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# Stay-at-home fathers in Australia

RESEARCH REPORT 2018

Jennifer Baxter



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# Executive summary

Fathering today is multifaceted, and many now consider it appropriate for fathers to take on the role of stay-at-home caregiver while the mother takes on the breadwinning role. This report provides detailed analysis of Australian data, largely from the census, to provide some information on the number of stay-at-home fathers, their characteristics and the characteristics of their families. The focus is on two-parent families with children aged under 15 years.

Overall, these analyses find that the number of stay-at-home fathers is small, at about 4–5% of two-parent families. This percentage has not grown much in the last two decades but was considerably lower in the 1980s. The number was 80,000 in 2016, up from 68,500 in 2011.

Parents' labour force status is used to identify stay-at-home fathers as being those who are not employed and have an employed spouse or partner. The analysis shows that this is a very diverse group, and some of these fathers may not, in fact, identify with the stay-at-home father role, rather identifying as being unemployed or students, for example. The increase from 2011 to 2016 included increases in the number of stay-at-home fathers who were unemployed or who were not in the labour force, but no increases in the number who were employed but away from work.

When we look at the demographic characteristics of stay-at-home fathers, some have characteristics in common with dual-working families, while others are more similar to jobless families.

Stay-at-home father families tend to look different to stay-at-home mother families, with the most notable differences being that stay-at-home fathering happens later in life, when fathers and children are older, compared to stay-at-home mothering. It appears that stay-at-home fathers are less common as complete substitutes for stay-at-home mothers, for example swapping roles while children are very young. Of course, this does happen in some families, but the numbers are very small. However, stay-at-home fathering may become an option in more families when family finances are more secure, and mothers have returned to full-time work. For some families, a father's job loss may precipitate the stay-at-home fathering role, while others may choose to step aside from paid work to take on the parenting duties.

The small number of stay-at-home fathers suggests that, despite changes in attitudes toward involved fathering, and also increased employment participation among mothers, there are factors making this arrangement not workable for many families. This is in part likely to be related to financial constraints on families needing two incomes, but gendered parenting attitudes are also likely to play a part.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the author and may not reflect the views of the Australian Government, including the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

This report draws on the data collected and made available to the Australian Institute of Family Studies by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

# 1 Introduction

Today, “stay-at-home fathers” are the subjects of how-to books and websites and are talked about in social media. In an age of greater father involvement, having a stay-at-home father is generally perceived as an increasingly common way for families to organise their work and care responsibilities. But evidence on the prevalence of stay-at-home fathers in Australia is hard to find. This report seeks to address this, by presenting some information about stay-at-home fathers and their families. Specifically, this report aims to examine the following:

- How many stay-at-home fathers are there in Australia?
- Is the number of stay-at-home fathers increasing?
- What does labour force status tell us about mothers and fathers in stay-at-home father families?
- How do stay-at-home father families compare to families with other employment arrangements in terms of demographics and financial wellbeing?

The report extends the analysis of trends and demographics presented in Baxter (2017), presenting additional analysis and more background information, including a summary of the literature on stay-at-home fathers.

It seeks to explore stay-at-home fathering in (heterosexual) couple families, given that very strong gendered patterns are often the norm in these types of families. It is also interesting to learn more about those families in which parents’ allocation of time to paid work does not follow the conventional pattern. As such, single fathers have not been included, meaning this is not a report about all fathers caring for children. It is also not intended that this report documents all ways fathers might adjust their employment to take part in the care of children, such as reducing work hours to equally share the care. The focus is on those in the more extreme situation of being out of work, with a partner or spouse who is in work.

The research is intended to provide an account of stay-at-home fathering in Australia, to build a statistical profile of how families of stay-at-home fathers differ to others. As well as being of general interest, this information helps to provide context for thinking about the delivery of workplace policies, as well as services and programs to families with children, which traditionally have been designed to reflect a model that assumes mothers are the primary carers. It also broadens our understanding of the roles that fathers can play in families. With “involved fathering” now typically considered to mean fathers spending time with children and actively involved with child care, we might expect that stay-at-home fathers are a particular example of this.

As defined here, stay-at-home fathers comprise fathers who are not employed who have an employed spouse or partner. Of course, some of these fathers are out of employment due to job loss or instability in their employment, others have made an active decision to stay home to care for children, while others have different reasons for being out of employment. Not all may consider themselves to be stay-at-home fathers, such as those who consider themselves to be unemployed or students. Limitations of this definition are discussed in this report, acknowledging also that other fathers may consider themselves to be stay-at-home fathers, such as those who are the primary carers of children yet continue to have some engagement in paid work.

The report is structured as follows. **Chapter 2** discusses the identification and measurement of stay-at-home father families, as applied in other research and in this report. It also presents a discussion about stay-at-home father families, based on Australian and international literature, that led to the different analyses presented throughout the report. **Chapter 3** is the first analytical section, presenting an overview of the numbers of stay-at-home father families and families with other employment arrangements, including information on the labour force status of parents in stay-at-home father families. **Chapter 4** is then an analysis of the demographic characteristics of stay-at-home fathers and their families, with the purpose of being able to see to what extent they are different to others. This section also includes an examination of the financial wellbeing (income and housing) of stay-at-home father families. A discussion and conclusion follows.

The primary data source for this report is the Australian Census of Population and Housing (referred to throughout as the census). Other data sources referred to are outlined in the Appendices.



## 2 Background

### 2.1 Introduction

Despite the interest in stay-at-home fathers, they have received relatively little attention in Australian research, with no published *demographic* analyses of these families that we could locate. More typically, research on parents' employment focuses on mothers' employment, given that it is mothers who usually withdraw from employment when children are born, and in Australia often work part-time when they do return to work. The leave-taking, return to work and employment characteristics of mothers have therefore received much attention in Australia and elsewhere.

In contrast, as fathers' employment is less responsive to childbearing, research on fathers' employment tends to have a different focus. Some of the main research questions concerning fathers and employment in Australia are related to their leave-taking at the birth of a child (Huerta et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2014), the number of hours they work (Gray, 2013), and their take up or use of different employment arrangements (e.g., Charlesworth, Strazdins, O'Brien, & Sims, 2011).

This report therefore aims to fill a gap in what we know about these families, primarily using Australian census data to provide some insights.

### 2.2 What is a “stay-at-home father”?

While there is no single definition of “stay-at-home father” that is consistently used in research, there are some common elements based on fathers' (and also often mothers') employment status or income or on fathers' role as primary carer within the family. Generally, the understanding is that a stay-at-home father is one who has minimised his involvement in paid work, and is primarily responsible for the home and family. Researchers have used various ways of identifying stay-at-home fathers, depending on the focus of particular research questions and on the data available to them. These approaches are described here.

#### How stay-at-home fathers are defined in this report

The goal of the current research is to be able to quantify stay-at-home fathers in Australia, and to be able to provide statistical information about their families. As such, the definition used had to be one that could be applied to available data—for this research, the key data source was the census. As in similar explorations of stay-at-home fathers in the US and in Canada (discussed further below), we turned to couple-level data, for which information about the employment status of each partner allowed the identification of families in which fathers were not employed but mothers were. Specifically, stay-at-home fathers are considered to be men who are not doing any paid work, who have co-resident dependent children aged under 15 years and a spouse (married or de facto) who is doing some paid work. As such, this is indicative of a role reversal that has the mother as the breadwinner and the father caring for children. Some limitations of this definition are discussed below.

As noted in the introduction, the focus of the current research is on stay-at-home fathers in couple families, and so single fathers, even if they have minimised paid work involvement to care for children, are not included in the analyses. Their exclusion from the focus of this research is not intended to diminish the importance of their role as fathers. Their circumstances, however, are quite different to those stay-at-home fathers who are financially supported (at least to some extent) by a co-resident partner.



Another exclusion from the classification of stay-at-home father is fathers who are not in paid work who have a partner who is also not in paid work. These families are instead referred to here as jobless couple families. Of course, fathers in these jobless families may have taken time out of work to care for children alongside the mother, or perhaps because the mother is unable to provide care for children. One or both of them may be out of work for other reasons, such as being students. Throughout this report jobless couple families are included as a comparison group. Other comparison groups are stay-at-home mother families (in which mothers are not employed and fathers are) and dual-working families (in which both parents are in full-time or part-time paid work).

## Quantitative approaches used elsewhere

The focus on fathers who are out of employment who have an employed partner is broadly consistent with some US and Canadian research. For example, Kramer, Kelly, and McCulloch (2013) examined trends in stay-at-home fathers in the US using the Monthly Current Population Survey (CPS) data. Their work counted fathers as stay-at-home if they were not employed and had an employed spouse or partner, although these CPS data have a year-long reference period, so fathers had to be out of work for a year and their partners in work for the year. From this research, it was estimated that from 2000 to 2009 about 3.5% of couple households with children were stay-at-home father households, 33% stay-at-home mother households, and 63% dual-earner full-time households (other household forms were excluded). These percentages are not directly comparable to Australian data, however, because of the exclusion of households in which mothers work part-time hours—a common situation in Australia but not the US. Later work by Kramer and Kramer (2016) used these same data.<sup>1</sup>

The US CPS data are particularly useful for analyses of stay-at-home fathers, as they include information on the main reason for non-employment, so that fathers who are not in the labour force can be classified into caregiving, unable to work and other fathers (Kramer et al., 2013; Kramer & Kramer, 2016). The Australian census data do not allow this distinction to be made, so we include some analysis of other datasets to explore this. The inclusion of unemployed fathers as well as fathers who are not in the labour force in the definition of stay-at-home fathers used in this Australian research is a departure from that used by Kramer and colleagues (2013) but we include analyses of labour force status to allow discussion of the diversity of those identified as stay-at-home fathers.

For Canada, estimates of stay-at-home fathers were produced by Marshall (1998), also with the definition based on the employment status of husband and wife in families with children (aged under 16 years). It was estimated in this work that, at 1997, 6% of families with children were stay-at-home father families. Their definition included fathers with a working wife as “stay at home” if those fathers were able to work but were neither looking for work nor studying.

The US estimates produced by Kramer et al. (2013) were critiqued by Latshaw (2011), who highlighted the potential undercount that follows from having a reference period of 12 months, the restriction to fathers who have done no work at all in that period, with wives who worked the entire 12 months. Latshaw’s qualitative research revealed that fathers in other situations considered themselves to be stay-at-home fathers, including some working part-time hours. Fathers who work some hours are not typically counted in estimates of stay-at-home fathers, but qualitative research such as that presented by Latshaw (and others discussed below) report that those who consider themselves to be stay-at-home fathers sometimes have some engagement with paid work.

There has been further inconsistency in the definitions and measurement of stay-at-home fathers. For the US, Livingston (2014) used a definition of stay-at-home fathers that included all not-employed fathers who live with their children, regardless of whether or not partnered and the spouse’s employment status. She estimated that 7% of fathers were stay-at-home fathers in 2012, up from 4% in 1989. In fact, in that research, 50% of these stay-at-home fathers were identified as not having a working spouse.

## Subjective approaches used largely in qualitative analyses

Qualitative and smaller-scale studies of stay-at-home fathers tend to use more nuanced definitions than those relying on couple-level employment or income data. These studies often involve primary data collection, for which stay-at-home fathers can be defined and identified to fit the needs of the research. For example, Doucet (2004) has undertaken a large program of work on stay-at-home fatherhood in Canada. Her study includes fathers who self-defined as the primary caregivers of children, who had been at home caring for children for at least one year, or had altered their work to more flexible, home-based or part-time work to allow a focus on

<sup>1</sup> Their definitions are even more precise than this. For example, Kramer and Kramer (2016) defined a stay-at-home father as a father who was outside the labour force and had not received any income in the previous year, with a wife who worked 35 hours or more (for pay) and earned the entire household income.

caregiving. Doucet also worked with Merla (Doucet & Merla, 2007) to analyse stay-at-home fathers in Belgium and Canada. The information for Belgium referred to fathers with a “professionally active” partner, who stayed at home for six months or more in order to take care of children (see also Merla, 2008). In a US study by Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley, and Scaringi (2008), stay-at-home fathers were those who defined themselves as such, who had a partner in full-time work and at least one child aged under 6 years old. Chesley (2011) used a definition that required men to have had primary responsibility for children for a minimum of six months, with a partner providing most of the family’s income (at least 80% of the family income). This approach did not require fathers to be completely out of employment.

## Female breadwinner families

It is worth noting also some work on a related topic of female breadwinner families. For Australia, Drago, Black, and Wooden (2005) and Wooden and Hahn (2014) used the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA) to explore the incidence and characteristics of female breadwinner families. They defined these families as being couple families in which the female partner has income from employment that is at least 10% higher than that of her male partner. Their findings indicate that about one in four working couples were female breadwinner couples. These families, however, are not all stay-at-home father families. For example, in 2011, in 43% of female breadwinner families both members of the couple worked full-time hours (Wooden & Hahn, 2014). Further, only one-third had children aged under 15 years. Stay-at-home father families are therefore a subset of these families.

## 2.3 Family employment arrangements and stay-at-home fathers

The “breadwinner” model, in which the mother takes on the primary carer role and the father the breadwinner role, still occurs in Australia, particularly when there are very young children in the home. Growth in the “modified male breadwinner model” has seen more mothers continuing as the primary caregiver, while engaging part-time in paid work (Pocock, 2005). The proportion of families with employment arrangements of this kind has grown over recent decades. Families with both parents working full-time are also apparent, more so as children grow older. Other arrangements are less common, including that of stay-at-home father families. (See Baxter (2013b) for analysis of family employment trends).

The time use and fathering literature tells us that fathers have spent more time on child care in recent years compared to decades past, but there are still very gendered time use patterns that see the unpaid household work and caring primarily the role of mothers (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Craig, Mullan, & Blaxland, 2010; Sayer, 2005). A significant proportion of men and women support the ideal of women being primarily responsible for the home, and men for earning the income, especially among parents with caring responsibilities (Baxter, 2015; van Egmond, Baxter, Buchler, & Western, 2010). There has nevertheless been some shift, with support for more equal roles slowly increasing (van Egmond et al., 2010).

These patterns of employment participation and time in unpaid work are therefore both very gendered, and stay-at-home father families are far from the norm. In itself this may create challenges for families, if fathers find their situation conflicts with their own gender role attitudes or with the attitudes of others around them. Much of the literature on stay-at-home fathers explores this (e.g., Doucet, 2004; Shirani, Henwood, & Coltart, 2012).

Family employment arrangements come about as a consequence of a number of factors, including macro-economic ones that affect the availability of different types of jobs, within-family ones including the resources of each parent and the extent of caring demands within the family, and also parenting and gender role attitudes of parents themselves and the wider community. For a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that apply in relation to explaining stay-at-home fathering, and of existing literature, refer to Kramer and Kramer (2016).

Macro-economic factors are relevant to a discussion of stay-at-home fathers, as a rise in unemployment may lead to a father’s job loss, and possibly his move into a stay-at-home father role. In discussing findings from German-speaking countries, Schwiter and Baumgarten (2017) note that the evidence indicates that stay-at-home father arrangements tend to come about due to adverse employment conditions or job loss, rather than being a choice to be home to care for children. Various qualitative studies (e.g., Doucet, 2004) have shown that in some families faced with the father’s job loss, parents renegotiate roles such that the father can be the primary carer. In this situation, he may take some time out of employment altogether, or take up different forms of employment that can be fit around a predominantly carer role, with the mother in the breadwinner role. Another possibility, of course, is that higher unemployment may be associated with a higher incidence of jobless families, when the

father as well as the mother is not in employment. Some fathers who find themselves out of employment with an employed spouse or partner may not identify as a stay-at-home father, nor take up the unpaid household tasks, especially if they see this role as short-term or are dissatisfied with it.

Economic factors may be important to within-family decision making about employment participation. As discussed later in the discussion, child care costs may contribute to those decisions, but in terms of which parent might stay home, should there be a desire for one parent to do this, the *relative* economic or human capital resources of each of the parents can lead to families making particular choices about which parent is to be the primary carer. When the mother has higher earning potential than the father, families may adopt a stay-at-home father model, so that the parent with the higher earning potential is in employment (Fischer & Anderson, 2012).

As noted above, as well as these economic factors, the attitudes of the parents toward parenting and gender roles are likely to contribute to the way they share the care of children and devote time to paid work. Unpaid work in the home, including child care and housework, has traditionally been viewed as female tasks, while providing an income through work (breadwinning) has been traditionally viewed as the male's task. In recent decades, these boundaries between female and male tasks are perhaps less distinct, as mothers are now more engaged in paid work and fathers in caring for children. There is considerable emphasis now on "involved" fathering, acknowledging the valuable role that fathers can have in parenting beyond that of breadwinner (Pleck, 1997). Being motivated to be involved fathers can be an important factor in a father's decision to become a stay-at-home father (Fischer & Anderson, 2012; Kramer et al., 2013; Merla, 2008; Solomon, 2014). The attitudes of mothers are also relevant in thinking about the decisions parents make about work and family (Doucet & Merla, 2007; Fischer & Anderson, 2012; Merla, 2008).

Overall, though, very gendered time use patterns persist such that we expect that gender norms still play some role in parents' decision making about work and care. This is supported by qualitative research. Men who opt into the stay-at-home fathering role may have views or values that do not adhere so strongly to the "traditional" roles of mothers as carers and fathers as breadwinners (Fischer & Anderson, 2012; Solomon, 2014). In fact, research on stay-at-home father families shows that this is especially so if fathers have entered the stay-at-home father role by choice, rather than coming to the role because of job loss (Latshaw, 2015).

Stay-at-home fathers are sometimes discussed as if there were two distinct groups—those whose primary reason is to care for children, and those whose primary reason is related to lack or loss of employment. However, qualitative research tells us that stay-at-home fathers have often had a multiplicity of reasons contribute to their decision to stay at home (Doucet & Merla, 2007), and they may themselves see this role differently over time, or even at a point in time have varied ways of conceptualising what their role is, and why they are doing it (Doucet, 2004). For example, those who took up the role because of job loss may initially attribute their staying at home to this reason but, over time, they may increasingly value the opportunity to have a greater role in taking care of children, such that they may identify with the role of stay-at-home father more after some time. Further, just as mothers may have complex and varied ways of fitting work around their care responsibilities, this is true too of fathers who have taken on the primary carer role. Here, we focus on fathers who are not in paid work but, as previously noted, other fathers who have reduced or changed their employment to enable them to be primary carers may also consider themselves to be stay-at-home fathers (Doucet, 2004).

Within the family, other factors may contribute to decisions about family employment arrangements, notably the individual characteristics and capabilities of parents to work and to care. We will explore this in this report by considering some of the demographic characteristics of parents and families in **Chapter 4**.

## 2.4 Measurement of stay-at-home fathers in this report

With the Australian data used in this report, to estimate the number of stay-at-home fathers, the employment status of fathers and mothers at the time of the survey or census is used, with those who are unemployed, not in the labour force or away from work (working zero hours) all counted as not employed. Stay-at-home fathers are not-employed fathers who have a spouse or partner who is in some employment.

There are some limitations of the definition used here, relating to some of the nuances of identification of stay-at-home fathers, as highlighted in some of the literature discussed above. In particular:

- This approach does not allow for cases in which fathers are working just a small number of hours a week, while primarily focused on caregiving, to be classified as stay-at-home fathers.
- The requirement of this definition is that mothers be employed; however, some employed mothers are in paid work for only a few hours a week. In fact, some of these families may be primarily reliant on government

pensions and allowances, not on the mothers' income. Such families might be better considered to be "near jobless" rather than stay-at-home father families.

- Some not-employed fathers are out of employment for reasons other than caring for children, such as their difficulties finding work, or to study or because of ill health. That is, the non-employment may not represent an intentional reversal of roles by parents.

Some analyses in this paper explore the above issues.

## 2.5 Data and methods

Much of this report draws on the ABS Census data. Information about the census data sources is given in **Appendix A**.

In all analyses, the focus is on two-parent families with children aged under 15 years, with this age cut-off commonly used in analyses of parents' labour force status.

The key data item used throughout is one derived for this report, referred to as family employment status. This variable identifies stay-at-home father families, stay-at-home mother families, dual-working families and jobless families. "Stay-at-home" parents are those who are not in work who have a partner/spouse who is in work. We include those who are unemployed, not in the labour force, or employed but working zero hours as not in work. Jobless families are those with both parents not working. "Dual working" indicates both parents spent at least one hour in paid work in the reference period. These analyses exclude families in which either parents' labour force status was not stated.

Some analysis of trends in stay-at-home father families is presented, for which customised aggregated data reports provided by the ABS were used for 1991–2016, and confidentialised unit record data were used for 1981 and 1986. See **Appendix A** for more information.

Detailed analysis was done using the 2011 data, drawing on the 5% confidentialised unit record file, accessed through the ABS Remote Access Data Laboratory. Detailed 2016 data were not yet available for analyses for this report. These data were used to combine information about fathers' characteristics, mothers' characteristics and family characteristics to create a dataset of couple families with children aged under 15 years, which could be analysed according to family employment status. With these detailed census data, other family characteristics analysed were age of youngest child, number of children in the family, and whether the family was part of a multi-family household. Father characteristics included were age, disability and carer status, study status and educational attainment. Mothers' carer and disability status were also included, and mothers' educational attainment analysed on its own and relative to fathers'. Information about financial wellbeing—parents' and household incomes and housing tenure—is also presented. A summary of these variables is found in **Appendix A**. The sample size is about 82,000 records, representing the number of couple families with children in the sample, with information about the labour force status of each of the mothers and the fathers. This includes 3,377 families classified as stay-at-home father families. In some analyses, the sample size is a little smaller, due to non-response to particular items examined.

Some other data sources were used to answer questions that could not be explored with the census data. These additional analyses are provided in the appendices. Analysis of the ABS labour force survey is in **Appendix B**, the ABS Persons Not in the Labour Force Survey in **Appendix C** and the ABS Survey of Income and Housing Costs in **Appendix D**.

The methods used in this report were primarily descriptive, cross-tabulating the family employment status variable, or parental employment details, across information about parental and family characteristics. Some multivariate analysis was also used in **Chapter 4**, and the methods used are described in that section. Data analyses were done with StataMP 15.0.

## 2.6 Summary

The existing research shows that while the typical depiction of a stay-at-home dad is one who has opted out of paid work in order to care for children, and has a spouse or partner who takes on the breadwinner role, there is much more diversity than this in terms of who makes up the stay-at-home father population. There are actually different pathways into stay-at-home fatherhood, with some men becoming stay-at-home fathers by making a decision to reduce paid work involvement in order to focus more on caring for children, while others do so as a consequence of their job loss or other changes in family circumstances. While we are unable to identify these different pathways, some of the analysis in this report aims to highlight the diversity of the stay-at-home father group.

# 3 How many stay-at-home fathers are there?

## 3.1 Overview of trends

As noted in **Chapter 2**, in this report stay-at-home fathers are considered to be fathers with co-resident dependent children aged under 15 years, who are not doing any paid work, who have a partner or spouse who is doing some paid work.

Applying this definition to Australian Census data, in the census week in 2016:

- There were approximately 80,000 families with stay-at-home fathers. This represented 4.6% of two-parent families.
- In comparison, there were 498,900 families with stay-at-home mothers, if this same definition is applied to mothers, or 29% of two-parent families.
- The balance comprises 60% of families in which both parents did some paid work and 6.8% in which neither did any paid work.

According to the 2011 Census, 4.2% of two-parent families were stay-at-home father families (68,500 families); 31% were stay-at-home mother families; in 57% both parents were working and in 7% neither parent was working. While other data sources may yield different estimates because of variation in survey scope and questions asked, a number of Australian datasets yield very similar estimates to the ones derived from the 2011 census.<sup>2,3</sup>

The varied definitions of stay-at-home father used across countries and studies make it difficult to compare estimates. However, it appears that estimates of 4–5% are broadly consistent with those produced for other industrialised countries, as discussed in **Chapter 2**.

While there was an increase between 2011 and 2016, the estimated number of stay-at-home father families has remained low across the census years examined here, from 1981 to 2016.<sup>4</sup> The numbers of stay-at-home-fathers were:

- 29,600 in 1981 (1.9% of two-parent families);
- 41,900 in 1986 (2.6% of two-parent families);
- 54,700 in 1991 (3.6% of two-parent families);
- 60,300 in 1996 (4.0% of two-parent families);
- 68,200 in 2001 (4.5% of two-parent families);
- 59,500 in 2006 (3.9% of two-parent families);
- 68,500 in 2011 (4.2% of two-parent families); and
- 80,000 in 2016 (4.6% of two-parent families).

That is, there was an increased number and percentage of stay-at-home fathers between each of the census years from 1981 through to 2001. From 2001 to 2011 this increase did not continue, with the number and percentage at 2011 similar to those at 2001, with lower estimates for 2006. In **Appendix B**, analysis of the ABS

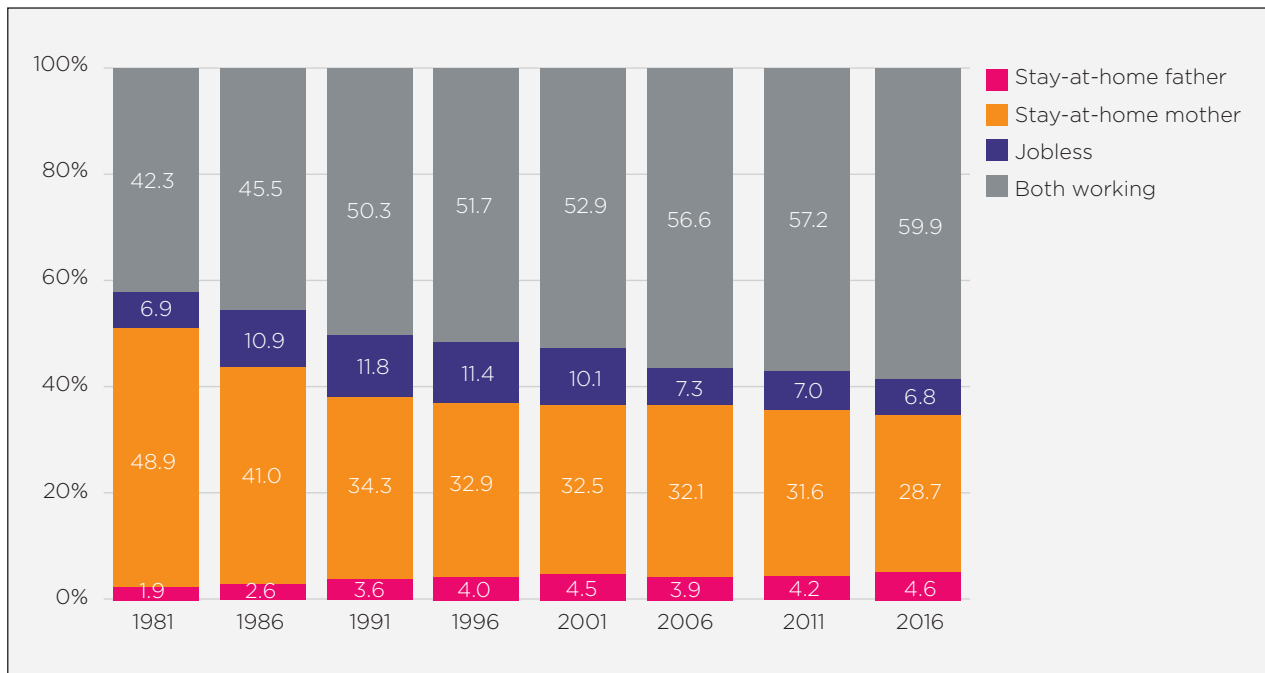
<sup>2</sup> If we derive estimates from HILDA, using data collected in 2011, the results are virtually the same as these derived from the 2011 Census. Using the same definition and scope, according to HILDA, in 2011, 4% of two-parent families were stay-at-home father families, 33% were stay-at-home mother families, 5% were jobless families and in 58% both parents were undertaking some work.

<sup>3</sup> According to the ABS labour force survey in June 2011, of two-parent families with a youngest child aged less than 15 years, 3.3% were stay-at-home father families, 29% stay-at-home mother families, 63% dual-working families and 5% jobless families. The estimated number of stay-at-home father families was 60,000 at this time.

<sup>4</sup> The estimates for 1981 and 1986 were derived from the Census one per cent confidentialised unit record files. The estimates for 1991–2016 were derived from custom data reports provided by the ABS. All estimates are based on two-parent families with children aged under 15 years, excluding families in which either parent had not stated labour force status.

labour force survey is presented for 1981–2016, and these data also show that most of the increase in the number and percentage of stay-at-home fathers occurred over the 1980s and 1990s.

To contextualise this trend, changing family employment arrangements from 1981 to 2016 were more apparent in terms of the decline in jobless couple families and stay-at-home mother families. This has been balanced by the increase in the proportion of families in which both parents are in some employment. As seen in Figure 1, the change in the percentage of stay-at-home father families over this time is much smaller than these other changes.



**Note:** “Stay-at-home” parents are those who are not in work who have a partner/spouse who is in work. “Jobless” families are those in which both parents are not working, including those away from work. “Both working” indicates both parents spent at least one hour in paid work in the reference period. Excludes families in which either parent’s labour force status was not stated. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0% due to rounding.

**Source:** Australian Population Census customised reports, 1991–2016; 1981 and 1986 one percent confidentialised unit record files

**Figure 1:** Stay-at-home fathers and other family employment arrangements by year, two-parent families with youngest child aged less than 15 years

## 3.2 Stay-at-home fathers’ labour force status

In defining stay-at-home fathers as those who are not employed (who have a spouse who is in paid work), all are counted as stay-at-home regardless of their reason for non-employment, their preference for being employed or not, or the activities they are undertaking while not employed. In this section, we explore this, by using information about fathers’ labour force status and activities, to uncover some of the heterogeneity of the group of fathers identified as “stay-at-home”. This is not done with the intention of refining the definition of stay-at-home father, but of providing more understanding of which fathers are captured using this approach.

Of the 80,000 stay-at-home fathers in 2016, 43,800 were “not in the labour force” (55%), 23,800 (30%) were “unemployed” and 12,500 “away from work” (16%).

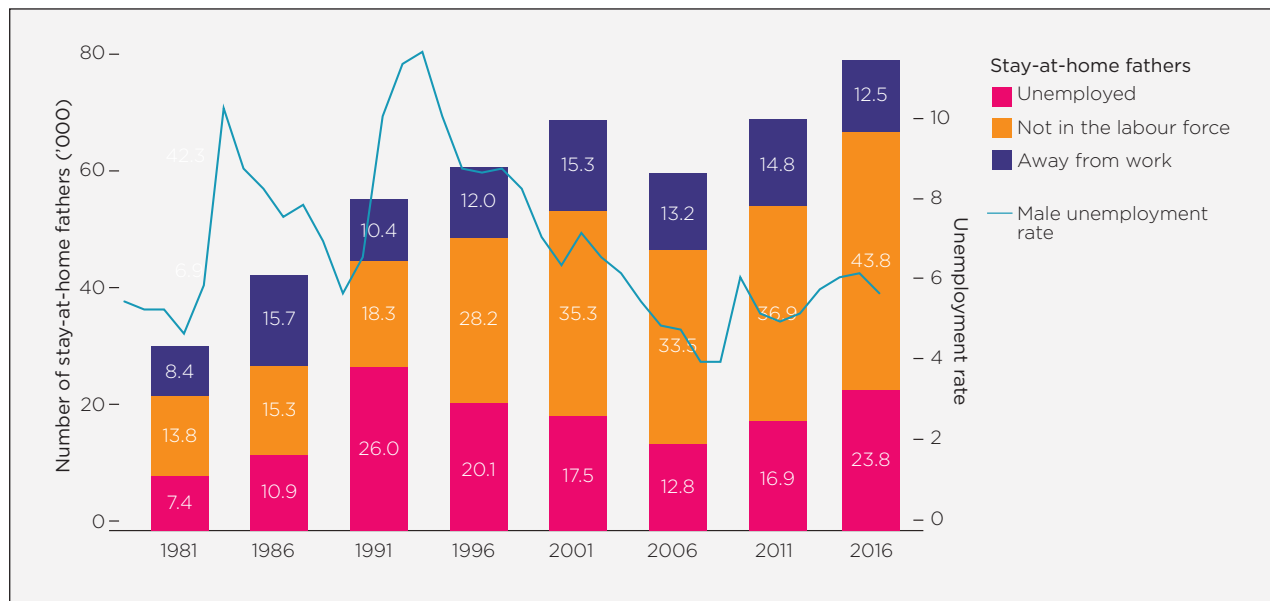
- Fathers who are *not in the labour force* include those away from work to care for children and look after the home, as well as those away from work due to ill health or disability, or study, and those who are otherwise jobless but not looking for work or not available to start work. Within this group, then, are those fathers who have opted out of paid work to focus on caring for children. These different reasons for being out of employment are not captured in the census, and so we cannot create different groups of stay-at-home fathers, as has been done for the US by Kramer and colleagues (as discussed in [Chapter 2](#)). According to analysis of the ABS Persons Not in the Labour Force Survey, about one in three fathers who are not in the labour force has a main activity of home duties or child care ([Appendix C](#)).



- *Unemployed fathers* are those who do not have a job, are looking for work and are available to start work. Here, the unemployed stay-at-home fathers are those who are unemployed and have a spouse who is employed.<sup>5</sup>
- Stay-at-home-fathers who are *away from work* are fathers who say that they had a job, but were not working in it in the census week. That is, they reported having a job, but then answered that they worked no hours in that job during census week. According to standard labour force definitions, they are employed, but we have included them as not employed in case some have taken long-term leave to care for children. Analyses of mothers' employment participation by age of youngest child indicates that for mothers the "away from work" category includes those who have taken leave to care for children (Baxter, 2013b). Stay-at-home fathers who are away from work include those who are temporarily away from work for other reasons, such as because of holidays or illness.

The increase in the number of stay at home fathers between 2011 and 2016 reflected increases in the number not in the labour force and the number unemployed, with the number of stay at home fathers who were away from work somewhat less in 2016 than in 2011. (See Figure 2.) Together, these data indicate that the stay-at-home father group defined from these data is a heterogeneous one. While it includes fathers who are not seeking work and are primarily doing home duties or child care, there are many other circumstances represented. This includes those who are away from work because of their own illness or disability, and those who are actively seeking work.

Research from the US has shown that there is an increase in the number of stay-at-home fathers (Kramer & Kramer, 2016) and also in fathers' involvement in care (Casper & O'Connell, 1998; Knop & Brewster, 2015; O'Connell, 1993) when unemployment rates are higher. We therefore ask whether information about stay-at-home fathers' labour force status can tell us anything about changes in this group of fathers over recent decades.<sup>6</sup> For context, Figure 2 shows the male unemployment rate at June of each year from 1980 to 2016, along with the five-yearly census data on stay-at-home fathers' labour force status. There does not appear to be an association between the total number of stay-at-home fathers and the male unemployment rate. There are not always more stay-at-home fathers when the unemployment rate is higher.



Notes: See Appendix A about some of the changes in labour force questions used in the census.

Source: Australian Population Census customised reports, 1991–2016; 1981 and 1986 one percent confidentialised unit record files. ABS Monthly labour force surveys (June each year, from trend series).

**Figure 2:** Male unemployment rates (1980–2016) and labour force status of stay-at-home-fathers with children aged under 15 years (1981–2016)

Focusing instead on the stay-at-home fathers who were unemployed, in most census years the number follows a similar trend to that of the unemployment rate. For example, the number of unemployed stay-at-home fathers was low in 2006 when male unemployment rates were relatively low, and the number of unemployed stay-at-home fathers peaked (across these census years) in 1991, around the time of very high male

<sup>5</sup> There have been differences across census years in the collection and derivation of labour force information. See Appendix A.

<sup>6</sup> There have been differences across census years in the collection and derivation of labour force information. See Appendix A.



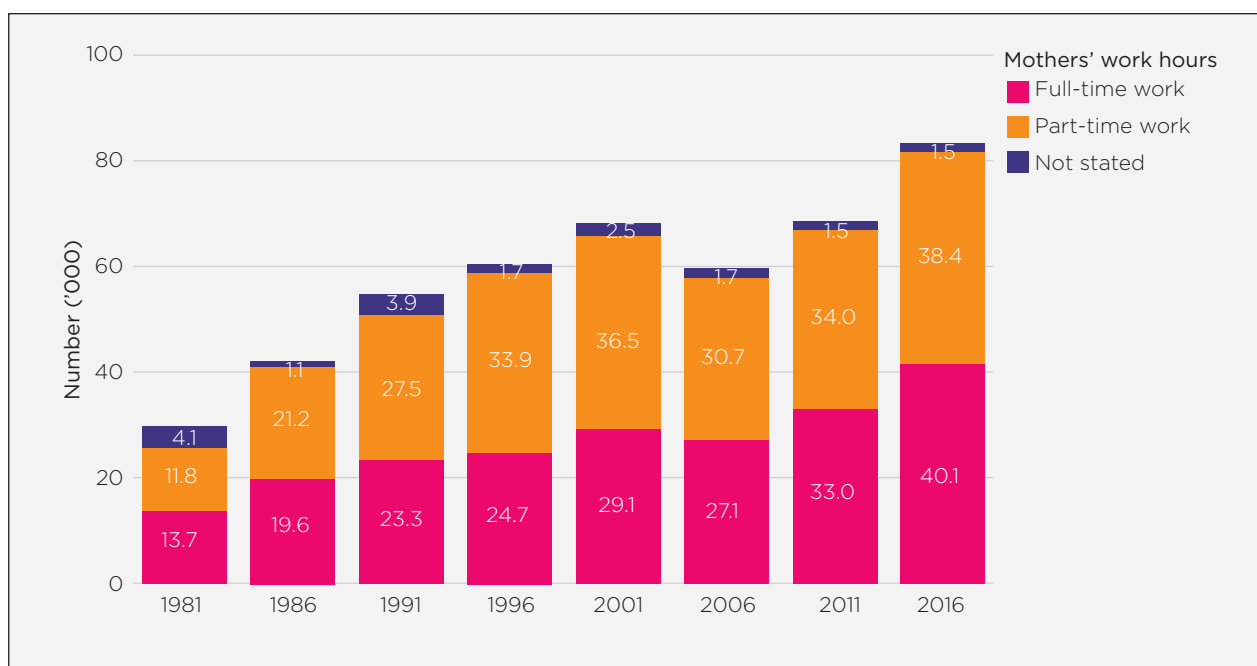
unemployment rates. There does therefore appear to be some link between macro-economic conditions and the number of stay-at-home fathers, insofar as it relates to stay-at-home fathers who are unemployed.

In more recent years, the “not in the labour force” category is the largest within those defined as stay-at-home fathers, having increased across census years. This mirrors a broader trend of increasing numbers of men not in the labour force (Lattimore, 2007). This does not necessarily reflect an increase in the number or proportion of fathers electing out of employment in order to care for children, since there has also been growth in the number of working-age men who are outside of the labour force because of their ill health or disability (see in **Appendix C**, analysis of changes in the distribution of main activities of men aged 25–54 years who are not in the labour force). For more analysis of trends relating to men not in the labour force refer to Lattimore (2007).

### 3.3 Mothers’ labour force status and work hours

In reporting on stay-at-home *mothers*, we do not normally pay much attention to activities and labour force status, as the majority of mothers are not in the labour force, and a majority give their reason for not working as caring for children or looking after the family. However, not-employed mothers of older children are more likely than those of younger children to give reasons for being not employed that indicate their having barriers to employment (Baxter, 2013c).

By our definition, mothers are employed in stay-at-home father families; however, they are not all employed full-time. In 2016, of the 80,000 stay-at-home father families, about half of the mothers were working part-time hours and half were working full-time hours. If we were to impose a more restricted requirement on our definition of stay-at-home fathers that the mother had to be in full-time work and the father not employed, then the estimates of the number of stay-at-home father families, at each year, would be around half of those presented previously. This is evident in Figure 3, which shows mothers’ work hours in stay-at-home father families, for each of the census periods from 1981 to 2011. The growth in part-time work among mothers in stay-at-home father families mirrors the growth in part-time work among mothers more generally over this period (Baxter, 2013d).



**Note:** Part-time work is up to 34 hours per week.

**Source:** Australian Population Census customised reports, 1991–2016; 1981 and 1986 one per cent confidentialised unit record files.

**Figure 3:** Mothers’ work hours in stay-at-home father families, 1981–2016

More detailed census data reveals that mothers in stay-at-home father families who were employed part-time were often working quite short hours (see **Appendix E**, Table E.1). In 2011, of employed mothers in stay-at-home father families:

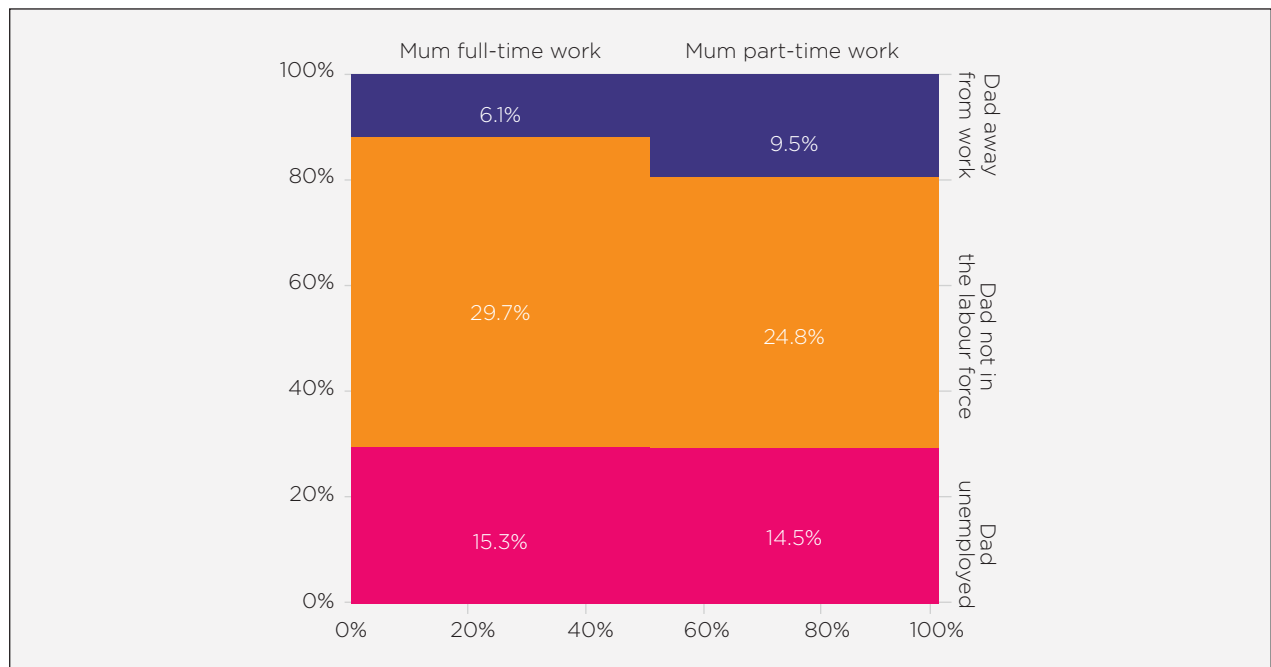
- 16% worked 1–15 hours per week;

- 17% worked 16–24 hours per week; and
- 17% worked 25–34 hours per week.

However, Table E.1 shows that a higher proportion of mothers work full-time hours (49%) in stay-at-home father families compared to dual-working families (37%).

If we put mothers' work hours together with fathers' labour force status (Figure 4), in 30% of stay-at-home father families in 2016, the father was not in the labour force while the mother worked full-time hours. This was the largest of the groups when families are cross-classified according to these two variables.

A reason to focus only on families in which mothers work full-time hours would be that some mothers working part-time hours may be working only a few hours of work per week, such that income from this employment is not the household's primary source of income. That is, when mothers work part-time hours, it may be that the stay-at-home fathers are not primarily reliant on the mothers' income, but instead they and their household are primarily reliant on allowances or pensions from the government. This is, in fact, the case, as seen in **Appendix D**, in supplementary analysis of the main source of household income according to family employment arrangements. In **Chapter 4** of this report we examine income information for stay-at-home father families and other families, as reported in the census.



Source: Australian Population Census customised report, 2016.

Note: Excludes 2% who were not classifiable because employed mothers' work hours were not stated.

**Figure 4:** Mother's work hours and father's labour force status in stay-at-home father families, 2016

### 3.4 Summary

The prevalence of stay-at-home father families is small—currently at 4.6% of couple families with children, which is around the level found in comparable countries such as the US and Canada. The incidence of these families has grown when considering the longer-term trends from the early 1980s and is up from 4.2% in 2011. Overall, though, changes in the percentage have been small after the 1980s. While the percentages are small, the number of these families was estimated to be around 80,000 in 2016, rising from 68,500 in 2011. In the rest of the report we aim to provide greater insights on the stay-at-home father families, focusing on the 2011 census data, to examine how they compare to other families with children.

The main point to take from the analysis of parents' labour force status is that there is considerable diversity within the group identified as stay-at-home father families. The increase from 2011 to 2016 comprised increases in the number of stay-at-home fathers who were unemployed or who were not in the labour force, with no increase in those who were employed but away from work. From these data, it is not possible to hone in on those who have elected to remain home to care for children while the mother takes on the primary breadwinning role. However, it appears that a significant proportion of the 4–5% identified as stay-at-home fathers is not characterised by this description.

# 4 Characteristics of stay-at-home father families compared to other families

## 4.1 Introduction

The above analysis of stay-at-home fathers, as defined using the census data, has shown that these fathers are not a homogeneous group when we consider their and their partners' labour force status. Exploring the demographic characteristics of these fathers, their spouses and their families provide some insights on the factors that may lead to parents taking up a stay-at-home father arrangement. This is also important information in thinking about the extent to which supports or services might better cater to stay-at-home fathers as well as other family forms.

In this section, stay-at-home father families are compared to families with other employment arrangements; specifically, to jobless families, families with a stay-at-home mother and dual-working families. Census data from 2011 are used for these analyses. In particular, we wish to see whether stay-at-home father and stay-at-home mother families are similar, just with gender roles reversed. Further, the comparison to jobless families is relevant, as the key difference between jobless and stay-at-home father families, as defined here, is that mothers in the latter are employed. We have seen that in a number of stay-at-home father families the mother is not working very long hours, such that some of the families classified as stay-at-home fathers may share characteristics in common with the jobless families.

While demographic research such as this appears to be unavailable for Australian families, research from overseas leads us to expect that stay-at-home father families will not necessarily be similar to stay-at-home mother families. For example, Kramer and colleagues (2013) found that, for the US, compared to stay-at-home mother families, in stay-at-home father families the children and parents were somewhat older, there were fewer children, and it was more likely that the mother had higher educational attainment than the father. There were income differences also, with the average incomes in stay-at-home mother households higher than in stay-at-home father households. However, in their further analyses, there were similarities between the stay-at-home mothers and the stay-at-home fathers whose main reason for being at home was to care for children. Comparing these two groups, the ages of parents were similar, as was the average age of youngest child. That is, overall differences between stay-at-home father families and stay-at-home mother families were largely related to the characteristics of the fathers who were away from work for reasons such as being unable to find work (rather than for caregiving reasons).

The characteristics examined here are those typically considered in looking at demographic factors associated with the employment participation of parents. The aim is to consider what might contribute to parents having a stay-at-home father arrangement. We first explore the age of the youngest child and then include family size, father's age and student status, parents' carer and disability status and number of families in household. These characteristics are examined by family employment arrangements in Table 1. Educational attainment is then considered in Table 2, including a relative measure of education that compares the highest educational attainment of the two parents. Multivariate analysis is used to see which factors are most important in predicting which fathers will be stay-at-home fathers versus other arrangements.

We compare the incomes and housing of households and parents in different family employment arrangements. The incomes of parents and households are expected to be closely related to the family employment arrangements. As noted above, Kramer and colleagues (2013) reported that household incomes were lower in stay-at-home father, compared to stay-at-home mother families. We explore this for Australia, also comparing parents' own incomes and housing tenure.

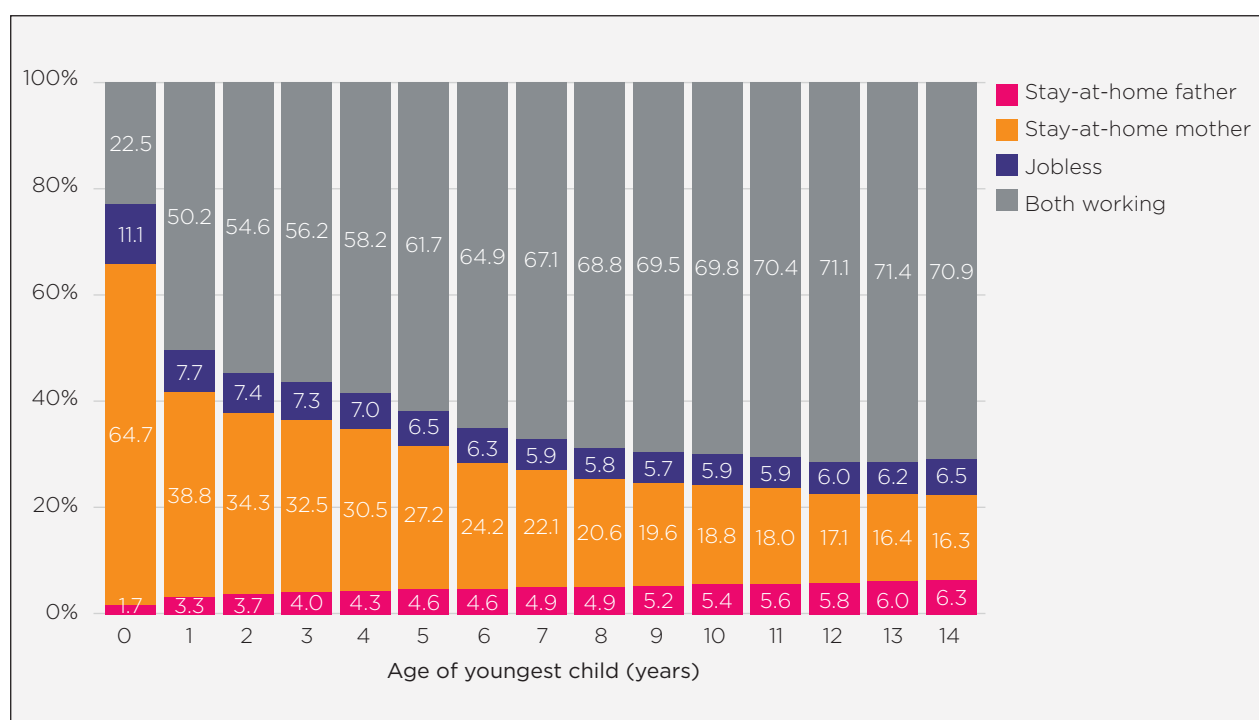
## 4.2 Age of youngest child

For mothers, being a stay-at-home parent is strongly linked to the age of the youngest child in the family, being most likely for newborn children when mothers are likely to take a break from employment, and then declining as children grow and mothers return to work (Baxter, 2013c). We first explore here whether there is any indication that being a stay-at-home father is more or less likely at particular ages of children. Given that the definition used requires that the mother be employed (which is likely to increase with the age of the youngest child), being a stay-at-home father may not have the same relationship with the age of the youngest child as that which applies for mothers.

Figure 5 shows stay-at-home fathers as well as other family employment arrangements in couple families, by the age of the youngest child, as at 2011.

- As a percentage of all families, stay-at-home fatherhood increases with the age of the youngest child. In couple families, stay-at-home fathers accounted for less than 2% of families with a child aged under one year. This increased up to 6% once the youngest child was 13 or 14 years.
- The very low percentage for families with an under-one-year-old child reflects that a large proportion of mothers are out of employment at this time.
- The “jobless” figure includes those away from work as well as those without employment, and so the relatively high proportion of “jobless” with an under-one year old relates to the higher likelihood of parents (particularly mothers) being away from work at this time.

A simple way of summarising the differences in the association between the age of the youngest child and family type is by looking at the average age of the youngest child in each, within all families with a youngest child aged under 15 years. In 2011, the average age of the youngest child was 3.8 years for stay-at-home mother families, 6.9 years for stay-at-home father families, 5.0 years for jobless families and 6.4 years for dual-working families.



Note: Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 due to rounding.

Source: Australian Population Census customised reports, 1991–2011

**Figure 5:** Stay-at-home fathers and other family employment arrangements by age of youngest child, 2011

## 4.3 Demographic characteristics

**Table 1:** Demographic characteristics of stay-at-home father families and couple families with other work arrangements, 2011

Family characteristics	Stay-at-home fathers (%)	Stay-at-home mothers (%)	Dual-working families (%)	Jobless couples (%)	Total (%)
<b>Age of youngest child (years)</b>					
0–2	21.2	53.6	25.6	43.1	<b>33.4</b>
3–5	21.4	19.9	21.1	19.4	<b>20.6</b>
6–14	57.4	26.5	53.4	37.5	<b>44.0</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Number of children aged &lt;15 in family</b>					
1	46.7	35.8	41.7	39.7	<b>39.9</b>
2	38.2	40.3	43.1	34.1	<b>41.4</b>
3 or more	15.1	24.0	15.2	26.2	<b>18.7</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Father's age (years)</b>					
Less than 25	1.4	2.3	0.6	3.7	<b>1.4</b>
25–34	14.1	30.6	17.3	25.1	<b>21.9</b>
35–44	43.4	46.6	49.7	36.9	<b>47.6</b>
45 or more	41.2	20.5	32.4	34.3	<b>29.1</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Mean age of fathers</i>	<i>43.3</i>	<i>38.3</i>	<i>41.2</i>	<i>41.4</i>	<i>40.4</i>
<b>Indicator variables (binary variables with the balance not shown)</b>					
Father is student (%)	9.7	5.0	4.2	11.7	<b>5.2</b>
Father is carer (%)	13.8	10.2	9.3	16.5	<b>10.3</b>
Mother is carer (%)	20.6	15.7	13.5	24.2	<b>15.2</b>
Father has disability (%)	6.5	0.3	0.2	11.4	<b>1.3</b>
Mother has disability (%)	0.4	1.1	1.1	5.5	<b>0.9</b>
Multi-family household (%)	3.5	3.0	2.3	5.9	<b>2.8</b>
<b>Overall sample size</b>	<b>3,377</b>	<b>25,472</b>	<b>46,558</b>	<b>5,688</b>	<b>81,095</b>

**Notes:** All characteristics vary significantly by fathers' work status ( $p < 0.001$ ). Calculations exclude those with "not stated" responses. See **Appendix A**, Table A.4 for more information about these variables and overall numbers in each category, including the "not stated" category. "Not stated" responses were more common in jobless families. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 due to rounding.

**Source:** Australian Population Census five per cent sample file, 2011

Key demographic characteristics of families are shown by family employment arrangements in Table 1. For information about each of the variables, refer to **Appendix A**. Findings include:

- The *age distribution of the youngest child* in stay-at-home father families is similar to that of dual-working families. Stay-at-home father families were the most likely of couple families to have older children. Stay-at-home mother families have a much younger age distribution of children when compared to stay-at-home father families, reflecting the detailed distribution of parental employment arrangements according to the age of the youngest child in Figure 5.

- Stay-at-home father families are more likely to have *only one child* at home than are stay-at-home mother families. Along with dual-working families, they are less likely to have three or more children compared to jobless families and stay-at-home mother families.
- Stay-at-home fathers are *older*, on average, than fathers in families with other employment arrangements. The comparison to fathers in stay-at-home mother families is particularly marked. Overall, the mean age of stay-at-home fathers was 43.3 years, while the mean age of fathers in stay-at-home mother families was 38.3 years. Fathers in dual-working families were, on average, 41.2 years and in jobless families 41.4 years.
- One in 20 fathers were full-time or part-time students, with the proportion being higher in stay-at-home father and jobless families. One in 10 stay-at-home fathers were students.
- The majority of fathers and mothers were not identified as *carers* (10% of fathers and 15% of mothers had provided unpaid assistance to someone because of their disability, illness or old age). However, the proportion of carers was somewhat higher for fathers and mothers in stay-at-home-father families and jobless families.
- The proportion of fathers and mothers reporting to have a *disability* was very low (around 1%) but was higher for stay-at-home fathers and for mothers and fathers in jobless families.

We return to consider which of these factors are most important in explaining the different family employment arrangements, through multivariate analyses, later in this section.

**Table 2:** Parents' educational attainment in stay-at-home father families and couple families with other work arrangements, 2011

Educational attainment	Stay-at-home fathers (%)	Stay-at-home mothers (%)	Dual Working families (%)	Jobless families (%)	Total (%)
<b>Fathers</b>					
Incomplete secondary education	25.3	16.9	15.6	38.5	<b>18.0</b>
Completed Year 12, certificate or diploma	52.9	53.3	56.2	45.0	<b>54.3</b>
Bachelor degree or higher	21.8	28.0	28.3	16.5	<b>27.7</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Mothers</b>					
Incomplete secondary education	20.4	21.4	16.5	39.7	<b>19.8</b>
Completed Year 12, certificate or diploma	46.4	49.9	47.6	43.5	<b>48.0</b>
Bachelor degree or higher	33.2	28.7	35.9	16.8	<b>32.2</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Relative parental education level</b>					
Father has <i>lower</i> education than mother	33.4	21.1	27.6	21.7	<b>25.4</b>
Father has same education as mother	45.2	48.1	47.2	53.6	<b>47.9</b>
Father has <i>higher</i> education than mother	21.4	30.9	25.2	24.7	<b>26.8</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Sample size</b>	<b>3,298</b>	<b>24,957</b>	<b>45,814</b>	<b>5,406</b>	<b>79,475</b>

**Notes:** Educational attainment variables vary significantly by family employment arrangements ( $p < 0.001$ ). Calculations exclude those with "not stated" education. Sample size excludes those with not stated relative educational attainment. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 due to rounding.

**Source:** Australian Population Census 5% sample file, 2011

The educational attainment of parents is shown, by family employment arrangements, in Table 2, with fathers' and mothers' own highest educational attainment shown, and also a relative measure of educational attainment, which classifies families according to whether one parent has a higher level of educational attainment than the other. Key findings are:

- Stay-at-home fathers include a higher proportion with relatively low own *educational attainment* compared to fathers in stay-at-home mother families or dual-working families. However, they have higher educational attainment, on average, compared to fathers in jobless families.
- The educational attainment of mothers was similar in stay-at-home father families and dual-working families. Not surprisingly, mothers' educational attainment was lower in jobless households compared to other families.
- If stay-at-home fathering is an arrangement chosen by parents because mothers have the greater earning capacity, we might expect that mothers would have a relatively high educational attainment, compared to fathers, in stay-at-home father families. In fact, this is the case, with a relatively high percentage of fathers having lower educational attainment than the mother in stay-at-home father families.

## 4.4 Multivariate analyses of demographic characteristics

The demographic characteristics presented in Table 1 and the measures of fathers' education and relative education from Table 2 were used in multivariate analyses to see which factors were most important in explaining the likelihood that a family would be a stay-at-home father family. To do this, multinomial logistic regression was used to see which factors predicted a family would be a stay-at-home father family, rather than one of the other arrangements represented in the family employment status variable. Specifically, the outcome variable has four categories "stay-at-home father", "stay-at-home mother", "dual-working family" and "jobless family".

Findings from the multivariate analyses are presented as marginal effects. A marginal effect is the predicted difference in the outcome associated with a characteristic, with other variables in the model set at the mean of the sample. For example, the *marginal effect* of the father having a disability on being a stay-at-home father family is the predicted difference in the probability of a father with a disability being a stay-at-home father family, all other factors being held constant, compared to those without a disability. Table 3 shows this is quite a large marginal effect relative to others, at 20%. For variables such as the age of the youngest child, where a categorical explanatory variable is used, the marginal effect is relative to one reference category, as indicated in the table. For example, in respect to being a stay-at-home father family, the marginal effect of 2.1% for the age of the youngest child being 6–14 years, means those with a youngest child aged 6–14 years are 2.1% more likely to be stay-at-home fathers than are those with a youngest child aged 0–2 years.

Findings from these analyses highlight the statistical significance of all these variables in explaining family employment arrangements, while also showing the size of the difference in employment patterns according to different characteristics. The overall predicted percentage of families being stay-at-home father families is 3.9%, and so it is not surprising that most of the marginal effects are small—there are no groups in which a very high percentage of families are predicted to be stay-at-home father families.

The variable that is associated with the largest differences in respect to stay-at-home fathers is that of the father having a disability. In these families, it is less likely that the father is employed, as indicated by the overall likelihood of the father being a stay-at-home father being greater (+20%) as well as the overall likelihood of the family being a jobless couple (+49%). These families are less likely to be stay-at-home mother families (-21%) or dual-working families (-48%), compared to those in which the father does not have a disability.

If the mother has a disability, there is a much smaller effect on the probability that the family will be a stay-at-home father family, but it operates in the expected negative direction (-3%), given that these mothers are more likely to be out of employment than other mothers. Strong differences are therefore apparent for the probability that this is a stay-at-home mother family (a higher probability, +27%), a jobless family (+18%), and a dual-working family (a lower probability, -43%).

After taking account of their own and partner's disability status, there was a small increase in the likelihood of fathers being stay-at-home fathers if they were classified as carers (+2%). Mothers' carer status did not significantly predict the likelihood of families being stay-at-home father families.

The age of the youngest child is significantly related to the likelihood that a family will be a stay-at-home father family, although the marginal effects are not large. Compared to a family with a child aged under 3 years, the likelihood that a family is a stay-at-home father family is 2% higher if the youngest child is 3–5 years or 6–14 years old. Far greater differences are apparent for the likelihood of families being stay-at-home mother families (which is lower for mothers of older children) or dual-working families (which is higher for mothers of older children). Clearly these patterns reflect the mother's return to work as children grow older.



**Table 3:** Marginal effects from multivariate analyses of parental employment arrangements, 2011

Variables	Stay-at-home fathers (1)	Stay-at-home mothers (2)	Dual- working families (3)	Jobless families (4)
Overall predicted percentage	3.9%	31.0%	59.7%	5.4%
Age of youngest child (years)				
0-2	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
3-5	+1.8***	-17.7***	+18.1***	-2.2***
6-14	+2.1***	-28.4***	+30.1***	-3.7***
Number of children in family				
1	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
2	-0.8***	+2.6**	-1.7***	-0.1
3 or more	-0.9***	+9.3***	-10.9***	+2.6***
Father's age (years)				
Less than 25	0.5	+13.5**	-18.3***	+4.2***
25-34	-1.7***	+4.9***	-1.6**	-1.6***
35-44	-1.1***	-0.1	4.0***	-2.8***
45 or more	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Father is student (full-time or part-time)	+5.1***	-4.3***	-10.2***	+9.5***
Father is carer (provided unpaid help)	+1.6***	-2.9***	-1.0	+2.2***
Mother is carer (provided unpaid help)	-0.2	+6.6***	-7.0***	+0.6*
Father has disability	+20.0***	-21.1***	-47.9***	+49.0***
Mother has disability	-2.7***	+27.0***	-42.5***	+18.2***
Multi-family household	+1.2*	-0.6	-5.5***	+4.8***
Father's education level				
Incomplete secondary education	+0.9***	+3.9***	-15.4***	+10.6***
Completed Year 12, certificate or diploma	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Bachelor degree or higher	+0.3	-3.0***	+3.2***	-0.4**
Relative parental education level				
Father has <i>lower</i> education than mother	+1.2***	-7.9***	+9.5***	-2.8***
Father has same education as mother	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
Father has <i>higher</i> education than mother	-0.7***	+8.2***	-8.7***	+1.3**

**Notes:** Marginal effects were calculated for each of the categories of family employment status, after a multinomial logit model that predicted the likelihood of being in any one of the categories of family employment status. Marginal effects were calculated at the sample means, although for categorical variables, to calculate the marginal effect of one category (e.g., incomplete secondary education) other categories in the model (e.g., bachelor degree or higher) were set to zero. Models also included not-stated categories for each of the variables. Total  $n = 80,256$ , pseudo-R square = 0.101, \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

**Source:** Australian Population Census 5% sample file, 2011

Findings related to the number of children in family are also greatest in respect to the likelihood of families being stay-at-home mother families (increasing with number of children) or dual-working families (decreasing with number of children). There is a small but significant association with the likelihood of families being stay-at-home father families, with families with more than one child being 1% less likely than those with one child to be a stay-at-home father family.

There are significant associations between the father's age and family employment status. It is the oldest (45 years or more) fathers who are most likely to be stay-at-home fathers, although the marginal effects are not large. Age differences are more apparent if comparing the youngest fathers to the oldest fathers with respect to whether families are stay-at-home mother families (more likely for younger fathers) and dual-working families (more likely for older fathers).

Fathers who were studying (full-time or part-time) were more likely than those not studying to be stay-at-home fathers (+5%), although being a student was also positively associated with parents being jobless (+10%).

The likelihood of a father being a stay-at-home father was only slightly higher if living in a multi-family household (+1%). This variable was more relevant in predicting whether a family would be jobless (more likely in a multi-family household, +5%) or dual working (less likely in a multi-family household, -6%).

Fathers with the lowest educational attainment (incomplete secondary education) were the most likely to be stay-at-home fathers, but this represented a difference of less than 1% when compared to those with bachelor degrees or higher. Low father education was also associated with an increased likelihood that the family would be jobless, and the family would be a stay-at-home mother family. In addition, the within-couple relative measures of education showed that when the father's education was lower than the mother's there was an increase in the likelihood that this would be a stay-at-home father family. The opposite was true if the father had the higher educational attainment. Again, the marginal effects associated with these variables were quite small, as with most variables in these models.

Overall, these findings indicate that the likelihood of a family being a stay-at-home father family varies with some demographic characteristics, but few of the factors explored resulted in dramatic differences in the likelihood that fathers would be stay-at-home fathers.

## 4.5 Variation within stay-at-home father families

Stay-at-home father families comprise fathers who are away from work, are unemployed or not in the labour force, with mothers who are in part-time or full-time employment. The analyses of demographic characteristics presented above combines these potentially diverse groups of stay-at-home fathers, for which there might be different motivations or factors explaining the family's employment situation. Additional analysis was done to explore how the demographic factors varied within stay-at-home father families, according to the fathers' labour force status and mothers' work hours. See **Appendix E**, Table E.2 for the family and parental characteristics and **Appendix E**, Table E.3 for the education variables. While the characteristics of fathers and of families generally varied across the categories of labour force status and work hours, there was also considerable variation within each of these categories.

## 4.6 Financial wellbeing and housing

This section presents analyses of financial wellbeing and housing in stay-at-home father families compared to other families, using the 2011 Census. Building on the analyses of demographic characteristics, it is expected that the stay-at-home father families will be quite diverse, and different to stay-at-home mother families.

From the census, information is available on individuals' incomes and household incomes, all collected in ranges. This is total income, with information not collected on whether that income was derived from employment or other sources. Housing tenure is also analysed. See **Appendix A** for more information about these variables.

The income and housing data are shown in Table 4 by family employment arrangements. To examine the heterogeneous nature of stay-at-home father families, these data are shown for stay-at-home father families, by mothers' work hours and fathers' labour force status in Table 5. Both sets of results are discussed below.

- Not surprisingly, fathers' personal *income* is relatively low in stay-at-home father families, with 40% having a personal income of less than \$200 per week. This is double the proportion with this low income in jobless families. However, a significant proportion (24%) of stay-at-home fathers report incomes of \$1,000 per week or more. When the incomes of stay-at-home fathers are explored by parents' labour force status, the key finding is that it is the stay-at-home fathers who are "away from work" who have these high incomes, indicating that many are probably still receiving an income from work. Stay-at-home fathers who are unemployed or not in the labour force are especially likely to have a very low personal income if mothers are in full-time rather than part-time work.

**Table 4:** Income and housing of stay-at-home father families and couple families with other work arrangements, 2011

Fathers' characteristics	Stay-at-home fathers (%)	Stay-at-home mothers (%)	Dual-working families (%)	Jobless families (%)	Total (%)
<b>Father's income (weekly) <sup>A</sup></b>					
Less than \$200	39.6	1.6	1.7	19.2	<b>4.5</b>
\$200-\$599	23.6	9.7	7.9	48.8	<b>11.9</b>
\$600-\$999	12.6	23.0	22.7	11.4	<b>21.6</b>
\$1,000 or more	24.2	65.7	67.7	20.6	<b>62.0</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Mother's income (weekly)</b>					
Less than \$200	4.2	58.6	6.7	26.9	<b>24.2</b>
\$200-\$599	30.6	27.3	34.6	56.2	<b>33.7</b>
\$600-\$999	30.2	5.9	27.9	9.4	<b>19.8</b>
\$1,000 or more	34.9	8.2	30.8	7.5	<b>22.3</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Household income (per week)</b>					
<\$1,000	31.0	20.2	6.8	59.0	<b>15.6</b>
\$1,000-\$1,999	38.7	45.1	34.8	24.5	<b>37.5</b>
\$2,000-\$2,999	19.6	26.2	32.3	10.9	<b>28.4</b>
\$3,000 or more	10.7	8.5	26.1	5.7	<b>18.5</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Household tenure</b>					
Owned outright	16.6	11.6	13.6	15.4	<b>13.3</b>
Owned with a mortgage	49.8	55.1	68.2	32.7	<b>60.9</b>
Rented	33.6	33.3	18.2	51.9	<b>25.9</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Sample size</b>	<b>3,377</b>	<b>25,472</b>	<b>46,558</b>	<b>5,688</b>	<b>81,095</b>

**Notes:** All characteristics vary significantly by family employment arrangements ( $p < 0.001$ ). Calculations exclude those with "not stated" responses. "Not stated" responses were more common in jobless families. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 due to rounding.

**Source:** Australian Population Census 5% sample file, 2011

- Compared to other family employment arrangements, *spouses/partners* are most likely to have relatively high incomes in stay-at-home father families. In these families, 35% of spouses earn \$1,000 or more per week. Note, though, that this 35% is well short of the 66% of fathers earning \$1,000 or more per week in stay-at-home mother families. That is, we do not expect similarity in overall financial circumstances of stay-at-home mother and stay-at-home father families. Within the stay-at-home father family group, though, the incomes of spouses/partners are higher when mothers work full-time hours and fathers are either unemployed or not in the labour force—in these cases 56% and 59% respectively had incomes of \$1,000 or more a week. These are the families identified in the previous point as being most likely to have fathers with very low incomes.
- There are marked differences in *household income* according to these categories of family employment. Families are most likely to have lower household incomes in jobless families, and least likely to have lower incomes in dual-working families. *Stay-at-home father families are more likely to have low household incomes compared to stay-at-home mother families.* Fewer than one in 10 of the stay-at-home mother and stay-at-home father families have household incomes in the top range identified here (\$3,000 or more per week), with dual-working families being much more likely to have these incomes than other families. The lowest household incomes within the stay-at-home father families were when the mother worked part-time and the father was unemployed or not in the labour force. Around 50% of them had a household income lower than \$1,000 per week, similar to the distribution for jobless households. In contrast, when fathers were away from work, household incomes were comparable with those of dual-working families.

- Looking at *housing tenure*, a minority of families own their homes outright (13%), but interestingly this is slightly higher in families of stay-at-home fathers (15%) and in jobless families (17%). As with household income, the housing tenure of stay-at-home fathers who are away from work looks very much like that of dual-working families. Outright home ownership is especially likely if the mother works part-time and the father is not in the labour force. We return to this below.

**Table 5:** Income in stay-at-home father families by fathers' labour force status and mothers' work hours, 2011

Household and parents' weekly incomes	Mother full-time work			Mother part-time work			Total
	Father away from work	Father unemployed	Father not in the labour force	Father away from work	Father unemployed	Father not in the labour force	
<b>Father's income</b>							
<\$200	4.9	51.2	65.4	1.6	37.6	38.0	<b>39.6</b>
\$200-\$599	8.7	18.3	19.7	8.7	30.4	40.2	<b>23.6</b>
\$600-999	23.4	12.1	7.5	22.4	9.8	11.0	<b>12.6</b>
\$1,000 or more	62.9	18.3	7.3	67.3	22.2	10.8	<b>24.2</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Mother's income</b>							
<\$200	2.8	1.5	1.2	7.4	9.1	5.6	<b>4.2</b>
\$200-\$599	10.1	8.9	9.1	50.7	52.4	51.5	<b>30.6</b>
\$600-999	35.7	33.6	31.2	25.4	27.0	29.7	<b>30.2</b>
\$1,000 or more	51.4	56.0	58.5	16.5	11.6	13.2	<b>34.9</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Household income</b>							
<\$1000	5.8	20.9	24.6	8.4	49.7	55.2	<b>31.0</b>
\$1,000-\$1,999	27.2	46.8	48.8	38.0	29.7	31.9	<b>38.7</b>
\$2,000-\$2,999	35.1	19.9	21.7	32.4	11.2	8.6	<b>19.6</b>
\$3,000 or more	31.9	12.4	4.9	21.2	9.4	4.3	<b>10.7</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Household tenure</b>							
Owned outright	10.0	10.2	15.8	14.8	14.8	24.2	<b>16.5</b>
Owned with mortgage	67.0	47.5	47.7	65.1	47.0	39.5	<b>49.5</b>
Rented	22.3	41.4	35.3	19.9	38.0	36.0	<b>33.3</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Sample size</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>966</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>856</b>	<b>3,377</b>
<b>% overall</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>28.6</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes: Excludes those with not stated income. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 due to rounding.

Source: Australian Population Census 5% sample file, 2011

## 4.7 Summary

These analyses revealed a number of findings about the characteristics of stay-at-home father families compared to other families, and also revealed that there are differences within stay-at-home father families when examined according to the fathers' labour force status and mothers' work hours.

The characteristics of stay-at-home father families are different to those for stay-at-home mother families, as seen when describing the characteristics of these families (see Table 1). Most notably, parents and children are older in stay-at-home father families. This indicates that stay-at-home fathering, as measured with these census data, may not be a substitute for stay-at-home mothering. While stay-at-home mothering is most likely when children are young, declining as mothers return to work when children grow, stay-at-home fathering increases as children grow. For example, more than half of the stay-at-home father families have a youngest child aged 6–14 years, while more than half of the stay-at-home mother families have a youngest child aged under 3 years.

Other demographic differences were apparent if comparing stay-at-home father families to stay-at-home mother families, with fathers in the former being older, having somewhat lower educational attainment and also, within the family, being more likely to have an educational attainment lower than the mother. These factors as well as variables capturing fathers having a disability, being a carer or a student explained variation in which fathers were stay-at-home fathers.

It was relevant to compare stay-at-home fathers to jobless families, with some similarities between these families, especially when examining the stay-at-home father families in which the mother worked part-time hours. There were also some similarities between the stay-at-home father families and the dual-working families, especially the stay-at-home father families in which fathers were employed but away from work.

The comparison of finances of different family employment arrangements revealed some expected differences, with fathers' incomes generally lower when fathers are not employed (stay-at-home fathers or jobless families) and mothers' incomes generally lower when mothers are not employed (stay-at-home mothers and jobless families). Stay-at-home fathers who are away from work have incomes similar to those of fathers in dual-working families. The household income in stay-at-home father families is greater than jobless families, but less than stay-at-home mother families. This relates to there being a number of stay-at-home father families in which mothers' income is not very high, which relates to the fact that mothers are working part-time hours in about half of the stay-at-home father families.

An interesting difference in looking at housing by family employment arrangements was that outright home ownership is actually most likely in stay-at-home father families and jobless families. This may actually reflect the older ages of parents in these households and, for jobless families, may in part reflect the greater proportion of them living in multi-family households (so someone else may own the home). Among the stay-at-home father families, the highest rates of home ownership were apparent when fathers were not in the labour force and mothers worked part-time hours. The household income in these families was relatively low. It may be that outright home ownership has allowed fathers to leave employment without needing the full-time income of the mother.

Overall, these data confirm that stay-at-home father families are generally not the same as stay-at-home mother families, with roles reversed. There is considerable heterogeneity among the stay-at-home father families, but the different characteristics suggest different motivations and pathways to stay-at-home fathering compared to stay-at-home mothering.

## 5 Discussion and final remarks

This report focused on stay-at-home fathers as those who are not in paid work and who have an employed spouse or partner. Using the census data as well as other data sources, a very small percentage of fathers was identified as being a stay-at-home father—around 4–5% of fathers in two-parent families. Low estimates have also been calculated for other countries, including the US (Kramer & Kramer, 2016) and Canada (Marshall, 1998).

### 5.1 Who are the stay-at-home fathers?

The definition of stay-at-home fathers used here included fathers who are unemployed, not in the labour force or working zero hours (but employed), who had a spouse or partner in full-time or part-time work. This is clearly a diverse group and, as argued throughout the report, includes those who have elected to remain home to care for children as well as others who are not in work for other reasons. Some not-employed fathers (with an employed partner) may not identify themselves as stay-at-home fathers. For example, unemployed fathers may see themselves involuntarily out of work, and those who are at home because of an illness or disability may relate to those factors when defining their role and reasons for being out of employment. Nevertheless, they were all included as stay-at-home fathers, as we do not have specific information on whether fathers consider themselves to be stay-at-home fathers. Also, fathers can come to the stay-at-home father role through varied pathways, including job loss, so fathers may identify with the stay-at-home father role even if their primary or initial reason for being out of work was not to take on this role (Chesley, 2011).

An aspect of diversity among those identified as stay-at-home fathers was that of mothers' work hours. Of the 4.6% of two-parent families classified as stay-at-home father families, half the mothers worked part-time hours. The analysis here revealed that some of the stay-at-home father families with part-time working mothers might better be seen to be near jobless families, with some having characteristics similar to jobless families and those on low household incomes. Supplementary analysis presented here suggested that a number of families like these were quite likely reliant on government support rather than a mother breadwinner. Such families therefore do not typify parents swapping roles, as is envisaged when thinking about stay-at-home father families.

As fathers' non-employment may be related to factors other than wishing to take on the caring responsibilities, it is not surprising that these analyses also showed that when fathers had relatively low education levels, had a disability or long-term illness, or were carers or students, they were more likely to be stay-at-home fathers, rather than in dual-working or stay-at-home mother families. These characteristics were also related to families being likely to be jobless, and are factors generally associated with lack of employment. Further, the analysis of trends showed that unemployed stay-at-home father numbers were higher in times of higher unemployment, suggesting that the external economic environment may also be relevant in exploring trends in stay-at-home father numbers. This is consistent with research in the US by Casper and O'Connell (1998) and Kramer and Kramer (2016) who found that fathers' involvement in child care does vary according to the macro-economic environment.

A particular focus of this research was on exploring whether stay-at-home father families are similar to stay-at-home mother families, just with gender roles reversed. This analysis has shown this is not the case, which is what we expected given other US research by Kramer and colleagues (2013) that similarly explored this question. Stay-at-home mother families are most likely when children are youngest, reflecting that mothers take time out of work when a baby is born, and then return to work as children grow. Fathers' employment generally is not responsive to the birth of a child—in most families fathers are the sole or main breadwinner while children are young. While there were some stay-at-home father families when children were very young, they increased in number as children grew older.

The analyses throughout this report focused on families with children aged under 15 years. Given the increased proportion of stay-at-home fathers as children grow older, we might also expect to find that higher proportions again are stay-at-home fathers in families with older children. However, these families were out of scope for this research. As children grow older, fathers themselves are likely moving into ages of early retirement, so disentangling reasons for non-employment, and whether child care is part of that, would be useful in assessing whether the stay-at-home father role is pertinent in families with older children.

The detailed analyses of stay at home fathers presented here used the 2011 census data. Given that there was an increase in the number of stay at home fathers between 2011 and 2016, when the more detailed 2016 data are available, it will be interesting to explore whether changing parental or family characteristics help explain the higher number for 2016.

It is worth noting that the strict definition used here, based on fathers working no hours at all, does not capture fathers who consider themselves to be stay-at-home fathers, who are working a small number of hours per week, or who work flexibly to fit around their children's care needs. Research by Latshaw (2011), in the US, found that some of those who consider themselves to be stay-at-home fathers do have some engagement in work. For example, some fathers may see themselves as stay-at-home fathers who perhaps are working reduced hours, or working shifts that are compatible with caregiving. Including these fathers in the estimates would clearly increase the numbers, but identifying these stay-at-home fathers is not possible with the data source used here without broadening the scope to include, for example, all fathers working part-time hours.

Given that Latshaw's research showed that many self-identified stay-at-home fathers had some engagement in work, she asked whether the label "stay-at-home parent" has become antiquated "in a society where mothers and fathers pursue and balance multiple identities and responsibilities daily" (p.144). She suggested "primary caregiver" may be a more relevant term, although for Australia this also would pose measurement challenges, without a source of such information in national collections, and may lack clarity in situations where parents feel they share the caring role.

## 5.2 Why hasn't there been a large increase in stay-at-home father numbers?

While there is a general perception that more and more fathers are taking on the role of stay-at-home fathers in Australia, and with increases apparent elsewhere (Kramer et al., 2013), there is only weak evidence of such a change for Australia. While the number increased between 2011 and 2016, there had been little increase since the 1980s. Inasmuch as there is some upward movement in the numbers using these census data and the ABS labour force data, there is no indication of significant numbers of families taking up this arrangement.

The perception that the stay-at-home father numbers should be increasing is linked to two main factors. One is that mothers are more often employed, and more likely to be in well-paying jobs, opening up the potential for them to take over the breadwinner role. Theories centred on economic explanations for couples' employment decision-making (e.g., Becker, 1981) predict that couples will make decisions about employment based on the relative human capital of each spouse, in order to maximise household income. The US research by Kramer and colleagues (2013) indicated that this has some relevance, with there being a higher likelihood that a family would be a stay-at-home father family, rather than having another employment arrangement, when the wife had a higher educational attainment than the husband. The research presented here also provided support of this for Australia. Much of the existing research on stay-at-home fathers indicates that economic factors contribute to the decisions leading to this arrangement, including the father's job loss, but also calculations of who is the higher earner (Doucet & Merla, 2007; Merla, 2008; Rochlen, McKelley, & Whittaker, 2010).

The other factor that contributes to an expectation of increases in stay-at-home fathering is that there has also been some, albeit slow and incomplete, change toward more egalitarian gender role attitudes (England & Folbre, 2002; van Egmond et al., 2010), and a greater appreciation of the role that fathers can play as involved fathers (Pleck, 1997). As well as being relevant to the potential increase in stay-at-home fathers, these changes are considered relevant in respect to the potential for more gender equal behaviours among parents (Craig & Mullan, 2011). There is certainly evidence from the stay-at-home father research that some fathers take up this role because they have a strong motivation to be involved parents, and are prepared to act against prevailing stereotypes to do this (Fischer & Anderson, 2012; Kramer et al., 2013; Merla, 2008; Solomon, 2014). This research also finds that parents who take up this arrangement have, on average, less traditional gender role attitudes (Fischer & Anderson, 2012; Kramer & Kramer, 2016), although it is not always clear whether those attitudes led to the take-up of the stay-at-home father arrangements or evolved upon experiencing those arrangements.



While these reasons could explain an increase in stay-at-home fathering, there are countervailing factors that work against the potential upward trend in stay-at-home father numbers. Broadly, and discussed below, the main factors relate to financial ones and to sustained gendered parenting and work roles. Gender role attitudes of individuals and, more broadly, cultural norms and values, are also considered to be central to the explanation for the slow change in patterns of time spent on paid and unpaid work, including child care (Bianchi et al., 2000; Craig & Mullan, 2011). The extent to which institutional contexts, including employment policies and other policies and services, support fathers to take up stay-at-home fathering may also make a difference, just as this is also relevant in thinking about whether the infrastructure and supports are in place to encourage fathers to more equally share the care of children with mothers (Craig & Mullan, 2011; Hook, 2006).

In relation to financial factors, families today are often reliant on two incomes to meet the standard of living to which they aspire, with housing affordability a key issue. Mothers often cite financial reasons as being important in contributing to their reasons for returning to work (Baxter, 2008; Hand, 2006), and the decline in stay-at-home mother families over the last 20 or 30 years may be partly explained by this heightened need for two incomes.<sup>7</sup> The analysis of census data here showed that household income is significantly lower when one or both parents are not employed. A stay-at-home parent arrangement, whether that is the father or the mother, may be impossible for all families to sustain over a long period of time. Families may prepare, or adjust in some way, for the likelihood of reduced family income due to having a stay-at-home parent while children are young and there is an expectation and desire, among many parents to have children cared for by family. Beyond the early years, it is less likely that children will have a parent at home. In the analysis of census data presented here, at 2011, both parents were employed in about seven out of 10 families with a youngest child aged 9 years and over.

The financial aspect is revealed here in respect to the higher likelihood of stay-at-home father families being outright home owners. These families are likely to have lower housing costs and may be more financially secure. The demographic analysis also showed that stay-at-home father families are more likely when children and fathers are older, compared to stay-at-home mother families. As home ownership tends to increase with age (Baxter & Taylor, 2014), the higher home ownership rates for stay-at-home father families may reflect the older age of these fathers. It may actually be that when housing costs are lower and when families are more financially stable that there is the potential for parents to renegotiate their work and family commitments, and are able to manage without the father's income. This could be a driving factor in explaining why stay-at-home fathering more often occurs when fathers and children are older.

Financial factors come into parental employment decision-making if parents are having to pay for children's non-parental care. If child care costs are especially high, parents may calculate that they are better off financially for one parent to be at home. It is not only financial factors that may lead parents to arrange their employment so that one parent is at home. Some parents have strong beliefs that children should be primarily cared for by parents or other family members, and may organise their work so that one parent is always able to provide that care, even if this comes at a financial cost (Rochlen et al., 2010; Solomon, 2014). Typically, the stay-at-home parent is the mother, and research about child care costs and parental employment is generally framed in regard to the potential impact of child care costs on mothers' employment (e.g., Han & Waldfogel, 2001).

As discussed in relation to economic factors, above, some parents may determine that to maximise family income it is more advantageous for the father to be at home. There was some support for this here with stay-at-home father families including more mothers with educational attainment higher than the fathers, compared to other families. Such families might include those who have intentionally reversed roles to maximise family income as well as those in which fathers have experienced job loss. It is relevant to note that while the educational attainment and earning potential of women today is much more equal, relative to men, than it was decades ago, a gender wage gap remains. This means that if families are making employment decisions based largely on financial factors, with a view to having one parent at home, then it is likely for many that they will be financially better off if the father rather than the mother is employed. As noted by Hewitt, Baxter, Givans, Murphy, Myers, & Meiklejohn (2011), "Men's economic advantage restricts their opportunities for part-time employment or their ability to be stay-at-home dads" (p. 81).

The prevailing parenting norms involve the stay-at-home parent being the mother rather than the father, and the gendered nature of these parenting norms is quite likely slowing potential increases in stay-at-home fathering, just as it is instrumental in explaining the slow change in regard to the division of paid and unpaid work between mothers and fathers (e.g., Sayer, 2005). This was highlighted in Australian research on families who share the domestic work by Hewitt and colleagues (2011). In exploring how parents made decisions about the sharing of

<sup>7</sup> There are several factors contributing to the rise in maternal employment (and therefore the decline in stay-at-home mother families) (Baxter, 2005; 2013a; Gray, Qu, Renda & de Vaus, 2006).

domestic and parenting tasks they found that those decisions were partly related to financial considerations but also that “gender still outweighs economic factors” (p. 80). Kramer and Kramer (2016) similarly noted that “in many cases, the accepted norms regarding gender roles and ideology inherent within our current social fabric still frequently trump human capital-based decisions” (p.1319).

While parents today often express agreement that children do just as well if fathers, rather than mothers, are children’s primary carers (Baxter, 2017), this does not necessarily mean that they themselves would instigate those arrangements. Parents may still hold fast to their own preferences for how they would like to manage the care of their children and, for many, they may still see the ideal as mothers caring and fathers breadwinning. This is likely to be especially true while children are young, and there are still strong gender norms of the mother as primary caregiver. Importantly, a reversal of parental roles such that mothers are to take on the breadwinner role also challenges mothers’ preferences about work and care.

Even if mothers believe that children would do just as well if primarily cared for by the father, they may still be heavily influenced by the “intensive mothering” ideal (Hays, 1996), and therefore still have a strong preference to fulfil the carer role over the breadwinner role. They may “gate-keep” the child care responsibilities (Allen & Hawkins, 1999), minimising opportunities for fathers to take on a significant role, such as in the case of stay-at-home fathering. Further, those mothers who do return to full-time work while they have young children may face criticism and feelings of guilt, which may dissuade some from contemplating a stay-at-home father arrangement. Such factors may be less of an issue for older children, which may contribute to the findings here that stay-at-home fathers are more likely as children grow older.

The norms held by fathers as family breadwinners, and the value they place on their career and worker identity, can also be so strongly held that a withdrawal from employment is not seen as a realistic option, including among fathers who highly value and enjoy their role as fathers. Qualitative research highlights that there can be challenges for stay-at-home fathers. They may face others’ disapproval of their not being the family breadwinner or suggestions that they are less capable at child care than the child’s mother (Doucet, 2004; Merla, 2008; Shirani et al., 2012).

### 5.3 Valuing and supporting stay-at-home fathers and other variations of caregiving fathers

The extent to which society and institutions support stay-at-home fathers is expected to contribute to the options that fathers and mothers consider when making their work and care arrangements. As discussed above, the prevailing social norms in regard to parenting are important. A related challenge for stay-at-home fathers is that they do not always feel welcomed into the parenting community, with some services not well equipped for fathers, and some mothers reluctant to accept fathers into formal or informal parenting groups, or fathers reluctant to join them (Merla, 2008; Rochlen et al., 2008). Experiences of stay-at-home fathers are not all like this, of course. There is qualitative research that reveals positive experiences of taking up this role and perceptions of support by others (e.g., Solomon, 2014). For the participants in Solomon’s study, the positive experiences outweighed the negative ones. Perhaps as there is more widespread support for more equal sharing of roles in the home, more fathers will seek out opportunities to spend time in this stay-at-home father role.

In thinking about how to support stay-at-home fathers, employment and social policies can help, by providing opportunities for fathers to take time out of employment, or to make use of flexible work arrangements. Even if such policies do not result in fathers taking an extensive period of time out of employment, or if they result in fathers reducing hours rather than leaving work altogether, they send the signal that it is acceptable for fathers to modify their work arrangements to take a shared role in caregiving. This is likely to build support for those who do choose stay-at-home fatherhood and may encourage the uptake of flexible work options by other fathers.

It is relevant for Australia to monitor trends in the use of flexible work options, to determine whether it is through these approaches that fathers are taking on more of the care responsibilities, rather than withdrawing completely from work. Overall, there has been an increase in the percentage of employed fathers reported using work arrangements (predominantly flexible work arrangements) to help care for children, up from 26% in 1996 to 42% in 2014, although this remains significantly lower than the percentage for mothers (at 72% in 2014).<sup>8</sup> This is relevant, especially in considering this as an alternative to stay-at-home fathering. Schwiter and Baumgarten (2017) discuss increases in the uptake of part-time work by fathers in Switzerland, Austria and Germany, and note that this option allows fathers to still have their identity as breadwinner, yet draws them into the everyday routines of children. While they acknowledge that this requires more research, they suggest this is where there

<sup>8</sup> See ABS (2015) *Childhood Education and Care, Australia, June 2014* (44020DO005\_201406).

is “a great potential for a subtle revolution regarding the gendering of care” (p. 85), without the significant challenge to gender stereotypes and loss of identity as breadwinner and worker that a full withdrawal from employment entails.

Overall, we might expect financial pressures on families will mean that we will continue to see increases in the dual-working family in Australia, with the “stay-at-home parent” arrangement taken up only at specific times, when the parenting demands are greatest, or perhaps at a stage in life when financial constraints are less pressing. For the stay-at-home parent to be the father in growing numbers significant shifts in attitudes and ideals toward parenting and toward work will be required. While such a change is not impossible, it is likely to be a slow-moving change. It does seem more likely that changes at the margins, that involve fathers becoming more involved in the caregiving through the greater use of flexible work options, may be where changes are most likely to occur in the near future.

This research has provided some new insights on stay-at-home father families, but without the use of qualitative data, there are a number of unanswered questions about the ways in which stay-at-home father families work. The focus on census data here allowed quite detailed analysis of stay-at-home father families, relative to others, but it did mean there was little flexibility in definitions, with no information on parents’ self-reports of how their work and care arrangements came about, and no information on whether not-employed fathers considered themselves to be “stay-at-home” fathers.

Most of the stay-at-home fathering research is qualitative, given the small numbers in the population, and so this report contributes to the small body of research that takes a quantitative approach. Nevertheless, ideally, this research would be followed up with some more in-depth research to explore to what extent economic factors and gendered parenting roles contribute to decisions to have a stay-at-home fathering arrangement in Australia.

In conclusion, while the number of stay-at-home fathers in Australia is relatively small and, as measured here, is a very diverse group, it is important that the contribution of stay-at-home fathers is acknowledged and supported. Understanding more about those fathers, about their pathways and experiences of stay-at-home fathering, is more than just informative for better supporting those families. Research on stay-at-home fathers can also shed more light on the ways in which parents might be supported to find ways of sharing the work and care, and this is important given the need today for mothers as well as fathers to stay connected to employment, even across the years that child care demands are greatest.

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# Appendix A: Census analysis

This report draws on microdata from the Australian Population Census of Housing, with data provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Table A.1 outlines the data sources used. There have been changes across census years in how labour force questions have been asked and then used in the derivation of labour force variables. Some of these changes are outlined in Table A.2.

The questions for 2016 were the same as those used in 2011, except that the first question about having a job asked “Last week, did the person have a job of any kind”, with a note “A ‘job’ means any type of work including casual, temporary, part-time or full-time work, if it was for one hour or more”. There was a similar note for this question in previous years.

A list of the variables used in the analysis of 2011 census data is then presented in Table A.3. The distribution of each within the 2011 5% sample file, for the analyses of family employment arrangements, is presented in Table A.4. This excludes those with missing labour force status for either of the parents in a couple family.

**Table A.1:** Source of census data

Year	Source	More detail and comments
2011	Expanded confidentialised unit record file, accessed through the remote access data laboratory (RADL).	Contains a 5% sample. Data from person, family and household levels were used. Records of spouse/partners were combined to derive information on family employment status. Families were included if there were children aged under 15 years living at home, there were two opposite-sex parents and labour force information was available for both.
1991–2016 (aggregates only)	Customised data files	Customised data files were provided to AIFS for analyses of parents’ labour force trends. The files contained population counts for the cross-tabulation of: year, age of youngest child, mothers’ labour force status and work hours, fathers’ labour force status and work hours.
1981 and 1986	Confidentialised unit record files	Family employment status variables were created by combining records of husband/wife (or partners) and family information.

**Table A.2:** Selected census labour force questions, 1981–2011

1981	1986, 1991	1996, 2001, 2006, 2011
<b>Did the person do any work at all LAST WEEK?</b>		
1. Yes, worked for wages, salary, payment or profit.		
2. Yes, but did unpaid work only.		
3. No, did not work.		

*Table continued over page*



1981	1986, 1991	1996, 2001, 2006, 2011
<p>If not equal to 1 in above:  <b>LAST WEEK, did the person have a full-time or part-time job of any kind, business, profession or farm?</b> (even if on holidays, sick, on strike, temporarily stood down, etc.)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes, had a paid job, a business, a profession or a farm last week.</li> <li>2. Yes, helped without pay in a family business.</li> <li>3. No, did not have any job, business, profession or farm last week.</li> </ol>	<p><b>LAST WEEK, did the person have a full-time or part-time job of any kind?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes, worked for pay or profit.</li> <li>2. Yes, but absent on holidays, on sick leave, on strike or temporarily stood down.</li> <li>3. Yes, unpaid work in a family business.</li> <li>4. Yes, other unpaid work.</li> <li>5. No, did not have a job.</li> </ol>	<p><b>LAST WEEK, did the person have a full-time or part-time job of any kind?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes, worked for payment or profit.</li> <li>2. Yes, but absent on holidays, on paid leave, on strike or temporarily stood down.</li> <li>3. Yes, unpaid work in a family business.</li> <li>4. Yes, other unpaid work.</li> <li>5. No, did not have a job.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Did the person actively look for work LAST WEEK?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No, did not look for work.</li> <li>2. Yes, looked for work.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Did the person actively look for work at any time during the LAST 4 WEEKS?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No, did not look for work.</li> <li>2. Yes, looked for full-time work.</li> <li>3. Yes, looked for part-time work.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Did the person actively look for work at any time during the LAST 4 WEEKS?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No, did not look for work.</li> <li>2. Yes, looked for full-time work.</li> <li>3. Yes, looked for part-time work.</li> </ol>
		<p><b>If the person had found a job, could the person have started work LAST WEEK?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes, could have started work last week.</li> <li>2. No, already had job to go to.</li> <li>3. No, temporarily ill or injured.</li> <li>4. No, other reason.</li> </ol>

#### Main differences

	Changes to questions to adhere to International Labour Organization (ILO) guidelines. Question about active job search changed to refer to 4 weeks.	Introduction of availability question to align the data more closely to monthly labour force estimates.
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**Note:** This table does not cover all changes that affected labour force status, in particular, those relating to question order and issues relating to the use of the “not stated” category. Much of this analysis of changes in labour force status was undertaken by the author while completing doctoral studies 2001–04 at the Australian National University. It was subsequently updated to include 2006, 2011 and 2016.

**Source:** ABS, 1981; 1986; 1994; 1999; 2003

**Table A.3:** Census variables, 2011 census

Variable	Categories	More detail and comments
Age of youngest child	0–2 3–5 6–14	Derived from child records. Includes all children in the family.
Number of children aged under 15 years	1 2 3 or more	As above. Counts only children up to 14 years old. Older children and dependent students are not included.
Father's age	Less than 25 35–44 45 or more Missing	
Father is student	Student Not student Missing	Includes fathers who are full-time students or part-time students.
Father is carer	Carer Not carer Missing	People who in the two weeks prior to census night spent time providing unpaid care, help or assistance to family members or others because of a disability, a long-term illness or problems related to old age. This includes people who are in receipt of a Carer Allowance or Carer Payment. It does not include work done through a voluntary organisation or group.

Table continued over page



Variable	Categories	More detail and comments
Father has a disability or health care need	Disability/health care need No Disability/health care need Missing	In the census this is defined as those people needing help or assistance in one or more of the three core activity areas of self-care, mobility and communication because of a disability, long-term health condition (lasting six months or more) or old age.
Multi-family household	Single family household Multi-family household	
Father's (mother's) educational attainment	Incomplete secondary education Completed Year 12, certificate or diploma Bachelor degree or higher Missing	Derived from highest year of school completed and non-school qualification: level of education
Relative educational attainment	Father has <i>higher</i> education than mother. Father has same education as mother. Father has <i>lower</i> education than mother. Missing	Comparisons based on the derived educational attainment variable
Father's (mother's) weekly income	< \$200 \$200-\$599 \$600-\$999 \$1,000 OR MORE Missing	This is derived from a more detailed classification. Total weekly income
Household weekly income	< \$1,000 \$1,000-\$1,999 \$2,000-\$2,999 \$3,000 OR MORE Missing	This is derived from a more detailed classification. Household income is derived by the ABS, by summing the personal incomes of household members.
Housing tenure	Owned outright Owned with a mortgage Rented Not stated	Few have "other" tenure so they have been combined with rented.

**Table A.4:** Distribution of 2011 census variables

Variable	%	<i>n</i> (total = 81,095)
<b>Family employment status</b>		
Stay-at-home fathers	4.2	3,377
Stay-at-home mothers	31.4	25,472
Dual working families	57.4	46,558
Jobless families	7.0	5,688
<b>Age of youngest child (years)</b>		
0-2	35.4	28,722
3-5	20.6	16,701
6-14	44.0	35,672
<b>Number of children in family</b>		
1	39.9	32,353
2	41.4	33,552
3 or more	18.7	15,190
<b>Father's age (years)</b>		
Less than 25	1.4	1,118

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Variable	%	n (total = 81,095)
25-34	21.9	17,762
35-44	47.6	38,583
45 or more	29.1	23,632
<b>Father is student (full-time or part-time)</b>		
Student	5.2	4,186
Not student	93.8	76,070
Missing	1.0	839
<b>Father is carer (provided unpaid help)</b>		
Carer	10.1	8,195
Not carer	88.3	71,597
Missing	1.6	1,303
<b>Mother is carer (provided unpaid help)</b>		
Carer	15.0	12,144
Not carer	83.3	67,568
Missing	1.7	1,383
<b>Father has disability</b>		
Has need for assistance	1.3	1,018
Does not have need for assistance	97.7	79,248
Missing	1.0	829
<b>Mother has disability</b>		
Has need for assistance	0.9	731
Does not have need for assistance	98.1	79,563
Missing	1.0	801
<b>Multi-family household</b>		
One family household	97.2	78,796
Two or more family household	2.8	2,299
<b>Father's education level</b>		
Incomplete secondary education	17.7	14,343
Completed Year 12, certificate or diploma	53.4	43,310
Bachelor degree or higher	27.2	22,064
Missing	1.7	1,378
<b>Relative parental education level</b>		
Father has lower education than mother	24.9	20,163
Father has same education as mother	46.9	38,034
Father has higher education than mother	26.2	21,278
Missing	2.0	1,620
<b>Tenure type</b>		
Owned outright	13.2	10,671
Owned with a mortgage	60.4	49,015

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Variable	%	n (total = 81,095)
Rent	25.4	20,580
Other	0.3	279
Missing	0.7	550
<b>Father's income</b>		
< \$200	4.4	3,561
\$200-\$599	11.7	9,510
\$600-\$999	21.2	17,200
\$1,000 or more	61.0	49,465
Missing	1.7	1,359
<b>Mother's income</b>		
< \$200	23.8	19,299
\$200-\$599	33.1	26,812
\$600-\$999	19.5	15,793
\$1,000 or more	21.9	17,765
Missing	1.8	1,426
<b>Household income</b>		
< \$1000	14.7	11,940
\$1,000-\$1,999	35.5	28,772
\$2,000-\$2,999	26.8	21,768
\$3,000 or more	17.5	14,196
Missing	5.5	4,419
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>81,095</b>

**Note:** Only families for whom family employment status could be derived are included.

**Source:** Australian Population Census 5% sample file, 2011. ABS Labour force survey

The percentage and number of stay-at-home fathers can be calculated from the ABS Labour force survey ("Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Families", June each year, 6224.0). Here, data are compiled from publications from 1981 to 2016 (Figure A.1). For this analysis, stay-at-home fathers are unemployed or not in the labour force fathers with a spouse or partner who is employed. This is based on two-parent families with children aged under 15 years. Data were sourced as follows:

- 1981 through to 2004 from printed publications (6224.0);<sup>9</sup>
- 2005-11 from Supercross tables (ST FA5\_aug04 and FA5\_jun94);<sup>10</sup>
- 2012-16 from downloaded Excel file.<sup>11</sup>

From this source, the number of stay-at-home father families was about 19,800 in 1981 (1% of two parent families), with a slight upward trend through the 1980s, and then with higher numbers in the 1990s and beyond. The trend overall for this period from 1981 to 2016 clearly reflects an increase in stay-at-home father families, the growth has not been rapid since the 1990s, with quite some variation between survey periods. This is similar to the trend observed using the census data. Given these are small estimates, some of this variation will be due to sampling error.

At June 2016, the estimated number of stay-at-home fathers using these data was 75,000.

<sup>9</sup> Actual table number varied across years—Tables 12, 13 and 14.

<sup>10</sup> Retrieved from <[www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6224.0.55.001December%202008?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6224.0.55.001December%202008?OpenDocument)> and <[www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6224.0.55.001Jun%202011?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6224.0.55.001Jun%202011?OpenDocument)>.

<sup>11</sup> Retrieved from <[www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6224.0.55.001June%202016?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6224.0.55.001June%202016?OpenDocument)>, Table 9.

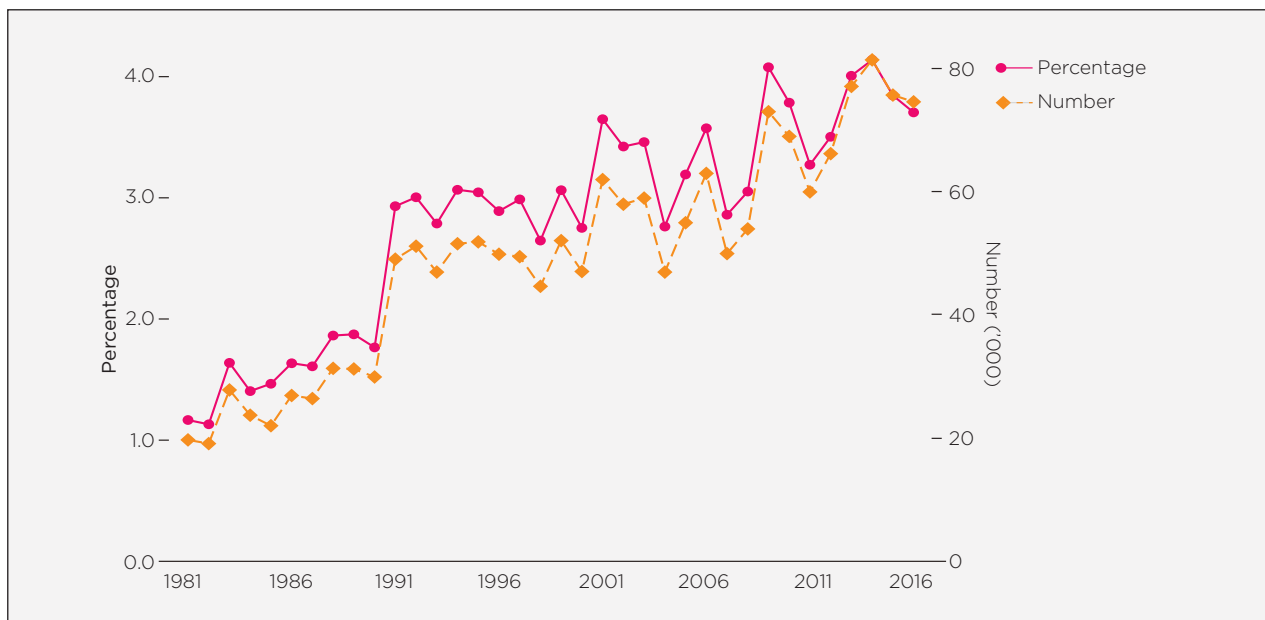
# Appendix B: ABS Labour force survey

The percentage and number of stay-at-home fathers can be calculated from the ABS Labour force survey (“Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Families”, June each year, 6224.0). Here, data are compiled from publications from 1981 to 2016 (Figure B.1). For this analysis, stay-at-home fathers are unemployed or not in the labour force fathers with a spouse or partner who is employed. This is based on two-parent families with children aged under 15 years. Data were sourced as follows:

- 1981 through to 2004 from printed publications (6224.0);<sup>12</sup>
- 2005-11 from Supercross tables (ST FA5\_aug04 and FA5\_jun94);<sup>13</sup>
- 2012-16 from downloaded Excel file.<sup>14</sup>

From this source, the number of stay-at-home father families was about 19,800 in 1981 (1% of two parent families), with a slight upward trend through the 1980s, and then with higher numbers in the 1990s and beyond. The trend overall for this period from 1981 to 2016 clearly reflects an increase in stay-at-home father families, the growth has not been rapid since the 1990s, with quite some variation between survey periods. This is similar to the trend observed using the census data. Given these are small estimates, some of this variation will be due to sampling error.

At June 2016, the estimated number of stay-at-home fathers using these data was 75,000.



**Note:** “Stay-at-home” fathers are fathers who are not employed (unemployed or not in the labour force) who have a spouse or partner who is employed.

**Source:** ABS Labour Force Status and other characteristics of families, 1981-2016. (as described in text).

**Figure B.1:** Stay-at-home fathers by year, two-parent families with youngest child aged less than 15 years

<sup>12</sup> Actual table number varied across years—Tables 12, 13 and 14.

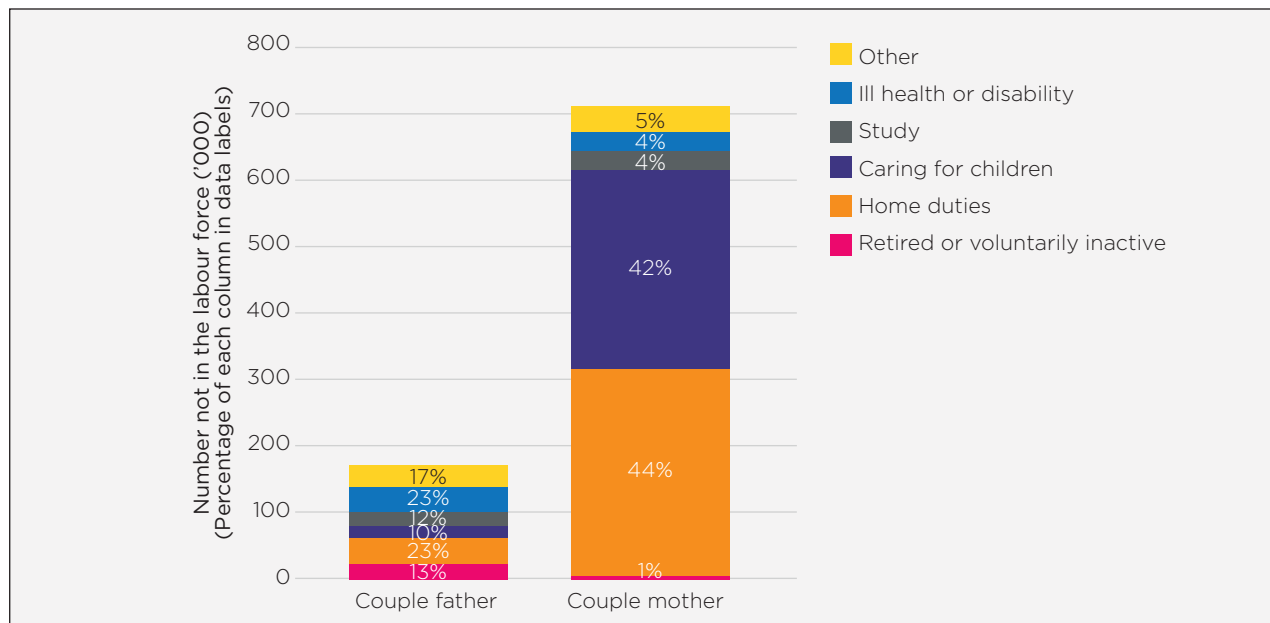
<sup>13</sup> Retrieved from <[www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6224.0.55.001December%202008?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6224.0.55.001December%202008?OpenDocument)> and <[www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6224.0.55.001Jun%202011?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6224.0.55.001Jun%202011?OpenDocument)>.

<sup>14</sup> Retrieved from <[www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6224.0.55.001June%202016?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6224.0.55.001June%202016?OpenDocument)>, Table 9.

# Appendix C: Persons not in the labour force

The ABS *Persons not in the Labour Force* publication (Catalogue No. 6220.0) provides details of those who are not in the labour force, including information about their main activity. Here two sets of analysis using this survey data are presented. First, customised data from the 2013 survey were used to explore the main activities of fathers, compared here to the main activities of mothers.<sup>15</sup> In addition, time series information on men not in the labour force who are aged 25–54 years is used to explore the change in being out of employment to care for children.

The main activities of couple fathers and mothers who are not in the labour force at September 2013 are shown in Figure C.1. Overall, there are significantly more mothers (7,111,500) than fathers (173,600) not in the labour force. One in 10 (18,200) of the couple fathers who are not in the labour force refer to caring for children as their main activity and 23% (40,600 couple fathers) refer to home duties. Some of these fathers will have an employed spouse or partner and some will be part of a jobless couple, so they are not all stay-at-home fathers. These data highlight that even among those couple fathers who are not in the labour force, many have a main activity that is not related to the home or children, with 23% (40,700) stating their main activity is related to their own ill health or disability, 13% (22,700) stating it is because they are retired or voluntarily inactive, 12% (21,100) studying and another 17% (30,300) giving other reasons. For mothers, the distribution is vastly different, with 42% of couple mothers who are not in the labour force stating their main activity is caring for children, and 44% referring to home duties.



**Notes:** Fathers and mothers are those classified as males and females with *dependants*. Dependants are children aged under 15 years or dependant students aged 15–24 years. Couple fathers and mothers are those defined as a husband, wife or partner. Statistics for lone parents are not shown. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0% due to rounding.

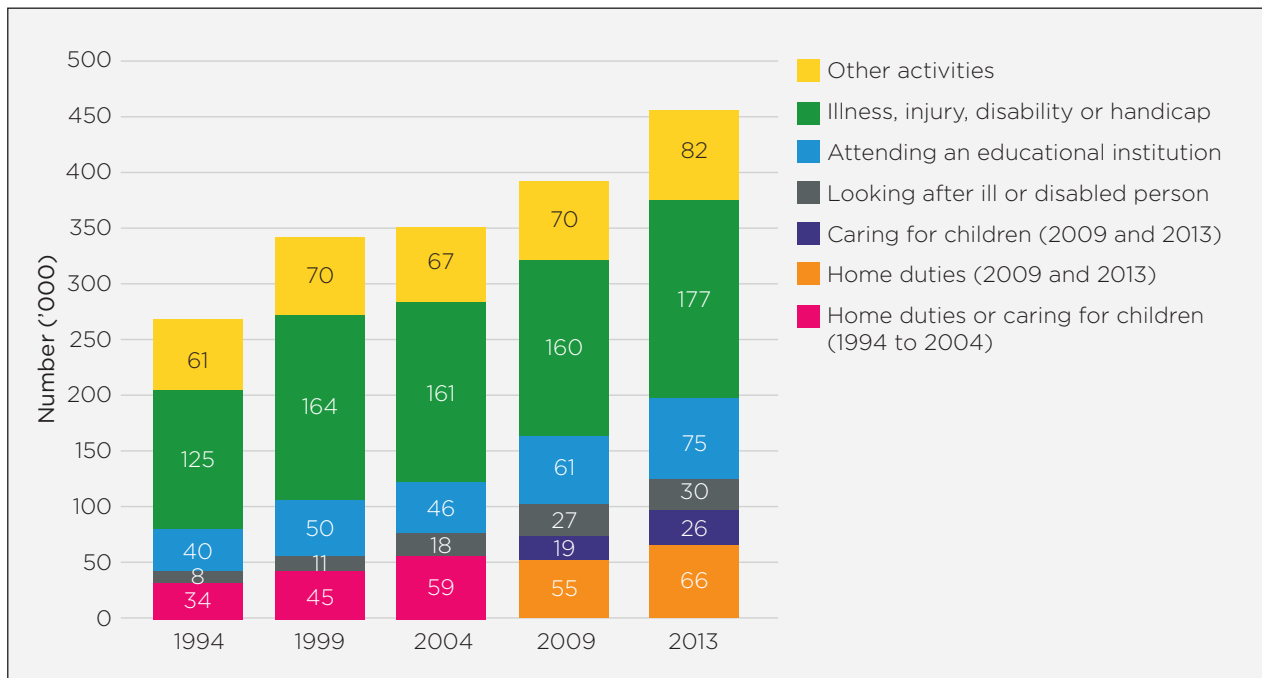
**Source:** Customised ABS data using *Persons not in the Labour Force*, September 2013 (Catalogue No. 6220.0).

**Figure C.1:** Main activities of couple fathers and mothers who are not in the labour force, September 2013

<sup>15</sup> These data were sourced from a customised data request from the ABS.

This information about the main activity while not in the labour force is available by age and sex for persons not in the labour force across a number of years. This information allows us to explore whether there has been an increase in the number of men reporting child care activities, or home duties. The readily available data are not disaggregated by sex and relationship in household, and so age is used here to focus somewhat on the ages of men who are most likely to be home as a stay-at-home father. The main activity data are explored here for men aged 25–54 years. According to analysis of the 2011 census data, only 28% of men aged 25–54 years who were not in the labour force were parents of children aged under 15 years, so we expect a varied range of activities among these men who are not in the labour force. Not only are these men not all fathers, some are single men and some are in jobless households.

Overall, the number of 25–54-year-old men not in the labour force increased from 266,500 in 1994 to 456,400 in 2013. The distribution of main activities of these men is shown for selected years in Figure C.2. In 1994, 33,700 men aged 25–54 years were not in the labour force and stated their main activity as home duties or caring for children (13% of those not in the labour force). Across the years shown, the number whose main activity was home duties or caring for children increased, with 92,100 men (20% of those not in the labour force) reporting one of these reasons at 2013. It was more common, though, for men to say “home duties” rather than “caring for children”. The predominant activity for men aged 25–54 years and not in the labour force is “illness, injury, disability or handicap”, with the number in this category increasing over these years. The number attending an educational institution also increased over this period.



**Note:** Prior to 2008 “home duties or caring for children” was collected in one category but after this they were collected separately. “Other” includes retired or voluntary inactive, travel, holiday or leisure activity, working in unpaid voluntary job and “other”. There were some changes to underlying categories across the years such that data from 2004 are not precisely comparable with earlier years. These data were published annually up to 2013 but have only been shown for selected years.

**Source:** ABS, Persons not in the Labour Force, online tables: Main activity when not in the labour force (Tables 13.2 and 13.2a).

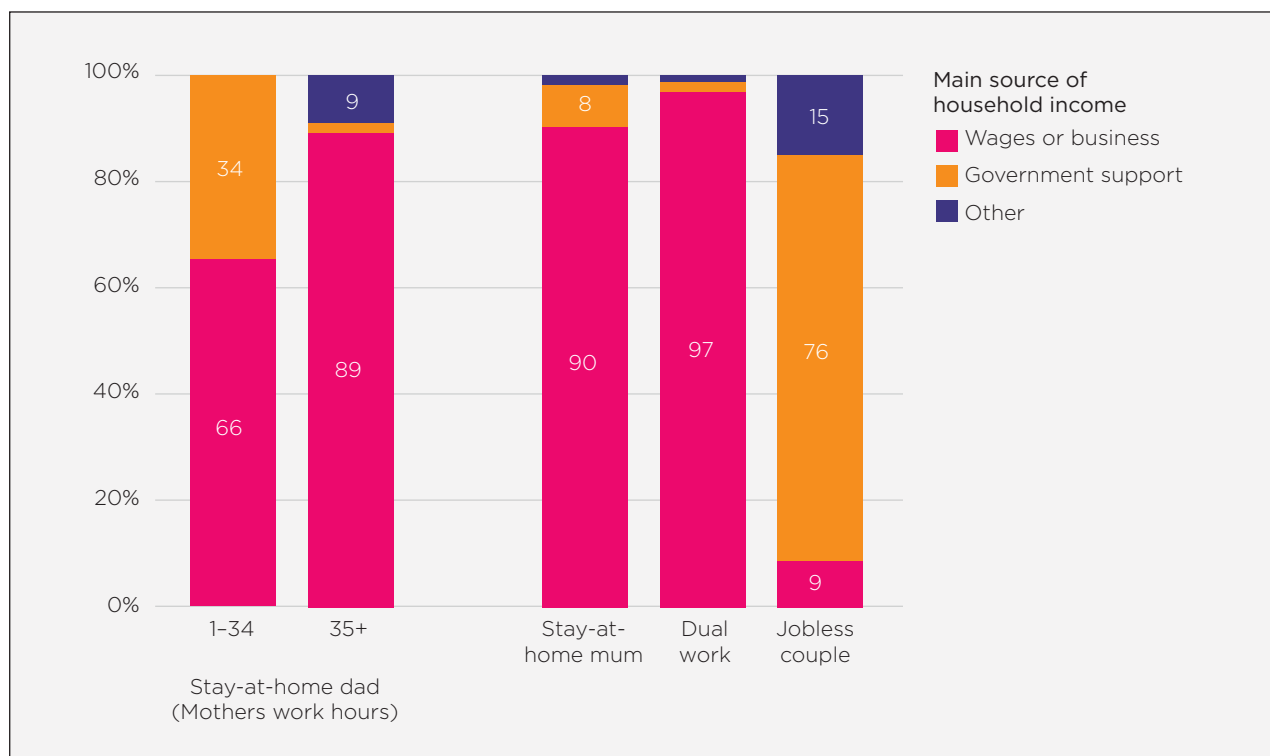
**Figure C.2:** Main activities of men aged 25–54 years not in the labour force, selected years 1994–2013

These *Persons not in the Labour Force* data indicate that fathers who are not in employment include some fathers who are predominantly caring for children or looking after the home but that their reasons for being out of work are likely to be very different to those of mothers. Factors such as illness or disability and undertaking study are also likely to explain the reasons for stay-at-home fathers’ lack of employment, as evidenced by the activities undertaken by fathers who are not in the labour force here, and by the changing activities of the broader category of men aged 25–54 years.

# Appendix D: Main source of income

The census does not capture information on the source of individuals' income, so the main source of income cannot be derived using this data source. This information is potentially interesting in exploring stay-at-home fathers, to distinguish between those families who are reliant on the income from the wage or salary of a household member and those who are reliant on government payments or other sources. In particular, this provides insights on whether stay-at-home father families are reliant on the mothers' incomes, as would be imagined to be the case if roles have been reversed within couples.

We explore this here using microdata from the ABS Survey of Income and Housing, 2010-11, which contains information about households' main source of income. This is examined here by classifying couple households with children according to a similar family employment status variable as used with the census. We were unable with these data to identify fathers who were away from work, so they are included among employed fathers. We were unable to conduct detailed analyses, as the sample size for stay-at-home father families was small ( $n = 101$ ). Dividing this by mothers' work hours, there were  $n = 47$  with mothers working less than 35 hours per week and  $n = 54$  with mothers working 35 hours a week or more.



**Notes:** Based on couple families with dependent children aged less than 15 years. Data labels omitted if values were under than 5%.

**Source:** ABS Survey of Income and Housing, 2010-11

**Figure D.1:** Main source of household income in stay-at-home father families, by mothers' work hours, compared to other family employment types



Main source of income is shown by family employment arrangements in Figure D.1. These data show:

- Wages or business income is the main source of household income in 95% of families in which there is a stay-at-home mother and 97% in dual-working families.
- At the other end of the scale, within jobless couple families, 76% report that their main source of income is government support.
- Looking at stay-at-home father families, when mothers work 35 hours or more per week, the main source of income is wages or business income in a majority of households (89%).
- However, within stay-at-home father families with a mother working fewer than 35 hours per week, 66% report having a main source of income of wages or business income and around one in three of these families have government support as their main source of income.

These data indicate that when mothers work part-time hours, the stay-at-home father families may include a significant number who have not selected into those arrangements as a means of reversing caring and earning roles.

# Appendix E: Supplementary census tables

**Table E.1:** Mothers' work hours in stay-at-home father and dual-working families, 2011

Mothers' work characteristics	Stay-at-home father families (%)	Dual-working families (%)	All two-parent working mothers (%)
<b>Hours worked</b>			
1-15	15.9	19.5	19.3
16-24	17.2	23.4	23.0
25-34	17.5	19.9	19.7
35-44	36.8	27.5	28.2
45 or more	12.6	9.7	9.9
All	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes: Work hours varies significantly by these family work arrangements ( $p < 0.001$ ). Percentages may not total exactly 100.0% due to rounding.

Source: Australian Population Census five per cent sample file, 2011

**Table E.2:** Demographics in stay-at-home father families by fathers' labour force status and mothers' work hours, 2011

Family characteristics	Mother part-time work			Mother full-time work			Total (%)
	Father away from work (%)	Father unemployed (%)	Father not in the labour force (%)	Father away from work (%)	Father unemployed (%)	Father not in the labour force (%)	
<b>Age of youngest child (years)</b>							
0-2	23.8	24.8	23.0	17.5	17.3	19.6	<b>21.2</b>
3-5	24.3	22.8	19.4	19.2	19.7	22.7	<b>21.4</b>
6-14	51.9	52.5	57.6	63.2	63.0	57.8	<b>57.4</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Number of children in family</b>							
1	41.9	45.3	47.8	47.4	52.1	46.2	<b>46.7</b>
2	43.5	38.5	35.5	40.2	36.0	38.2	<b>38.2</b>
3 or more	14.5	16.3	16.7	12.4	11.9	15.6	<b>15.1</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Father's age (years)</b>							
Less than 25	1.3	2.8	1.5	0.3	1.2	1.0	<b>1.4</b>
25-34	15.2	14.3	14.7	13.8	15.3	12.5	<b>14.1</b>

Table continued over page

Family characteristics	Mother part-time work			Mother full-time work			Total (%)
	Father away from work (%)	Father unemployed (%)	Father not in the labour force (%)	Father away from work (%)	Father unemployed (%)	Father not in the labour force (%)	
35-44	51.9	45.5	34.9	52.9	44.0	42.9	<b>43.4</b>
45 or more	31.6	37.5	48.8	33.0	39.4	43.6	<b>41.1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Mean age of fathers</i>	<i>41.4</i>	<i>41.8</i>	<i>44.9</i>	<i>41.5</i>	<i>42.4</i>	<i>44.2</i>	<i>43.3</i>
<b>Indicator variables (binary variables with the balance not shown) (%)</b>							
Father is student.	4.9	7.6	13.1	4.5	9.3	11.7	9.7
Father is carer	11.0	12.2	15.5	12.9	12.6	15.1	13.8
Mother is carer	17.3	20.8	29.5	14.9	11.7	19.8	20.6
Father has disability	1.6	1.8	14.7	1.4	1.0	7.4	6.5
Multi-family household	1.3	4.8	3.9	3.4	6.1	2.5	3.5
<b>Sample size</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>856</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>966</b>	<b>3,377</b>
<b>% overall</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>28.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Australian Population Census 5% sample file, 2011.

**Table E.3:** Parents' educational attainment in stay-at-home father families by fathers' labour force status and mothers' work hours, 2011

Education variables	Mother part-time work			Mother full-time work			Total (%)
	Father away from work (%)	Father unemployed (%)	Father not in the labour force (%)	Father away from work (%)	Father unemployed (%)	Father not in the labour force (%)	
<b>Father's education</b>							
Incomplete secondary education	19.0	23.9	34.4	18.3	19.1	25.6	<b>25.3</b>
Completed Year 12, certificate or diploma	61.4	53.7	48.4	59.3	49.6	52.1	<b>52.9</b>
Bachelor degree or higher	19.6	22.4	17.3	22.5	31.3	22.3	<b>21.8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Mother's education</b>							
Incomplete secondary education	19.5	23.9	27.8	16.8	14.4	16.5	<b>20.4</b>
Completed Year 12, certificate or diploma	52.6	50.3	47.1	46.0	43.1	42.7	<b>46.4</b>
Bachelor degree or higher	27.9	25.9	25.2	37.2	42.6	40.8	<b>33.2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table continued over page

Education variables	Mother part-time work			Mother full-time work			Total (%)
	Father away from work (%)	Father unemployed (%)	Father not in the labour force (%)	Father away from work (%)	Father unemployed (%)	Father not in the labour force (%)	
<b>Relative parental education level</b>							
Father has higher education than mother	26.3	27.3	22.2	24.7	18.2	16.3	<b>21.4</b>
Father has same education as mother	45.1	44.1	44.1	40.9	51.9	45.2	<b>45.2</b>
Father has lower education than mother	28.6	28.6	33.7	34.5	29.9	38.5	<b>33.4</b>
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Sample size</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>833</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>3,298</b>

Source: Australian Population Census 5% sample file, 2011