 months. Young people not fully engaged in study or work are consistently more likely to have experienced these various life events.

FIGURE 1

Percent of 18 to 24 year olds reporting selected financial and life stresses by full-time engagement, Australia, 2002



See Table 3

One of the largest differences between young people not fully engaged and other young people was whether the respondent or someone close to them had not been able to get a job. Figure 1 shows that 41 percent of 18 to 24 year-olds who were not fully engaged reported this problem compared with 19 percent for those who were fully engaged.

Young people not fully engaged in work or study were also more likely to have personally experienced or had someone close to them experience alcohol or drug problems or mental illness or had trouble with the police. Rather than thinking of these personal and social problems in terms of cause and effect, it might be more useful to think of a matrix of social conditions that needs to be addressed both before full engagement levels can be raised and that is addressed by raising engagement levels.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

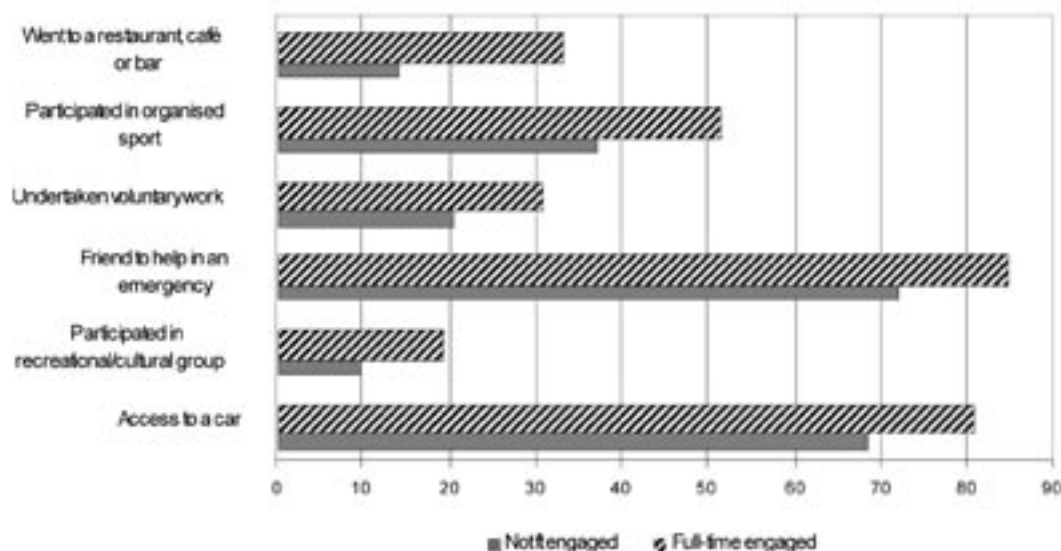
At the same time that young people not in full-time study or work experience more financial, personal and social stresses than other young people, they often participate less in social activities and have fewer social resources available to them in an emergency. Figure 2 shows some of the larger differences among the responses reported in Table 5.

Young people not fully-engaged in study or work have fewer people to turn to when faced with a crisis

Young people not in full-time study or work overwhelmingly (96.5 percent) believe that there is someone outside their household they can call on for help when faced with an emergency, but they have fewer options available to them than other young Australians.

FIGURE 2

Percent of 18 to 24 year olds reporting selected forms of social activity and support by full-time study or work, Australia, 2002



See Table 4

There was little difference between those fully engaged and other young people about the extent to which they felt they could call on neighbours, governments or community organisations for help. Overwhelmingly, in an emergency, young people (and people more generally) felt that they were more likely to be able to call on informal networks of family and friends rather than more formal organisations.

Young people not fully-engaged in study or work participate in fewer social activities

Young people not fully engaged in study or work were less likely than other 18 to 24 year-olds in the last three months to have:

- participated in a recreational or cultural group;
- participated in church or religious activities;
- gone to a restaurant, cafe or bar;
- taken part in or watched sport or physical activities;
- visited a library, museum or art gallery;
- attended the movies, theatre or a concert; and
- visited a park, gardens, zoo or theme park
- participated in organised sport or physical recreation.

Young people not fully-engaged in study or work are less geographically mobile

Being able to move around is as important for social and recreational activities as it is for work. Fewer people not full-time engaged in study or work have access to a car compared with other 18 to 24 year-olds or can easily get to places they need to get to (Table 5).

Young people not fully-engaged in study or work are less likely to use the internet

Computer literacy and access to the internet has become fundamental to work and to social life. Just as near universal literacy and numeracy under-wrote many of the work changes during the 20th century (banks came to rely on customers filling out their forms, for instance), so in the 21st century computer literacy and access to the internet are increasing essential to people's roles as employees and customers and to their social connections.

Table A18 shows that young people not fully engaged were much less likely than were other 18 to 24 year-olds to have access to or to have used a computer at home or elsewhere or to have access or to have used the internet at home or elsewhere. This excludes these young people from a whole virtual commercial and social world and means that skills required for employment in a wide range of occupations are not being created or updated.

In 2002 a third (33 percent) of young people not in full-time study or work had not used the internet anywhere in the last 12 months and less than a half (43 percent) had access to the internet at home.

Governments cannot rely on web-based solutions when high proportions of the target audience cannot or do not access the internet. Virtual solutions are exactly that for a number of young people who need to use them.

TABLE 1

Percent of 15 to 24 year-olds satisfied with aspects of their life, Australia, 2004

	Not working or studying full-time			Working or studying full-time		
	MALES	FEMALES	PERSONS	MALES	FEMALES	PERSONS
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Satisfied with . . .						
Friends and friendships	59.8	57.5	58.4	75.1	76.3	75.6
Love life	36.8	51.4	45.8	45.4	48.8	47.0
Spare-time activities	48.7	39.2	42.9	49.5	41.1	45.6
Physical appearance	43.8	32.3	36.7	49.6	32.4	41.7
Education received	39.3	45.8	43.3	57.2	63.1	59.9
Future job prospects	42.9	42.7	42.8	65.5	64.4	65.0
Savings	21.6	18.9	20.0	30.6	26.9	28.9
Living arrangements	61.6	54.4	57.2	65.5	67.8	66.5
The home in which you live	65.6	59.5	61.9	71.1	74.4	72.6
Employment opportunities	26.7	30.2	28.8	56.9	53.1	55.2
Financial situation	14.8	20.2	18.1	36.0	30.9	33.6
Personal safety	77.3	62.1	68.0	84.0	76.0	80.3
Feeling part of local community	26.1	27.2	26.8	41.4	37.3	39.5
Health	60.9	56.7	58.3	74.5	67.4	71.2
Neighbourhood in which you live	58.2	58.7	58.5	70.8	63.0	67.2
The amount of free time	67.2	45.9	54.1	42.4	35.0	39.0
Overall satisfaction with life	48.8	62.9	57.5	75.0	69.0	72.2

Notes ; Customised table from Household, income and labour dynamics in Australia survey. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction on a scale from zero (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied). Responses were categorised as zero to seven (not satisfied) and eight to ten (satisfied). The classification into fully and not fully engaged is described in the text and is not consistent with the definition in the rest of the report.

SATISFACTION WITH LIFE

The HILDA survey asked participants to rate their satisfaction with a range of aspects of their life on a scale from zero to ten. Table 14 shows the proportions satisfied (those who reported a satisfaction of 8 or more) for young people fully or not full-engaged. The choice to divide the satisfied from the not-satisfied at eight is of course arbitrary. What is important here, however, is not the level of satisfaction but the difference in satisfaction between young Australians who are fully engaged in work and study and young Australians who are not.

Young people who are not fully engaged in work or study are less satisfied with:

- The education they received;
- Their job opportunities and prospects;
- Their finances;
- Their friends and friendships;
- Their living arrangements, neighbourhood and community integration;
- Their health, physical appearance and personal safety.

The only area of their lives in which young people who are not fully engaged feel more satisfied than other 15 to 24 year-olds is in the amount of spare time they have—and they are no less satisfied with their love lives.

In summing up their overall level of satisfaction with their lives, 58 percents of young people not fully engaged in work and study were satisfied—substantially fewer than the 72 percent for 15 to 24 year-olds who are fully engaged, a difference that is larger for males than for females.

CONCLUSION

The flipside of the confident, robust Gen Y we hear about so often are the emotional, financial, family and other stresses that many people in this Generation feel and express.

The data presented here add to arguments for improving the transition from school, which are now frequently couched in terms of economics—as though the human consequences mattered less. Clearly there are sound economic reasons for governments to invest in improving Year 12 completion rates and the extent to which young people participate in education and work after leaving school. The cost to society of under-employment and unemployment of young people and of a lesser skilled workforce clearly outweigh the costs of doing something about it.

Policies need to take account of the views of young people, their language, preferences, technologies and media, and ways of organising life. For the moment, most young people continue to aspire to the goals of a wider Australia, including full-time paid employment. Governments, employers and communities need to continue to work to make sure that these aspirations can be realised.

TABLE 2

Attitudes to job by level of full-time engagement: 15 to 24 year-olds, Australia, 2002

	Part-time work & full-time study	Part-time work & no full-time study	Full-time work & no full-time study
	%	%	%
Reason for working part-time			
Own illness/disability	0.1	1.6	--
Caring for children	0.0	7.5	--
Caring for vulnerable adult relatives	0.0	0.5	--
Other personal or family responsibilities	0.0	1.1	--
Going to school, college, uni	95.4	21.2	--
Could not find full-time work	0.9	23.2	--
Prefer part-time work	1.7	17.9	--
Involved voluntary work	0.0	0.8	--
Higher per hour rates	0.2	0.7	--
Avoid loss of welfare payments	0.0	0.0	--
Getting business established	0.0	1.4	--
Nature of work	1.1	10.8	--
Other	0.5	13.3	--
Preference for more or fewer hours			
Fewer hours than now	5.0	2.2	20.4
About the same	62.3	37.2	65.2
More hours	32.7	60.6	14.4
Working conditions			
Holiday leave	0.7	3.4	12.8
Sick leave	86.9	70.5	12.5
Contract of employment			
Fixed term	0.7	3.4	12.8
Casual	86.9	70.5	12.5
On-going	12.4	26.1	74.7
More than 50% prob. leaving	40.8	46.5	25.3
More than 20% prob. of sack	10.8	17.9	12.7
More than 50% prob. better job	67.9	64.1	62.7
Satisfaction with aspects of job			
Total pay	47.7	40.6	37.1
Job security	75.7	59.6	76.5
The work itself	45.6	46.8	55.9
The hours worked	53.5	36.2	56.6
Flexibility to balance work and non-work activities	70.4	58.7	57.8
Overall	60.1	48.2	59.3

Notes Customised table from Household, income and labour dynamics in Australia survey. Respondents were asked to rate the probability from zero to 100 of their leaving, being sacked or finding at least as good a job if they left their current job. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction on a scale from zero (totally dissatisfied) to 10 (totally satisfied). Responses were categorised as zero to seven (not satisfied) and eight to ten (satisfied). The definition of full-time study is described in the text and is not consistent with the definition in the rest of the report.

TABLE 3

Percent of 18 to 24 year-olds who are not working or studying full-time by personal characteristics, Australia, 2002

Distrib'n	Background characteristics	MALES	FEMALES	PERSONS
%		%	%	%
Country of birth				
83.0	Australia	20.9	30.4	25.6
4.7	Other English-speaking	19.6	37.0	28.4
12.3	Other	15.7	17.4	16.5
English proficiency				
82.8	Only speaks English	21.9	32.5	27.1
10.6	Speaks Eng. well/very well	6.6	13.4	10.2
6.6	Does not speak Eng. well	18.4	13.5	16.4
Location				
73.0	Major cities	17.8	24.0	20.8
17.2	Inner regional	27.2	44.7	35.8
9.9	Other	25.2	40.8	33.1
Highest schooling completed				
68.9	Year 12	15.0	20.0	17.6
11.3	Year 11	26.7	33.4	30.1
15.2	Year 10	27.9	59.2	41.1
4.6	Year 9 or less	42.9	96.2	61.9
Disability				
1.8	Profound or severe limitation	69.1	55.2	64.7
2.3	Moderate or mild limitation	13.4	39.1	23.0
5.0	Schooling/employment limitation	29.8	44.8	38.5
13.6	No specific limitation	26.5	34.6	30.5
77.3	No disability/long-term health	17.2	26.5	21.8
Health				
74.0	Excellent or very good	18.1	22.6	20.2
18.5	Good	18.5	42.8	31.0
7.4	Fair or poor	44.2	60.5	52.0
Weekly household income				
6.1	Less than \$350	48.7	65.6	59.7
13.4	\$350 to less than \$630	33.6	58.3	46.0
21.0	\$630 to less than \$1,020	24.7	34.7	29.9
27.8	\$1,020 to less than \$1,565	17.8	23.9	20.9
31.8	\$1,565 or more	9.8	8.5	9.3

Notes: ABS General social survey, 2002. 4159.0. Working or studying full-time includes persons who were both working and studying part-time. Estimates for categories corresponding to a small percentage of the population have high relative errors.

TABLE 4

Percent of 18 to 24 year-olds who experienced selected personal stressful events, financial difficulties or crime in the last 12 months by participation in full-time work or study, Australia, 2002

	Not working or studying full-time			Working or studying full-time		
	MALES	FEMALES	PERSONS	MALES	FEMALES	PERSONS
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Personal stresses experienced in the last 12 months¹						
Divorce	6.4	13.0	10.3	11.3	11.0	11.1
Death	19.5	26.5	23.6	17.7	21.7	19.5
Serious illness	15.9	15.4	15.6	9.8	15.2	12.3
Serious accident	1.6	9.8	6.4	6.5	4.2	5.5
Alcohol or drug problems	19.6	19.8	19.7	9.5	11.3	10.3
Mental illness	14.3	15.6	15.0	5.1	7.7	6.3
Serious disability	1.1	4.8	3.3	0.4	3.9	2.0
Not able to get a job	54.5	30.6	40.6	16.5	22.7	19.3
Involuntary loss of job	10.0	5.2	7.2	5.8	7.6	6.6
Witness to violence	1.4	7.5	5.0	3.8	4.3	4.0
Trouble with the police	10.9	10.1	10.5	4.9	4.0	4.5
Gambling problem	3.2	7.0	5.4	3.5	3.6	3.5
Other	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.3
None of the above	23.1	29.6	26.9	47.7	43.5	45.7
Victim of . . .						
physical/threatened violence	32.4	19.8	25.0	18.2	6.3	12.7
actual or attempted break in	12.1	17.6	15.3	15.7	13.3	14.6
Feel unsafe or very unsafe						
At home alone during the day	3.3	3.0	3.1	1.2	3.0	2.1
At home alone after dark	5.2	25.4	17.0	1.4	15.7	8.0
Cash flow problems and financial stresses in the last 12 months						
Could not pay electricity, gas, or phone bills on time	6.4	13.0	10.3	11.3	11.0	11.1
Could not pay mortgage or rent on time	19.5	26.5	23.6	17.7	21.7	19.5
Could not pay car registration or insurance on time	15.9	15.4	15.6	9.8	15.2	12.3
Could not make minimum payment on credit card	1.6	9.8	6.4	6.5	4.2	5.5
Pawned or sold something because needed cash	19.6	19.8	19.7	9.5	11.3	10.3
Went without meals	14.3	15.6	15.0	5.1	7.7	6.3
Was unable to heat home	1.1	4.8	3.3	0.4	3.9	2.0
Sought financial help from friends or family	54.5	30.6	40.6	16.5	22.7	19.3
Sought help from welfare or community organisations	10.0	5.2	7.2	5.8	7.6	6.6
None of these cash flow problems	1.4	7.5	5.0	3.8	4.3	4.0
Could raise \$2000 in a week for something important	60.2	52.8	55.9	81.3	81.9	81.6

Notes ABS General social survey, 2002. 4159.0. Working or studying full-time includes persons who were both working and studying part-time.
(1) Personal stresses experienced in the last 12 months either by the respondent or by someone close to the respondent.

TABLE 5

Percent of 18 to 24 year-olds reporting various aspects of social inclusion and exclusion, Australia, 2002

	Not working or studying full-time			Working or studying full-time		
	MALES	FEMALES	PERSONS	MALES	FEMALES	PERSONS
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Help from outside the household in an emergency						
Friend	70.3	73.2	72.0	84.1	85.0	84.5
Neighbour	21.1	27.5	24.8	25.6	25.5	25.6
Family member	79.4	80.8	80.2	80.8	87.3	83.8
Work colleague	13.8	14.2	14.0	29.5	37.2	33.1
Community, charity, religious organisations	2.7	12.2	8.2	8.5	14.4	11.2
Local council, other govt org.	8.1	7.7	7.9	4.1	8.5	6.1
Health, legal, financial prof.	8.0	10.0	9.2	7.5	13.2	10.1
Other	2.4	2.5	2.5	1.8	2.9	2.2
No support	3.3	3.6	3.5	3.0	0.4	1.7
Could ask someone outside the household for small favours	92.0	95.0	93.7	91.8	93.2	92.4
Social activities in the last three months						
Recreational or cultural group	12.3	7.8	9.7	20.4	17.7	19.1
Community or special interest group	7.1	11.9	9.9	8.3	11.7	9.9
Church or religious activities;	11.7	16.3	14.4	17.5	25.9	21.4
Went to a restaurant, cafe, bar	74.6	85.7	81.1	88.4	95.0	91.4
Took part in, attended, watched sport/physical activities;	58.4	49.8	53.4	79.4	68.8	74.6
Visited a library, museum, art gallery	26.3	38.1	33.2	41.6	63.3	51.6
Attended movies, theatre, concert	72.7	65.4	68.5	83.0	88.4	85.5
Visited park, gardens, zoo, theme park	34.5	58.7	48.6	45.9	59.0	51.9
None of these social activities	9.4	6.8	7.9	2.8	2.1	2.4
Participated in sport or physical recreation in the last 12 months						
Organised (eg through a club)	39.1	35.1	36.8	56.6	45.3	51.4
Not organised	38.0	42.6	40.7	63.0	54.5	59.1
Organised or not organised	57.5	61.2	59.7	82.4	70.8	77.1
Undertaken voluntary work in the last 12 months						
	23.6	18.3	20.5	28.0	33.5	30.5
Computer and internet access in the last 12 months						
Access to computer at home	66.3	47.6	55.3	77.4	85.4	81.1
Used computer at home	58.5	41.2	48.4	72.9	82.3	77.2
Used computer anywhere	71.6	74.7	73.4	90.4	97.2	93.5
Internet access at home	59.0	31.9	43.2	67.3	67.6	67.5
Used Internet at home	50.3	29.4	38.1	62.7	64.5	63.5
Used Internet anywhere	68.6	65.7	66.9	86.1	93.3	89.4
Transport						
Access to a car	69.4	67.1	68.1	81.9	78.7	80.5
Can easily get to places	70.0	66.7	68.1	79.2	73.2	76.5

Notes ABS General social survey, 2002. 4159.0. Working or studying full-time includes persons who were both working and studying part-time.

