



**families** commission  
kōmihana ā **whānau**

## TWO PARENTS, TWO HOUSEHOLDS: NEW ZEALAND DATA COLLECTIONS, LANGUAGE AND COMPLEX PARENTING

PAUL CALLISTER, INSTITUTE OF POLICY STUDIES, VICTORIA UNIVERSITY  
& STUART BIRKS, CENTRE FOR PUBLIC POLICY EVALUATION, MASSEY UNIVERSITY

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The Commission can be contacted at:  
Public Trust Building  
Level 5, 117-125 Lambton Quay  
PO Box 2839  
Wellington

Telephone: 04 917 7040  
Email: [enquiries@nzfamilies.org.nz](mailto:enquiries@nzfamilies.org.nz)  
[www.nzfamilies.org.nz](http://www.nzfamilies.org.nz)

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Our assumptions, values, feelings and histories shape the scholarship we propose, the findings we generate and the conclusions we draw. Our insights about family processes and structures are affected by our membership in particular families, by the lives of those we study and by what we care about knowing and explaining.

Allen (2000: 14)

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the issues surrounding data collection and the diversity of family types, with particular emphasis on family connections across households. Most of the official statistics in New Zealand and overseas rely on data collected on an individual or household basis. Hence we commonly see such terms as 'sole parent family' and 'absent parent'. There is commonly an implicit assumption that individuals are part of one household only, and that all their family members live in that same household.

This does not reflect the reality of life for many people, and yet the data shape the perspectives chosen and the analyses undertaken. The associated terminology emphasises some relationships, while ignoring others. Similarly, there are inaccuracies in the perceived availability of, and demands on, resources for the various identified groups of people. It is through this distorted lens that much of our perception of society is formed.

This raises two main issues. Firstly, what research can we do with current data, and what are the inherent problems that can constrain us in drawing conclusions? Secondly, can we improve the quality of data collected so as to avoid these problems?

The results are important for data-gathering and future research, as well as for the revisiting of past research to consider whether conclusions drawn are robust, or were due to weaknesses in the data.

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# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

While there is increasing recognition, sometimes through experience, of the diversity and complexity of many families in New Zealand, current policy debate often uses definitions of, and associated statistics on, families that are generally household-based. In other words, in these debates a family type is defined in relation to households with all the members of the family living in the same dwelling, and everyone is considered to live in one household only. That this fails to reflect the reality of many people's lives has already been recognised, including by Statistics New Zealand, the main agency collecting family data in New Zealand (Nolan 2001, Statistics New Zealand 2003).<sup>1</sup>

To fully understand families, it is necessary to consider the individual participants and their relationships to each other. The perspectives that we take and that shape research on families, both influence and are influenced by the terms used and the data that are available. Given the numerous participants, no single perspective is likely to reflect adequately the experiences of all the people involved. We would contend that there are two major consequences of this. Firstly, analyses are likely to be limited. In particular a significant number of fathers, as well as a smaller group of mothers, are 'invisible' in family statistical collections.<sup>2</sup> Current official data measures are misleading, and we should acknowledge the limitations of these data and of analyses that use these data. As a result, the scope for effective policy intervention is less than might otherwise be the case. Secondly, we should aim for better measures, although there are clear difficulties and cost constraints.

The paper begins with some examples of how current practice disguises some family connections. Some initial thoughts about the size and complexity of the problem are presented followed by policy implications. The paper then presents some overseas survey data on the connections across households. Next, current ways of collecting data in New Zealand are examined, followed by a discussion on how these collections could be improved. The language dimension of this issue is then discussed along with the need to consider new analytical techniques. Finally, a strategy for improving New Zealand data collections is presented.

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1 At the time of writing this report Statistics New Zealand had begun a review of family statistics. This review acknowledges current gaps and a proactive approach is being taken to fill them. We hope that this paper will assist in this process. This review follows on from an analysis of census content, which outlined some of the shortcomings of current official statistics (see Appendix 1).

2 Hill and Callister (2006), as well as some other researchers, use the term 'invisible' extensively when describing separated parents who are not acknowledged in data collections.

## 2.0 CURRENT PRACTICE

We can consider some of the terms that are commonly used in official data collections:

### SOLE-PARENT FAMILY

This is a household-based and parent-based definition that counts people as a member of one family/household. Information on parents who reside in separate households is not collected in the census. Other associated terms used by policy makers, researchers and the general public include 'mother-only family', 'lone-mother family', 'sole-mother', 'sole-father', and the commonly used, but literally quite extreme 'absent parent'.

### PARENT

This term is defined for the 2001 Census as, "The mother, father (natural, step, adopted or foster), or person in a parent role of a child in a family nucleus."<sup>3</sup> The same source further emphasises the residential dimension: "A 'person in a parent role' is a person who is not a mother or father (natural, step, adopted or foster) of the young person (as defined by the survey) but who nevertheless usually resides with that young person. The young person does not have a partner or child of their own and does not usually reside with their mother or father – natural, step, adopted or foster."

A range of relationships could place a 'person in a parenting role'. They could have biological links (such as a grandparent residing with children whose parents are deceased), or it could be a social parenting role, such as a stepparent. The data collected do not provide any information on social versus biologically-based parenting.

Many of the terms are linked to common data classifications as indicated in Appendix 2 (Appendix 2 also contains Statistics New Zealand definitions of 'family type', 'family nucleus', 'household' and 'household composition').

As will be illustrated, not only is some of the language around 'family' potentially misleading, but so are the data, and hence any analyses based on these data. How do participants see the world? How well might the terms and data match their perspectives?

Briefly, it could be considered that families are based on relationships, biological and social, between people (mother, cousin, nephew, grandfather, sister, brother-in-law). These are relative, not absolute relationships. A man can be simultaneously a father to one person, a brother to another, an uncle to another and a son to another. Similarly, families are specific to individuals. A boy's half-sister (with a common mother) could be part of his family, but not part of his father's family. Research on step-parenting suggests that there can be marked differences in the perceived roles of parents and stepparents (Fleming and Atkinson 1999; Fleming 2001).

To illustrate the complex range of situations, here are two examples of what are commonly considered as family types. The first type is widely found. The second is far less numerous, but has been the focus of a lot of policy attention in recent years:

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3 [www.stats.govt.nz/census/2001-definitions-questionnaires/chapter-3.htm](http://www.stats.govt.nz/census/2001-definitions-questionnaires/chapter-3.htm)

## 2.1 CASE A

*A one female child sole-parent family (mother and child)*

Participants:

### MOTHER

In official statistics, she would be defined as a 'sole mother'. This suggests that she has sole responsibility for the upbringing of the child and is providing all the care. Even if studies acknowledge this assumption, it is not clear how any analysis could be adjusted to reflect other circumstances where some care is provided elsewhere. Her income would consist of what she earns, plus other sources of income such as benefits received and perhaps child support. Owing to respondents' perceptions, income measures may imperfectly indicate gross and net after-tax income. For example, would benefits or child support received be scaled up, to be comparable with tax-inclusive income, especially when child support is measured and given free of tax? There may also be distortions due to a failure to consider the effects of income-related concessions such as with a Community Services Card.

She is likely to see herself and her child as a family. She may also consider the child's father as part of a wider family. She may have a close relationship with both her parents or may have been estranged from one or both of them. She may be in close contact with her child's father's parents, who are actively caring for the child, or she may have no contact with them. She may co-operate closely with her siblings and/or the siblings of her child's father. There could be inter-household exchanges of money, goods and services.

### CHILD

She would be defined as a child in a sole-parent family. This suggests that she lives full-time with her mother and has no contact with her 'absent' father.

She may have no contact with her father or his family or she could be spending up to half her time living with him. She may only have access to the resources at her mother's house, or she may have a complete second set of furniture, clothes, toys, books, etc, at her father's house, and have access to his computer, etc. She may be reliant on her mother for costs of, and transport to, sport and music lessons, etc, or they could be provided by her father. She may also have step- and half-siblings and a stepmother with whom she is close. Her parents may be on good terms with each other or there may be no communication between them. She may be free to have her own relationships with each of them, or be expected to side with her mother against her father. She may celebrate major events (birthdays, Christmas) with both her parents, or with only one. She may see her father as part of her family in a way that her mother does not.

### FATHER

In official statistics, he would not be considered a member of the family.<sup>4</sup> There would be no recognition of the time his child is with him or the effect of child support payments on his or his household's income.

He and his daughter may consider themselves to be part of the same family. She could be spending extended periods with him and he could be active at her school and in her other activities. Alternatively, he may have no contact with her, either by choice or because he has been excluded through alienation or court orders. Depending on the number of children, income and deductions, he could be contributing up to 40 percent of his net pay in child support.<sup>5</sup> His income as recorded and as used to calculate benefit or other entitlements would not be adjusted for child support, even though that child support might affect his eligibility for a loan.

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4 There is an exception. In Ministry of Social Development (2002) when giving a context for family violence, it includes within its definition, "other relationships where significant others are not part of the physical household but are part of the family and/or are fulfilling the function of family [Footnote: This definition is consistent with the Government Statement of Policy on Family Violence 1996 and the definition of 'violence' in the Domestic Violence Act 1995.]."

5 For example, with an income of \$90,000, and a single living allowance of about \$12,500, child support for four children would be over \$23,000. His income tax, ACC levy and superannuation contributions would be about \$33,000, and child support would comprise 23/57 (40 percent) of the remainder. The figure could be even higher if there are student loan repayments.

## OTHERS

There are many other people whom we might consider to be part of someone's family, but who are excluded from a household-based definition and may be overlooked in the concepts used by those making and implementing policy. They could include, for example, a child's maternal and paternal grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, siblings, half-brothers and half-sisters who do not live in the designated household, and stepsiblings from terminated relationships.

As in other examples here, they could be overlooked even though they play an active part in someone's life, or they may face barriers that prevent them playing such a part because existing policies do not consider them. They may consider themselves to be part of the family or at least one of the people in Family A.

## 2.2 CASE B

*A same-sex (lesbian) couple with a male child<sup>6</sup>*

Some participants:

### MOTHER

She would be considered as the mother of a child, living with a partner in a two-parent household/family. Depending on the family history, the household's income could consist only of what she and her partner earn, or they could include benefits and/or child support (until recently she could be on the DPB while living with her partner). She and her partner would be assumed to be providing full-time care for her child.

She may see herself as a mother in an intact family, or she may be a separated mother who has re-partnered in a lesbian relationship. She may or may not have some ongoing contact with the father of the child. He could be unknown to them. She may want him to be an active father or to be someone unknown to the child. She may have a large extended family and she could be seen as part of her partner's and the child's father's extended family. Her partner could be actively sharing the parenting or taking a back seat. She could see the relationship as permanent or transitory and the child as 'hers' or 'theirs'.

### CHILD

The child would be seen as being in a two-parent household and family. He could possibly be identified as having same-sex parents, in which case it would be assumed that there was no father in the family.<sup>7</sup>

He might have been born when his mother was in the same-sex relationship, or when his mother was in a relationship with his father. He may not know the identity of his father, or he might spend a considerable amount of time with his father and his father's family. He could have half-brothers or sisters who live full-time with his father and with whom he has a sibling relationship, or whom he never sees. He could be benefiting from financial support from the father and he may or may not be aware of this. Alternatively, there could be no financial support.

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6 Data in Statistics New Zealand (2002a) show that, in 2001, same-sex couples comprised approximately one percent of all couples without children. Of couples with children, less than a third of one percent are same-sex couples. There are approximately 2,200 dependent children in these households. Not all of these children would have been born into an existing same-sex relationship. In comparison, there were approximately 667,000 dependent children in opposite-sex couple households, and approximately 250,000 dependent children in sole-parent households.

7 In the initial draft of the Care of Children Bill, the female partner of a mother in a same-sex couple was to be referred to as the father of the child, but this was quickly dropped.

## MOTHER'S PARTNER

She would be recorded as a parent to the child. Her income would be recorded as part of the household income.

She may have been in a relationship with the mother at the time of conception, and they might have planned the child together, to be considered a child of their relationship. Alternatively, she may have formed a relationship with the mother some time after the child was born. She may not know the father of the child, or may see him as part of the wider family. She may have children of her own living elsewhere and possibly spending time with them. She may be paying child support to her children's father, but this would not affect the measured income of the household.

## FATHER

The father of the child might be an ex-partner, a friend who donated sperm, someone with whom she had a one-night stand, or an anonymous sperm donor. In official statistics, he would not be considered a member of the family. There would be no recognition of the time his child is with him or the effect of child support payments, if any, on his or his household's income.

He and his son may consider themselves to be part of the same family. They could be spending extended periods together. He could be active at his son's school and in his other activities. Alternatively, he may have no contact with him and he may see himself as no more than a sperm donor.

## OTHERS

Other people living outside the designated household would not be considered part of the family. These could include the extended families of the people in the household, and relatives of the father (who may or may not be considered part of the extended family of the child). They can include grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, half-brothers and sisters, a stepmother and more distant relatives, as well as their in-laws.<sup>8</sup> They may consider themselves to be part of the family of at least one of the people in Family B.

In either of these two cases, specific individuals may experience a range of situations and a snapshot description of their current state would give no indication of this.

In summary, a major weakness of current perspectives is the lack of attention given to relationships across households, and the increasingly dynamic nature of living and caring arrangements. This paper looks at overseas attempts to address these issues and considers what might be done in New Zealand. We hope that in the process, it increases people's awareness of the shortcomings of current information and the distortions that may arise as a consequence.

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8 Special mention could be made of whānau and cultural differences in the concept of family and relationships. This point has been made elsewhere and suggests that European concepts of family may not accurately reflect the Māori perspective (Metge 1995). The discussion here illustrates the point that statistical measures also generally fail to describe European families accurately.

## 3.0 SOME INITIAL ISSUES

### 3.1 HOW MANY BIOLOGICAL PARENTS DO NOT LIVE TOGETHER?

Until relatively recently in our history, disease, war, accidents, starvation, abandonment and death during childbirth meant that many children grew up without one or both parents (eg Ellwood and Jencks 2002). One of the great themes of Victorian literature was "the plight of the orphan" (George and Wilding 1972). At the start of the 21st century, while death and abandonment remain routes to this household type, other routes are now the more travelled paths.<sup>9</sup> The most common paths are through the dissolution of a union by divorce or separation, or by a union failing to form when a child is born. Typically, the mother assumes custody if a union fails to form, and when a union dissolves children are conventionally allocated one primary caregiver, either through a decision by the parents or through a court order. This is partly a result of the thinking that has dominated many in family law, with first the 'mother principle' and then the emphasis on a concept of the 'primary caregiver'. This is described in Birks (1999).<sup>10</sup> In any case, the child still has two living biological parents, unlike the historical model in which death claimed one or both of them.

We do not know how many separated childrearing couples there are in New Zealand, but we do know from official statistics that a significant number of children appear to live in 'sole-parent families'. We also know that New Zealand and the United States stand out amongst industrialised countries in the proportion of all families raising children who are classified as 'sole parent' (Johnston 2005).

Studies carried out overseas give some idea of the magnitude of the challenge presented by biological parents living in different households. In presenting some data on the number of children being raised by separated parents, this paper gives some initial ideas of the type of data that can be collected. As a first example, Hill (1995) gives United States data based on Panel Study of Income Dynamics data, tying together information from household listings and fertility histories, and applicable to a single point in time two decades ago in 1985.<sup>11</sup> At this time, about one in five US fathers aged 20-39 and almost one in 10 US mothers in that same age group were identified as living apart from one or more of their minor-aged (under 18) children. The high percentage living separately from their young children persisted into ages 40-49 for US fathers. Many single-person households resulted from the separation of couples. Among single-person households consisting of a man aged 20-29, 13 percent had children living elsewhere; this percentage rose to 43 percent for those of a man aged 30-39. Comparable figures for single-person households consisting of a woman in those age groups were 5 percent and 13 percent, respectively. The implications for young children in the US were striking, with over one-quarter of children (29 percent of boys and 24 percent of girls) under age 10 in households missing at least one parent.<sup>12</sup> Closer to home, cross-sectional Australian data indicates that in 2003 there were 1.1 million children aged 0-17 years (23 percent of all children in this age group) who had a natural parent living elsewhere (ABS 2004).

### 3.2 ADDED COMPLEXITY

As the initial hypothetical case studies indicated, the child's family picture may, in fact, be even more complex in terms of 'parenting' arrangements. One or both of the biological parents may subsequently re-partner or could have children from an earlier relationship. For the child, if the custodial parent re-partners, this will create a stepparent family. But the non-custodial parent may also enter a step-parenting arrangement with a new child. In a small number of cases there may be more than one re-partnering. Table 1 uses Canadian longitudinal data to show the proportion of children who have

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9 Changes in social norms, labour market participation and technology, and availability of public assistance, have provided alternative ways of creating and supporting children in one-adult households. For instance, now women can choose to have children on their own, including using the services of anonymous sperm donors (Hertz 2002), with no expectations of contact with the absent biological parent and no legal responsibilities for that parent.

10 Note also that parents' decisions are made 'in the shadow of the law' and in the context of child support and other legislation. This concept is described in Birks (2002: 37-39). In particular, "The concept of the Shadow of the Law refers to changed behaviour of people who, while not directly using the law, take account of the anticipated outcomes were the law to be applied. Legal outcomes affect the behaviour of many more people than those directly involved" (p 38). This tends to tip the scales against shared care arrangements if the Court shows reluctance to award shared care unless both parents agree, and if the provisions for child support and the DPB are not neutral. For example, there is little scope to reduce child support payments to reflect direct costs of children, for care amounting to less than 40 percent of nights, while the DPB is only awarded to one parent.

11 These data are derived from separate reports of an initial household listing, updated from the prior wave of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) data, and a report of children born, collected in a fertility history format. This approach is likely to be less subject to downward biases and ambiguities in reports of children living elsewhere, than comparable data collected via a direct question about children living elsewhere.

12 Note that in all these cases the data are restrictive, in that the children may be spending only part of their time in the designated household, and some time in another household. Similarly for parents, 'living with' and 'living apart from' may not be entirely accurate.

experienced parental separation in the first 10 years of their lives, as well as the proportion of these children for whom their mother or father (custodial and non-custodial) has entered a new relationship. Table 1 indicates that a small but significant proportion of Canadian children live in stepparent families in the early years of their lives. Given that data on more than one cohort were collected, information presented in this Canadian report also indicates a growing trend of separation.

**Table 1:** Proportion of young Canadian children who have experienced separation and a new union by a parent

	<b>At 10th birthday 1983-84 cohort</b>
Total children who experienced separation	20.5
New union	
...of mother and father	4.6
...of mother only	3.9
...of father only	3.9
...of neither parent	8.1

Source: *Marcil-Gratton (1998)*

Cross-sectional Australian data show that, in 2003, 40 percent of the non-resident fathers of children 0-17 had formed new relationships, while 32 percent of them lived alone (ABS 2004). Other non-resident fathers lived as dependent students (7.8 percent), in group households (7.7 percent) and as 'lone' parents (6.4 percent). Of non-resident mothers, 48 percent had formed new relationships, 33 percent were 'lone' parents, but only 10 percent lived alone. Note that transition to new states or relationships will depend on time since separation, hence these figures say little about the possible experiences of children going through separation.

While it has been estimated that around half of fathers in the United States who do not live with their biological children have family ties to another set of children, one survey has shown that 24 percent have three or more groups of children in their lives. This makes studying connections across and within households even more complex (Smock, Manning and Stewart 2002).

However, relatively few children start life without their father living with them. Canadian longitudinal data indicate that less than 10 percent of biological parents were living apart at the time of the birth of their child and, of those, about half had never lived together (Table 2).

**Table 2:** Parental marital status at birth of child

	<b>Not living together</b>	<b>Subset who never lived together</b>
1993-94 cohort (0-1)	8.7	4.9
1983-84 cohort (10-11)	5.5	2.2

Source: *Marcil-Gratton (1998)*

In addition, amongst those Canadian children whose parents were not living together at the time of the child's birth, a significant and growing proportion had their father's name on their birth certificate (Table 3).

**Table 3:** Percentage of Canadian children whose parents were not living together at time of child's birth but had their father's name on their birth certificate

1991-94 birth cohort	57.1
1987-90 birth cohort	60.9
1983-86 birth cohort	48.3

Source: *Marcil-Gratton (1998)*

As indicated in the hypothetical case studies at the start of this paper, fathers and mothers are not the only people with biological links to children. To add further complexity to the conceptualisation of families, other related adults, such as grandparents, uncles and aunts, may also be involved in raising the children, either within the household or across households. Non-biologically related stepparents

and stepgrandparents could also be involved. In addition, the increased participation of women in the workforce means many children are spending significant amounts of time in out-of-home care, or are cared for in the home by non-relatives. In part it has been the proliferation of complex family types that has promoted the shift by many social scientists from a biological construction of parenthood to a social construction. Social researchers are starting to think more about what parents, and what other adults such as early childhood education and care teachers, 'do' rather than who they are and how they are connected biologically to a child. While the effect of the investments of other adults (eg teachers) outside the household is increasingly considered when assessing child wellbeing,<sup>13</sup> the question of what parents, or other relatives 'do' or how they invest in their children is still often thought about within the context of a household rather than across households. In addition, it might be misleading to concentrate on parenting as tasks done. Thirty years ago, writing specifically about mothers, Dally (1976) suggested, "What a mother is, is much more important than what she does. This fact is usually omitted in books and articles on child care" (p 24). This point seems to be overlooked in current analyses.

Finally, to add even more complexity to understanding the social and biological links across households, the New Zealand Law Commission (2004) cites a number of overseas studies. These show that through advances in DNA testing, a small but significant number of fathers, who were thought to be the biological parents of the children they are either raising or who live in other households, are in fact not their children's biological parent.

### 3.3 BIOLOGICAL LINKS APPARENTLY STILL MATTER

Despite the growing emphasis amongst policy-makers on the social construction of parenting, particularly for fathers, in some policy contexts biological links outside the household are still considered to matter. In most countries, separated biological parents not living full-time with their child are legally expected to provide some financial support to that child. In New Zealand, sole mothers may be financially penalised if they do not identify the father of their child(ren). In addition, when student allowances are calculated, the income of non-custodial parents may be taken into account.

In relation to fathers, social science has provided some evidence that biology still matters in terms of both emotional and financial investment in children (Harris, Heard and King 2000; Hofferth and Anderson 2003). In addition, it seems that many children who are separated from their biological parents (adopted children and those whose fathers were anonymous sperm donors being prime examples) still want to establish some contact with their missing biological parent, if only to view the source of their own genetic makeup (Hertz 2002). For some New Zealand children, knowing and understanding biological links could be essential for them to identify as part of the indigenous population, given that such identity is generally constructed via ancestry rather than being socially constructed. Census data show that about half of both Māori women and Māori men have non-Māori partners (Callister 2004). Therefore, for many children Māori ancestry will come only through one parent. This issue of ancestry for Māori could become even more important, if the suggestion of Kukutai (2004) that New Zealand statistical and legal definitions of Māori be amended to take account of both self-identified ethnicity and descent, is acted upon.

When children are asked about the importance of staying connected to separated parents, many want to retain strong links. For example, Australian research conducted with 60 young people aged 12-19 found that more than a third favoured arrangements spending equal time with each parent (Parkinson, Cashmore and Single 2005). US research also supports the idea that many children would like a high level of contact with both parents post-separation (Fabricius 2003). Qualitative research carried out in New Zealand, as in the UK, shows that children often retain strong bonds to 'blood' links, even in cases where the parents hardly communicate at all (Fleming and Atkinson 1999; Smart, Neale and Wade 2001). In relation to stepparents Fleming and Atkinson note (p 5):

Even when they get on well with the children and feel a genuine love towards them, parents' partners are unlikely to have the same inner commitment and sense of identification with the children as their natural parents.

Finally, research on primates also indicates that biological fathers may be genetically programmed to care for their own children (Alberts 2003).

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13 There are many studies carried out on the effect of maternal employment on children. Most of these are effectively studying the effect of care provided by early childhood education and care providers outside the home relative to the care provided by mothers at home. However, recent studies have begun to consider the effects of paternal employment on children (Ministry of Women's Affairs 2004).

### 3.4 CONCEPTUAL IMAGING OF TIES

To envision fully the ways that biologically linked children and parents are or are not engaged in each other's lives, it is helpful to have an image in mind that allows wide possibilities. The 'mother-child-father triad', a concept beginning to enter the literature in the US in the context of biological links across households (Hill and Callister 2006), offers such conceptual imaging. This is a construct drawing attention to the family as a network, to connectivity between children and their fathers as well as between children and their mothers, and to the ways children's fathers and mothers are tied together. This construct facilitates a closer focus on family processes, including active parenting, which can link biologically tied members together whether or not they reside together.

The triad is seen as a system of actors potentially engaged in family processes. From the triad, what constitutes 'family' is shaped by the way individuals interact with one another. The nature of the connections between the members of the triad, not the attributes of the individuals, shape 'family'.

The triad takes us beyond the traditional approach of seeing separate dyads of mother-child, father-child or mother-father. These dyads are the building blocks of the triad. The added advantage of the triad is that it allows simultaneous consideration of all three dyads. Fathers as well as mothers can exhibit parenting roles and partnering roles, and the child can be viewed as an active agent, initiating actions as well as reacting to parenting.

The nature of family for biologically linked members of a triad is shaped by how all three actors play their roles. It is important to remember that, as Dunn (2004) stressed, the quality of the mother-father and the mother-child relationship can be crucial in shaping the father-child relationship, especially when fathers are no longer living full-time with their children. The triad form of imaging facilitates taking this into account. How the parents interact with each other and how each parent interacts with the child – intersections of all three actors – shape what is considered 'family'.

Research in the US suggests an important structural element – a gatekeeper – in the triad when biological links cross households (Coley and Chase-Lansdale 1999; Carlson, McLanahan and Brooks-Gunn 2003). When parents reside in separate households, the resident parent is often in a position to make or break connections between the non-resident parent and the child, and thus potentially make or break researchers' ability to know anything about the non-resident parent. The quality of ties (eg, extent of trust and respect) between resident and non-resident parents appears to determine the extent of this gatekeeping (National Center on Fathers and Families, n.d.). Ongoing romantic attachment between separated parents can provide a useful opportunity to forge father-child bonds (McLanahan, Garfinkel and Mincy 2001).

## 4.0 THE POLICY DIMENSION: WHY POLICY-MAKERS NEED TO UNDERSTAND LINKS ACROSS HOUSEHOLDS

Understanding children's emotional needs and wellbeing provides one important reason for endeavouring to identify the connections between separated parents and their children. However, there are other policy-related reasons for understanding connections across households. These include issues of child poverty, income support, housing adequacy, childcare and overall investments in children.

In New Zealand, the five-yearly Census of Population and Dwellings is a key dataset used to study family change and the economic and social circumstances of children. Yet in some areas the census provides an incomplete understanding of families. For instance, in a census or other official survey, a non-custodial parent will generally not be able to record their relationship with their child(ren). Instead, these children will be recorded as living elsewhere, either as part of a single-parent family, or in a couple with children family if the custodial parent has re-partnered.<sup>14,15</sup> They are effectively 'invisible' parents. Equally, a grandparent living outside a household will not be identified as having connections with their grandchildren even if they care for them every day after school, yet a grandparent living inside that household will automatically be seen as part of an extended family even if they do not care for the grandchildren.

In New Zealand the census has often been used to determine relative incomes of different households. Yet in his study of income distribution, O'Dea (2000) argues that household-based analysis of families may miss important inter-household transfers that remove resources from the household, such as non-custodial parents' child support payments to custodial parents.<sup>16,17</sup> Birks (2001a,b) and Hodgson and Birks (2002) explore this issue in more depth and point out further problems when data are not collected on household expenditure. It is not uncommon for non-custodial fathers to spend time with their children on weekends, and some children will also have overnight stays on weekdays and/or stay with these parents during holiday breaks. Not only will this involve direct expenditures on the children, but it may also mean that additional household resources, such as an extra bedroom, are required in the non-custodial parent's household for these visits. Based on simple household data, the measurement of both disposable income and costs of living for the custodial and non-custodial households, can be inaccurate. Some households classified as sole-parent households can appear worse off and non-custodial parent households can appear better off than they actually are. It is conceivable that a child could spend part of the week, most likely Monday to Friday, living in a household that could be officially classified as being in poverty, but spend the weekends in a household that, without recognition that a child is part of the household, is not deemed to be poor.

Knowing the amount of time, and preferably the type of interactions between non-custodial parents and their children is important when assessing outcomes for children living in various family types. In research journals, in the media, and in political debates, comparisons are often made between children raised primarily in one-parent households and those in intact couple families (eg Pong, Dronkers and Hampden-Thompson 2003).<sup>18</sup> Overall, this research indicates that while there is a considerable diversity of outcomes within family types, on average children have better outcomes when living in a household with both their biological parents.<sup>19</sup> However, rather than focusing on the physical

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14 Similarly, children will not be able to record their relationship to their non-custodial parent.

15 Under the Care of Children Act 2004, the terms 'custodial parent' and 'non-custodial parent' were replaced with the concepts of parents having 'day to day care' or 'contact'. This paper uses the former terminology, not least because it more closely matches the description in official data. It is possible for both parents to have time with day to day care, just as it was possible under the Guardianship Act 1968 for parents to have 'shared custody', although it is likely that more parents will be considered to be sharing day to day care as the requirements are less stringent. (Shared care under the Child Support Act 1991 requires each parent to care for a child for at least 40 percent of nights.) Nevertheless, and regardless of the legislation, statistically a child is recorded as having time with only one parent.

16 In the census, child support will not be reported as income by a custodial parent receiving the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB), nor would it increase that parent's household income, unless the amount of child support is greater than the DPB that parent is entitled to receive. Child support payments by a liable parent reduce the income available to that person's household, but there is no provision to identify this, hence the apparent income position of the household overstates the true position.

17 There have been some attempts to provide measures of living standards other than income. The Ministry of Social Development's Economic Living Standard Index (ELSI) has a long and short form. (See, for example, Jensen, Spittal and Krishnan 2005.) A survey approach is taken to determine what restrictions people feel they face in relation to selected purchases and activities. The responses are somewhat subjective, depending on how realistic their wants are in relation to their means. In any event, they would not show the extent of resource transfers between households or people's time in more than one household. The measures are for individuals, and assume residence in one household, rather than spending time in more than one household, with different facilities in each.

18 While sometimes the comparison is specifically made between intact biological parent households and one-parent households, at times the comparison is between two-parent and one-parent households, with the incorrect underlying assumption that two-parent households, including blended families, are the equivalent of intact biological parent households.

19 As Mackay (2005: 127) notes "there is an abundance of evidence that children who experience a parental separation are, on average, worse off than their peers in intact families, on a number of measures of wellbeing". However, he goes onto note "the scale of the differences in wellbeing between the two groups of children is not large and most children are not adversely affected. Parental separation then bears down most heavily on a minority of children, generally in the presence of other exacerbating factors."

living arrangements, it may be more important to assess the ways parents and children interact across the spectrum of living arrangements, that is, what parents 'do' (Deschamps 2004), or what they represent (Dally 1976). On the latter point, there may well be a difference for a child if the father is elsewhere but paying child support, compared with being away at sea while still supporting his family. Similarly the effect of father absence on a child can be different if it is due to death, compared with separation – presumably the images of the father and of relationships (and the child's self-image) are different. On the issue of time alone, in an intact family a father, perhaps through working long hours or frequent travelling, could spend little time with his children, whereas a non-custodial father may be spending significant amounts of quality time with his children.<sup>20</sup> More generally, therefore, parents can contribute in diverse ways and both time and perceptions may be important. We should therefore note that the data and definitions actually shape perceptions of what amount of time parents 'should' be spending with children. A 'sole parent' may be expected to have sole responsibility for a child, and an 'absent parent' may be considered to have no parenting role. If health, education and welfare professionals make these assumptions, or policy is based on them, barriers are implicitly created that limit the involvement of 'absent' parents. Starting with Bowlby (1952), over many decades researchers and policy-makers have put in much effort researching the effect of maternal care, or lack of it, on child outcomes (Ministry of Women's Affairs 2004). More recently, research has focused on the time spent on childcare by fathers in intact families (eg Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean and Hofferth 2001). A next step is to analyse the total time, and the quality of the time, fathers (and mothers) spend caring for their children, regardless of whether or not they live with them full-time.<sup>21</sup>

Important constraints may also remain hidden by the absence of data about ties across households. Consider potential labour mobility. Without information on relationships across households it is easy to assume adults living on their own or even adults living in a couple household, can easily move to another location, including to another country, should they lose their job or wish to seek higher paying jobs. However, given that research shows that distance is associated with the level of contact a non-custodial parent has with their children, for a person in this parental status such a move may mean a loss of regular contact with their children (Stewart 1999).<sup>22</sup> For involved parents, this may be a major constraint on their mobility. Equally, a sole-parent or a stepparent household may be constrained, sometimes under court order, not to move too far from the non-custodial parent.

Information on connections across households of separated parents could also be useful when considering parental childcare. It is easy to assume that single-parent households have only one parent who can undertake childcare after school, in the evenings, weekends and school holidays. Yet, some children in a single-parent household may have a non-custodial parent willing and able to care for them after school or at other times. Equally, in an intact family, one partner may be unwilling or unable to provide such care, leaving the whole burden on the other partner. If subsidisation of childcare is based on household type then this may be inequitable across families. In work and family research there is often an underlying, but not explicit, assumption that partners in dual career childrearing couples are both the biological parents of the children in that household. But one parent may be a stepparent, and potentially both partners could have children from a previous union. Many households may be juggling careers within one family unit as well as juggling both financial and emotional contributions to other family members outside that household.

Not only might the reality not match the data classifications, but also the data classifications may shape the perceptions of those making and implementing policy. For example, if a family is seen as being a 'sole-parent family', and the other parent is considered an 'absent parent', there could be little thought given to the possible contribution of that other parent. Consequently, decisions might be made which constrain the involvement of that parent. For example, there is very limited scope for adjusting child support payments to allow for costs directly incurred by a non-custodial parent when caring for his/her children. In fact, the child support legislation considers the costs of food and clothing for a child, while they are with a non-custodial parent, to be costs of 'enjoyment of access', for which there is no provision to reduce child support.

For all these reasons, but particularly because it is important to understand what affects child outcomes, information on parenting across households is needed. However, it also needs to be recognised that not only will 'numbers' never fully explain social behaviour, but also that collecting data

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20 While time spent with children is important, it needs to be kept in mind that father's income can be one form of parental investment in his children (Christiansen and Palkovitz 2001).

21 The style of parenting may also be significant. Paul Amato has emphasised the importance of 'authoritative parenting' (Amato 2004).

22 It is difficult to know whether distance is the cause of a lower level of contact, or whether non-custodial parents who have less contact make little effort to live close to their children. In addition, it is possible for the custodial parent to move away so the non-custodial parent no longer lives close by.

can create behaviour. Some of the changes in behaviour may help us to understand social phenomena, but some might obscure it. For instance, in a wider discussion of the 'art of political decision making', Stone (1997: 187) notes that some of the reactions to being counted include:

- > People react to being counted or measured, and try to 'look good' on the measure.
- > The process of counting something makes people notice it more, and record-keeping stimulates reporting.
- > Counting can be used to stimulate public demand for change.
- > When measurement is explicitly used to evaluate performance, the people being evaluated try to manipulate their 'scores'.

Also from the policy perspective, we should be concerned not only about the accuracy of current data, but also about the way that data might indicate changing family relationships. If the structure of families is changing, then past information will be of less value for identifying future behaviour, policy issues and the effects of policies on families.

In relation to increasingly complex families, some have suggested that these increase the number of kin or step-kin potentially available to provide support (see Bengtson 2001: 6).<sup>23</sup> However, there is international evidence that divorce is associated with less support of older people by their children, particularly of elderly men (see evidence cited in Millward 1997). Divorce may also mean that older people are less able to provide financial assistance to their adult children.

In New Zealand there is increasing attention being given specifically to the role of grandparents, including the setting up of support groups.<sup>24</sup> There is debate about the rise in grandparents raising children, with some Canadian research indicating a very large rise (Worrall 2005: 6), but United States research indicating little change (Pebley and Rudkin 1999). If, in fact, there has been a rise in grandparents raising children, this is a change from the recent past, and may arise because of an increase in the proportion of children whose parents live apart. What will happen with the next generation if relatively few of today's generation of children have parents in stable relationships? In other words, not only do the available data provide an increasingly inaccurate picture of the present, but the inaccuracies also reflect even greater problems that we face in anticipating the future structure of families.

Moreover, the perspectives taken, and their associated policies, then affect the environments in which people make decisions. There is a real danger of resulting unanticipated (and possibly unidentified) behaviour changes.

This is an important aspect of policy analysis. If these things are not monitored, it is only after problems are well established that they are noticed. By then, it can be difficult to correct, especially given the short length of people's childhoods.

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<sup>23</sup> This section draws on the work of Petrie (2005).

<sup>24</sup> For example, Grandparents raising children, [www.raisinggrandchildren.org.nz/index.htm](http://www.raisinggrandchildren.org.nz/index.htm)

## 5.0 WHAT CURRENT OVERSEAS STUDIES SAY ABOUT CARE ACROSS HOUSEHOLDS

### 5.1 WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CHILDREN WITH SEPARATED PARENTS?

While little is known in New Zealand about the flow of care and resources across households, a number of international studies have started to shed some light on non-custodial parents' contact with their children. An increasing amount of research has been published in recent years, and more is under way. The following provide a selection of the findings from the published studies.

Cross-sectional data from Australia provides an estimate that there were 1.1 million children aged 0-17 years in 2003 (23 percent of all children in this age group) who had a natural parent living elsewhere (ABS 2004).<sup>25</sup> As found in other surveys, children were more likely to live with their mother than their father after parents separated. The survey found that of the children with a natural parent living elsewhere, 50 percent (or 543,500) saw their other parent frequently (at least once per fortnight), while 31 percent (339,000) only saw their other natural parent either rarely (once per year, or less often) or never. Of the 283,000 children who saw their other natural parent less than once a year or never saw them, 64,300 (23 percent) had some indirect contact with that parent (eg via phone, email or letter).

Younger children were likely to see their other natural parent more frequently than were older children.<sup>26</sup> Of children aged 0-2 years, 66 percent saw their other natural parent frequently while 23 percent saw them rarely or never. The corresponding proportions for children aged 15-17 years were 38 percent and 36 percent respectively. On average, 50 percent of children with a parent living elsewhere in 2003 had overnight stays with the other natural parent, compared with 46 percent in 1997. The proportion of children staying 110 or more nights, about a third of the year (equivalent to an average of two nights per week), with the other natural parent was higher in 2003 at 6 percent than the 3 percent in 1997.

Table 4 draws data from the 2003 ABS Family Characteristics Survey as well as data from a smaller survey carried out by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. It summarises some of the data already discussed on the frequency of contact between children and their non-resident parent. Table 5 summarises data from the ABS study on the number of nights the children spend with their non-custodial parent.

**Table 4:** Frequency of contact between child and non-resident parent in Australia

Frequency of contact, percentage in each group	ABS (2003)	AIFS (2003)
Daily/weekly	33	33
Fortnightly	17	23
Monthly	6	7
Once every 3-12 months	18	18
Less than once a year/never	26	19
Total	100	100

**Table 5:** Percentage of children staying overnight and length of stay with non-custodial parent, ABS 2003

Nights stayed	Percentage in each group
None	49
1-35	21
36-72	18
73-109	6
110-181	4
182 and over	2
Total	100

<sup>25</sup> [www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/e6a9286119fa0a85ca25699000255c89?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/e6a9286119fa0a85ca25699000255c89?OpenDocument)

<sup>26</sup> This may be in part because their parents have lived apart longer and there has been more time for the parent-child relationship to weaken. It is important to note the dynamic nature of relationships and the longer-term impact of changed living arrangements. In particular, it may be difficult to reconstruct severed relationships effectively.

Given that the Australian Family Characteristics Survey has been undertaken a number of times, some trend data are available. The proportion of children who frequently saw their other parent increased from 44 percent in 1997 to 50 percent in 2003. Other surveys have noted an increase in contact with non-resident parents over time (eg in Canada, Juby, Marcil-Gratton and Le Bourdais 2004).

An earlier ABS survey showed that 3 percent of children were in 'shared care' arrangements, although another 4 percent of children had daily face-to-face contact with a non-resident parent (Smyth 2004). Smyth goes on to note that a more recent estimate, based on both mothers' and fathers' reports derived from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, suggests that around 6 percent of separated households share the care of dependent children.

Commenting on the Australian data, Smyth (2004: 34) expresses concern that, "almost one-third (30 percent) of children under 18 with a natural parent *living elsewhere* rarely or never see one of their parents, typically their father" [italics added]. The term '*living elsewhere*' refers also to those children who spent time with both parents and indicates that even researchers fail to consider shared living arrangements. In addition, of those who do see their non-resident parent (so excluding those who never see their parents and so naturally never stay overnight), a significant minority (34 percent) never stay overnight (Smyth and Ferro 2002). Smyth (2004) suggests that overall research indicates that children of separated families do best when they have multifaceted relationships, including sleeping over, sharing meals and doing schoolwork, with both parents.

Argys et al (2003) compare estimates of father-child contact across a number of US studies. While they note that the various datasets provide quite different estimates of the proportion of children who see their non-resident father, some broad patterns are consistent across surveys. These include that only a relatively small proportion of children never have contact with their non-custodial father and that, equally, a significant number of children have regular contact. For example, based on parents' own reports of contact in the late 1980s, 80 percent of children with a separated father had contact with him; the comparable figure for children with a separated mother was 83 percent (Stewart 1999) (Table 6).

**Table 6:** Frequency of contact between absent child and non-resident father

<b>Frequency of contact</b>	<b>Number of non-resident fathers = 531</b>	<b>Number of non-resident mothers = 156</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Phone calls or letters to child</i>		
Not at all	20.1	17.1
About once a year	5.3	2.1
Several times a year	15.9	10.0
One to three times a month	21.9	23.3
About once a week	16.8	18.0
Several times a week	20.1	29.6
Total	100	100
<i>See child</i>		
Not at all	20.8	14.8
About once a year	8.7	9.7
Several times a year	18.2	17.8
One to three times a month	19.7	15.3
About once a week	16.3	13.8
Several times a week	16.4	28.7
Total	100	100
<i>Number of weeks child visits/lives with parent</i>		
None	68.3	50.6
1-4 weeks	17.6	13.3
Greater than 4 weeks	14.1	36.1
Total	100	100
Mean number of weeks	2.8	7.6

Source: Stewart (1999)

Note: Data drawn from the National Survey of Families and Households. Frequency of contact is measured over the previous 12 months.

Overall, US research suggests that among separated children from dissolved marital unions, roughly half of those in contact with their father are actively engaged with him on a steady basis (Seltzer and Brandreth 1994). Indications are that even fathers separated at the time of birth of the child are not 'absent' at the very early stage in the child's life (Carlson et al 2003; Teitler, 2001; Padilla and Reichman 2001).

Canadian longitudinal studies are now also providing useful data on family change and contact between children and both their parents when couples have separated. For example, Juby et al (2004) note the custody and visiting arrangements in place by 1998-99 for children whose parents had separated in the previous two years. They found that most parents had maintained close ties with their children within the relatively short period of time since the separation. Key findings were:

- > The parents of 13 percent of the children were living together again by 1998-99.
- > Almost two-thirds were living with their mother; of these, two-thirds saw their father on a regular weekly or two-weekly basis.
- > Only one child in 14 (7 percent) was living with their father full-time; of these, just under half saw their mother on a regular weekly or two-weekly basis.
- > One child in eight (12 percent) was living in shared custody, alternating between their mother's and father's home.
- > A minority of children (5 percent) fell outside the standard categories for a variety of reasons (eg in the care of someone other than a biological parent).

Overall, Juby et al note that 70 percent of the children were still in close contact with both parents two years after separation; under one-fifth had irregular contact with the other parent, and only 7 percent of children had no contact at all.

Norway provides an example of data from a non-English speaking country.<sup>27</sup> In Norway, the majority of non-resident parents also have regular contact with their children. However, slightly different measures are used relative to the United States and Australian data. In a 2004 survey, 97 percent of the respondents said that the non-resident parent had seen the child after the separation or birth of the child, 93 percent said that there had been contact in the previous year (much higher than the US and Australian data), and 79 percent said that there had been contact in the previous month. Based on the answers of both resident and non-resident parents, they found that non-resident parents had spent seven days with their child on average in the previous month (Table 7). They also found that the average number of contact days was somewhat lower than the number of agreement days.

The Norwegian surveys also confirm that the picture of non-resident parents' contact with their children depends on who is asked. Non-resident parents describe themselves as more actively involved with their children than do the resident parents. For instance, in the 2004 survey non-resident fathers reported that they had spent 8.0 days with their child last month, but according to the mothers this figure was 5.3 days.

**Table 7:** Average number of days with contact between the non-resident parent and the child during the previous month, based on answers from different groups of parents (%)

	<b>0 days</b>	<b>1-3 days</b>	<b>4-7 days</b>	<b>8-12 days</b>	<b>13+ days</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>Average</b>
All parents	21	10	26	26	18	100	7
Single mothers	26	13	29	23	9	100	5
Non-resident fathers	17	6	24	32	21	100	8
Single fathers	16	8	19	18	38	100	9
Non-resident mothers	9	6	11	19	55	100	11

Source: Survey on contact arrangements and child maintenance 2004, Statistics Norway

27 Norwegian data are drawn from two websites: [www.ssb.no/english/subjects/02/01/20/sambi\\_en/arkiv/art-2004-04-29-01-en.html](http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/02/01/20/sambi_en/arkiv/art-2004-04-29-01-en.html) and [www.ssb.no/english/subjects/02/01/20/sambi\\_en/main.html](http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/02/01/20/sambi_en/main.html)

The Norwegian data from the 2004 survey indicate that 87 percent of non-resident parents had spent at least one vacation with their child in the previous year. It was found that 26 percent had spent one or two vacations with their child, 44 percent had spent three or four vacations with their child, and 18 percent had spent at least five vacations with their child. The average number of vacations was 2.8.

When the Australian, Canadian, Norwegian and United States data are considered, one consistent pattern that emerges is that few 'sole-parent families' are truly sole-parent. Most children whose parents have separated have some form of ongoing contact with the parent they no longer live with full-time. There are strong indications that a notable proportion of separated parents are involved, 'authoritative' parents.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, despite the development of new data collections, the international picture of separated parents as parents, however, is far from complete. Research has only begun to touch on the wide variety of parenting involvement possible (eg Coley 2001), and only begun to address important measurement issues such as obtaining information from both parents (Sorensen 1997; Schaeffer, Seltzer and Dykema 1998).

## **5.2 PARENTS' VIEWS ON TIME WITH CHILDREN**

Some of the overseas studies also examine how much contact separated parents would like with their children. These indicate a level of dissatisfaction around post-separation parenting, especially for non-resident fathers. For example in Australia, Parkinson and Smyth (2003) found that many separated and divorced parents in Australia would like to see more contact occurring (75 percent of non-resident fathers; 40 percent of resident mothers). In addition, the same study noted that non-resident fathers with daytime-only contact report significantly lower levels of satisfaction with their relationship with their children than fathers who have overnight stays.

Also in Australia, Smyth et al (2001) found significant differences between resident mothers and non-resident fathers in their desires to change children's living arrangements. While few resident mothers (3 percent) wanted any change, 41 percent of non-resident fathers did. Around two-thirds of the dissatisfied fathers wanted children to reside with them while the remaining one-third desired joint 50/50 care.

In a 2004 Norwegian survey, 70 percent of the parents said that the contact arrangement worked well for the children, 17 percent said that it worked fairly well, and 13 percent said that it did not work very well. There was a small but significant increase in the proportion of parents who were positive about the contact arrangements, compared with the results from a similar survey in 2002. However, the researchers note that data were collected differently in the two surveys, mainly by telephone interviews in 2004 and mainly by postal questionnaires in 2002. They suggest that there is a stronger tendency for people to give socially desirable answers in a telephone interview than in a postal survey.

## **5.3 WHAT ENCOURAGES CONTACT?**

What encourages, or perhaps equally, what discourages contact between children and non-custodial parents? Clearly, death can remove one parent permanently, while prison can take them away from a family for either short or long periods of time. There are higher mortality rates for men than women in their prime childrearing ages, and a much higher imprisonment rate for men, so these ways of removing parents will affect fathers more than mothers. Both quantitative and qualitative data can tell us a little as to why some non-custodial parents spend little time with their children. Table 8 provides a selection of variables from the HILDA in Australia database, indicating the amount of contact fathers have with their children in relation to employment status, highest educational qualifications and income.

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28 'Authoritative parenting' is described in Amato (2004). It is useful for distinguishing between simply being present and playing an effective parenting role.

**Table 8:** Selected characteristics of separated/divorced non-resident fathers and co-parent fathers by care arrangement of their children (n=407), based on HILDA wave 1 data, % in each group

	<b>Little or no father-child contact (n=117)*</b>	<b>Daytime-only father-child contact (n=57)</b>	<b>'Standard' contact (n=202)#</b>	<b>Shared care (n=31)</b>
Employment status				
Full-time	60.5	62.6	79.1	** 67.5
Part-time	4.1	11.0	6.2	10.4
Not employed	35.4	26.5	14.7	22.1
Educational attainment				
Degree or higher	7.5	14.2	13.9	** 20.3
Other qualification	32.8	50.4	52.8	56.1
No qualifications	59.7	35.4	33.3	23.6
Personal income				
<\$15,000	43.9	38.3	21.7	** 39.7
\$15,001-\$35,000	24.8	36.6	25.9	28.7
>\$35,000	31.3	25.1	52.4	31.7
Satisfaction with contact				
Nowhere near enough	73.7	59.2	49.1	** 11.8
Not enough	6.2	14.2	25.7	18.2
About right	20.2	24.2	25.2	67.1
A little/way too much	0	2.5	0	2.9

\* As a proportion of total separated parents this group represented 29 percent of parents. Although there may be some differences in measurement, this is higher than the ABS estimate of parents having little or no contact. \*\*  $p < .01$  level (x2 test)

# When parent-child contact typically comprises alternate weekends and half school holidays this is a pattern commonly referred to as 'standard' contact or the '80/20' model.

It is important to note that these data do not tell us what happens to contact over time. If relationships tend to break down, then it is misleading to average outcomes at a particular time, or a certain length of time after separation. Nevertheless, there are some conclusions that we can tentatively draw from these selected data. They show that being out of paid work, having little education and, to a lesser degree having a low income, are all associated with a low level of father-child contact. However, when the section on satisfaction of contact is considered, it seems many of those with a low level of contact want more. Drawing on a number of studies and datasets, including both qualitative and quantitative data, on parental contact with their children, Smyth (2004: 126) notes:

Several possible drivers – not mutually exclusive – of paternal disengagement suggest themselves: fathers' own problems or issues (such as alcohol or substance abuse); new family responsibilities (especially the presence of a second set of natural children); a belief by fathers that their children may be better off without them, or that walking away is a way of dealing with grief, loss, ongoing conflict, role ambiguity, a sense of unfairness, and the "pain of contact visits – their brevity, artificiality, and superficiality" (Kruk 1993: 89); disengagement may also be a response to feeling disenfranchised by "the system" and/or a former partner (Braver and O'Connell 1998).

Smyth notes that the demographic data from the HILDA survey suggest that conflict, emotional and physical distance, new partners, and relative economic disadvantage feature prominently in the profile of parents who report little or no father-child contact.

He adds:

The individual stories of focus group members pointed to a similar list. In addition to some fathers' limited parenting skills were a lack of motivation, or poor social support, and perceived efforts by mothers to discourage or obstruct contact. Other significant issues for fathers also included the 'shallowness' of sporadic contact, and the pain of seeing their children adjusting poorly to the separation. In this respect, both the focus group and population-based data accord with key issues identified in research overseas (Dudley 1991; Kruk 1993).

These two quotes both reinforce the view that relationships can deteriorate over time. The association between poverty and lack of contact with children has also been noted in other studies (eg Child Trends 2002: 20). Yet, these studies show that even amongst the poor a significant number of parents have ongoing contact with their children after separation.

Norwegian data from 2004 indicate that the amount of monthly contact between non-resident parents and their children varies considerably between different groups. Parents living close to their children see their children more often than others; parents with young children see their children more often than parents with older children; those who have been married to the other parent have more contact than those who have never lived with the other parent; highly educated parents see their children more often than those with less education.

Formally establishing paternity early in a child's life also has been suggested to be a factor in ongoing contact. In the US, Mincy, Grossbard and Huang (2005) note that the US Congress, aiming to stem the growth of the welfare rolls and recoup the cost of public benefits, passed a series of amendments to the Social Security Act. These included provisions designed to increase paternity establishment for children born to unwed parents. Using longitudinal data from the Fragile Families Project, the researchers found that paternity establishment rates are now quite high within the population they studied, with six out of seven paternities being established in the hospital. We should be careful about reading too much into this, however. It may be a matter of getting a man's name on a document, rather than actually determining paternity.<sup>29</sup>

Mincy et al also found that, even after controlling for previously unavailable characteristics, establishing paternity (in and outside the hospital) was significantly and positively associated with formal and informal child support payments and father-child visitation.

## **5.4 HOW BENEFICIAL IS ONGOING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AFTER SEPARATION?**

Based on this very incomplete information, how beneficial is the involvement of separated parents in children's lives? Early studies registered meagre positive and some negative influences. However, more recent meta-analyses and reviews of research and key research projects, show separated parents making important positive contributions to children via child support, authoritative parenting and children's feelings of closeness (Dunn 2004; Amato and Gilbreth 1999). In addition, recent findings show the benefits of separated parents' involvement in children's school activities (National Center for Education Statistics 1998).

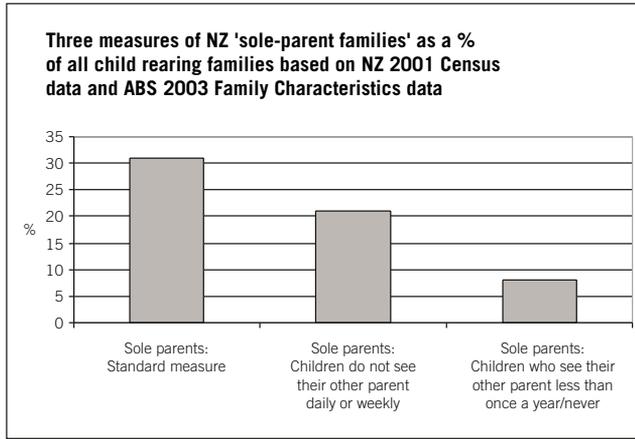
## **5.5 WHAT NEW ZEALAND 'SOLE-PARENT' FAMILIES MAY REALLY LOOK LIKE**

Finally, what do the overseas data suggest might be happening in New Zealand? As indicated early in the paper, New Zealand appears to have a significant number of sole-parent families. Based simply on Australian data, Figure 1 shows that many of these families may not in fact be sole parents. This emphasises even more the idea that we may be providing an incorrect idea of parenting patterns within society, by labelling all families where a child is considered to live the majority of their time with only one parent as 'sole-parent families'.

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<sup>29</sup> For example, the Law Commission (2004) discusses increasing "the number of fathers named on birth certificates" with the objective of achieving "increases in the percentage of named fathers" (para. 5.76). There seems to be less concern about men being wrongly named. The Care of Children Act 2004 Recommendation R3 of the Law Commission (2005) was for an extension of the legal presumption of paternity.

**Figure 1**



*Source: ABS and Statistics New Zealand*

## 6.0 CURRENT WAYS OF DEFINING FAMILIES AND COLLECTING DATA IN NEW ZEALAND

The ‘household’, a collection of individuals who usually reside alone or together in a dwelling unit, is what most statistical agencies, including Statistics New Zealand, focus on in their gathering of information. In their official set of definitions, Statistics New Zealand (1999) notes:

A household is either one person who usually resides alone or two or more people who usually reside together and share facilities (such as eating facilities, cooking facilities, bathroom and toilet facilities, a living area).

With a dwelling unit as the visible skin of a household, and dwelling units unlikely to move as one counts them, problems of omission or double-counting seem less problematic when using the household as the unit of observation rather than trying to count a population of people constantly in motion. Hence official surveys, including the census, have generally gathered information about individuals living in households, and this practice has received international support. For example, in its *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, the United Nations (1998) states that a family cannot comprise more than one household.

The complexities of families spanning household boundaries and the misconceptions this can create are illustrated by comparing what is available in New Zealand official surveys (such as the census, the Household Labour Force Survey and the Time Use Survey), with the more complicated picture that becomes apparent once across-household linkages are known. Keeping in mind Statistics New Zealand’s definition of a family nucleus,<sup>30</sup> Figure 2 shows examples of the standard kind of data collected for families in a variety of household settings. From such data social scientists generally obtain and publish two counts, that of (a) single-parent families and (b) single-parent households. Take the three households along the left side of Figure 2 (Households A, B and C). Households A, B and C can be interpreted as yielding four single-parent families (one a sub-family in the same household with another single-parent family). Equally, the data can be interpreted as yielding one single-parent household (Household A), one extended family household (Household B) and one two-family household (Household C). With our existing paradigm, a researcher trying to describe the real complexity in family forms might report one single-parent family household, two single-parent families within one household, and one single-parent family in an extended family household (eg Jackson and Pool 1996).

**Figure 2:** Across-household ties

### Two-household target child

Household A	Household AA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biological mother of target child A</li> <li>• Target child A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biological father of target child A who cares for that child every second weekend</li> <li>• Biological mother of non-target child</li> <li>• Non-target child</li> </ul>

### One-household target child

Household B	Household BB
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biological father of target child B</li> <li>• Target child B</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grandmother of target child B</li> <li>• Biological mother of target child B who does not care for that child</li> </ul>

### Two-household target child

Household C	Household CC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biological mother of target child C</li> <li>• Target child C</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biological mother of non-target child D</li> <li>• Non-target child D</li> <li>• Biological father of target child C who cares for that child every weekend and during school holidays</li> </ul>

<sup>30</sup> A family nucleus is “A couple, with or without child(ren), or one parent and their child(ren). The children do not have partners or children of their own living in the same household.”

This type of data offers no information on possible links across households. Therefore, to be strictly correct, each of the single-parent families should be described as a 'single-parent family segment within a household,' or, for ease, a 'single-parent family segment'. However, the term is commonly shortened in research, policy-making and everyday language to 'single-parent family'.

If surveys could identify family linkages across households it would be possible to gauge how complete each 'single-parent family' is at any point in time. Figure 2 provides information on across-household biological ties. Each right-hand side household contains a biological parent of the target child in the adjoining left-hand side household (ie, Household AA contains the biological father of the target child A in Household A). Recognising these ties, it is apparent that two of the target children in Households A, B and C have parents in other households who are actively involved in their care (the target child in Household A, with a parent in Household AA; and the target child in Household C, with a parent in Household CC). These are situations where the child has two biological parents residing in separate households but where the child has a high level of contact with the separated parent. Each of these target children in these situations is more accurately termed a 'two-household child'. With the additional information on cross-household links available, it is apparent that there is but one 'true' single-parent family – the one-household target child B situation.

The examples in Figure 2 are relatively straightforward in terms of whether separated parents are 'active' parents. As already discussed in reality, though, there is a continuum in the level and nature of parenting that separated parents offer their children and this may change over time. Hence, defining 'active' or 'involved' parents is not as straightforward as this illustration suggests.

## 7.0 IMPROVING NEW ZEALAND DATA COLLECTIONS

Before considering whether there is a need to develop specialist large-scale surveys that capture the true complexity of family ties and living arrangements in New Zealand, it is worth considering whether existing surveys, or ones under development, could be adapted. We initially consider the five-yearly Census of Population and Dwellings and then the Time Use Survey. A second Time Use Survey is planned for 2008/09, with data available in 2010. We then discuss New Zealand longitudinal studies including the Survey of Family, Income and Employment longitudinal survey (SoFIE). Two other planned official surveys, the Family Survey and the General Social Survey, are then discussed. Finally, some other ways of collecting data are considered, such as administrative datasets and qualitative data.

When considering developing new datasets or changing questions in existing surveys we need to consider why we need New Zealand data. For example, we may be able to rely on Australian data. One issue is that there may be some important ethnic-based differences in contact. Māori and Pacific children are much more likely to have separated parents than are European or Asian children (Davey 2003). We also know that Māori and Pacific mothers are over-represented amongst those living in 'sole-parent households' (that is without other adults or in the language of Statistics New Zealand 'one parent with child(ren)'), but are also over-represented amongst those living in extended family households (that is, mothers do not have the father living in the household, but other family members such as grandparents are present). It is likely there will be both cultural and poverty dimensions to these patterns (for example living in an extended household could be encouraged by facing poverty). To add even further complexity, we also know that many Māori and Pacific children record more than one ethnic group. Therefore there is an overlap between groups of interest. While there may be some behavioural parallel to groups overseas also facing poverty and high rates of parental separation, such as African Americans, it is possible that there are some unique parenting arrangements in New Zealand. This has major implications for sample size, including the possible need for oversampling of specific groups, in many surveys.

### 7.1 THE NEW ZEALAND CENSUS OF POPULATION AND DWELLINGS

In most industrialised countries, the main purpose of a population census is to define electoral boundaries. Another main purpose is to provide an official count of population and dwellings. However, the census also provides an opportunity for researchers to gather additional data, including household arrangements. In New Zealand, following each census, there are articles in both the popular media and in academia describing changes in households. Some of these articles endeavour to provide a picture of family change when in fact they are more accurately describing household change.

While the census is not primarily designed to capture information on family living arrangements, it is nevertheless an important survey for a number of reasons. Firstly, as indicated by its name, it aims to be a census rather than a sample of the population. It therefore has the potential to provide information on small population subgroups, including Māori. Other surveys have to oversample if they want to obtain useful samples of particular target populations.

Secondly, other large-scale surveys, such as the New Zealand Household Labour Force Survey and the New Zealand Time Use Survey, use census estimates to develop sampling frames.

A third reason is that the census includes people living in non-private dwellings. These include prisons, boarding houses and military camps. As Garfinkel, McLanahan and Hanson (1998) point out in the US, a significant number of non-custodial fathers (and presumably some non-custodial mothers) live in these settings.

Fourthly, in New Zealand a considerable amount of information is collected on individuals in the standard census form. Moreover, unlike many other countries the census is carried out every five years, not just every 10 years.

Yet despite the importance of the census, the questions currently asked show the impossibility of obtaining an estimate of the number of children spending time living in two households. Data are collected via two forms. There is one dwelling form per dwelling and an individual questionnaire for each person residing in that dwelling on census day. Neither form allows connections between non-

custodial parents and their children to be recorded. For example, question five of the individual 2001 form asked, “Where do you usually live?” In reference to this question the help notes state: “Children in joint custody should give the address where they spend most nights. If children spend equal amounts of time at different addresses, they should give one of those addresses.” Questions 18 to 20 of the 2001 dwelling form also asked the respondent to list and provide information about each person “who usually lives in this dwelling”. In the notes next to the question, the respondent is asked to include children away at boarding school, but there is no mention of children living with another parent.

New Zealand Census respondents are asked to record the information for the Tuesday night when the census is traditionally held.<sup>31</sup> Non-custodial parents in New Zealand generally have the children with them during weekends, while custodial parents have the children present during the week. Therefore, it is likely that few non-custodial parents have had their children with them on census night.

Given that the response rate and quality of data from the New Zealand Census is still relatively high, there is the potential to explore adding a question in the individual questionnaire. As the census covers people in non-household settings, such a question would need to specify the reference unit as the individual, not the household. In addition, instead of asking this as a negative question as is common in the US, (do you have children who do not live with you/in the household) it could be asked as ‘Do you have any biological or adopted children aged 18 or younger who live elsewhere?’<sup>32</sup> To be useful there would be a need to follow up with a child-specific question about what the elsewhere is – in the home of a separated parent, in boarding school, in college, in hospital, etc.<sup>33</sup> With such a set of questions it would also be possible to identify children who have been permanently adopted out, are in foster care, or are living with relatives other than a custodial parent. While adding such a question set does not provide any indication of time spent with such children, it would yield self-reports of employment, income, housing and other living circumstances of non-custodial parents, by identifying them as such. The question set would clearly need extensive pre-testing to assess the quality of responses and success of non-custodial parents identifying themselves as such. Under-identification of non-custodial parents is a distinct possibility, as research in the US suggests (Sorensen 1997). Social stigma attached to the non-custodial parent role may be the source of reluctance to self-identify; if so, then efforts to improve the image of non-custodial parents may be important in securing good information about them. A question asked in this way assumes that the parent is the unit of analysis rather than the child. Equally, a question could be tested that endeavours to find out if a child has a parent they spend time with but live with less than half the time.

There are, however, a number of potential problems in using the census to assess cross-household links. First, the next census that could contain a set of new questions would be 2011. Second, the census questionnaire is already ‘full’ and adding a further question(s) would have to be considered carefully. Third, the census is self-completed. Therefore questions have to be relatively simple. Fourth, adding quite complex and potentially personally intrusive questions may reduce overall response rates. It may be that these problems in the end outweigh the potential benefits of using the census to collect data on links across households.

Another option is to use the census as a screening tool for a more in-depth follow-up study. An example of how this has been done in the past is the disability survey that followed the 2001 census. This would require a short question on the census as to whether a parent had a child living in another household full-time or part of the time. These parents could then be followed up and interviewed.

## 7.2 THE NEW ZEALAND TIME USE SURVEY

Potentially, time use studies targeted at the general population could collect some data on the time non-custodial parents spend with the children. The New Zealand Time Use Survey, carried out in the late 1990s, seemed especially suited to this, given its relatively large sample size, its high response rate and its design; spreading the sample across the week (thus covering weekends when children often visit non-custodial parents) and across the year (including school holidays). For this time use survey three questionnaires were used. One gathered demographic information about the household, another about the individual and the third was the actual time diary. Both the household and personal questionnaires were interviewer-administered, allowing some complex in-depth questioning. While the unit of analysis was the household, there was still the potential to record childcare time of children by

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31 In New Zealand between 1874 and 1921 census day was on a Sunday because people usually stayed at home on this day, but as week-end travel increased in popularity the day was changed to a Tuesday (Statistics New Zealand 2002b).

32 The age 18 is used simply as an illustration. If appropriate another age could be used.

33 The dwelling form of the New Zealand Census asks for children away at boarding school to be counted as usually living in the dwelling. In both the New Zealand Census forms, college students are not to be included as usual residents of the household.

non-custodial parents, if this information had been gathered or coded. However, in terms of the unpaid work of looking after children only two codes were possible. The first was 'unpaid work for your own household' and within this a category 'looking after a child who lives in the same household as you'. The second was 'informal unpaid work outside of the home' and 'looking after a child who does not live in the same household as you'. Neither coding adequately describes a non-custodial parent caring for his or her own biological child who is visiting. It is unclear how such parents would have recorded this type of childcare, and an important opportunity to record such work was lost.

We suggest that a future time use survey should collect some data on care of children by separated parents. Detailed ways in which time use surveys can collect data on care across households is explored in Appendix 3.

## 7.3 LONGITUDINAL STUDIES

Even if new questions were to be added to the New Zealand Census or via a time use survey, the information gathered would still be limited. In order to more fully understand complex patterns of parenting, new surveys of families are needed. Some of these surveys could use the children as the centre of analysis.<sup>34</sup> Longitudinal studies, especially those started at birth, naturally lend themselves to using the child as the centre of analysis even if, in their early years of life, it is a parent who answers the questionnaires.

New Zealand has two longstanding longitudinal studies, the Christchurch Health and Development Study and the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study. Both were started in the 1970s, a time when parental separation was less common. Although the studies have been used to compare outcomes for children raised by couples who stayed together versus those who did not, as far as we are aware neither study has delved into connections with separated parents.

Statistics New Zealand's Survey of Family, Income and Employment (SoFIE) is an eight-year longitudinal study of income, labour force participation, educational training, asset accumulation and family structure, which includes children in the target population (Statistics New Zealand 2000). The survey commenced in October 2002. Although information about children's income and labour market activity is not collected, information about their family income and parental circumstances is likely to be useful.

In SoFIE, just as adults have a longitudinal record with both individual and family variables stored, a record is also created for children. This contains their personal demographic information, as well as any family information, such as standard of living, family type and family income. However, virtually all the data on children are derived from other people's records, except for a small amount of personal data (name, sex, age, ethnic group, and family spell information) collected about them by proxy.

In SoFIE, children were selected as original sample members at wave 1 in the same way as adults (ie if their household was selected). They were then tracked if they moved away from their original dwelling.

The second wave of SoFIE data was available in late 2005. These data need to be investigated to assess their use in understanding parenting across households. However, while some information on complex families may come out of this survey, it is unlikely that it will provide much.

Appendix 4 sets out details on longitudinal studies carried out in Australia, Canada and the US, including some examples of the questions asked on the care of children by separated parents, and flows of financial resources across households. There are examples of both large-scale random sample surveys, such as the HILDA survey, as well as small-scale specialist panel surveys including the US Fragile Families Study. The US Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study may provide a particularly useful guide for developing a focused policy-related survey. It is not a random survey of families, but instead follows a new cohort of 'unwed' parents and their children over four years. In this study there is a particular interest in fathers, and issues being investigated include expectations about fathers' rights and responsibilities, mother-father relationships, and how many fathers want to be involved in raising their children. As the name suggests, the survey is targeting potentially fragile families. These are generally low-income families and include those where parenting may not be optimal in terms of child development and wellbeing. While there are real difficulties in undertaking such a study, the results are potentially of great use in designing family policy and family support systems. When drawing up the sample for the new New Zealand child longitudinal study it may be worth drawing a subsample of 'fragile' families.

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<sup>34</sup> There are a number of compelling reasons to use the child as the unit of analysis. For example in New Zealand family policy is increasingly being influenced by a need to comply with the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC).

## 7.4 A SPECIALIST FAMILY SURVEY

Both the US and Australia provide examples of cross-sectional family characteristic studies that are attached as modules to labour force surveys. These surveys can identify a range of family forms and have gathered information on custody arrangements, contact with non-custodial parents and support payments from non-custodial parents to the custodial parent. However, such surveys do not cover people living in non-private dwellings.

Statistics New Zealand has already decided that a dedicated family survey is needed to produce data on the variety of family types existing in New Zealand today, including those that extend across households. In a background paper on the survey, they note that such a survey would also provide a vehicle for measuring family formation and dissolution, and the ways in which families are connected to wider social networks (Statistics New Zealand 2005a). Such a survey is planned as a household survey, with the survey to be in the field in 2008/09 and data available in 2010. It is proposed that the survey would be repeated 10-yearly. It would be useful if the Australian experiences were drawn on in designing this survey.

## 7.5 GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY

A General Social Survey (GSS) is planned for 2008 (Statistics New Zealand 2005b). This will be run by Statistics New Zealand. While the exact content of the questions is still under discussion, the key objectives of the GSS are to:

- > provide timely data on a range of social domains at the same time for the same individuals
- > enable analysis of the interrelationship of outcomes across domains, including the exploration of multiple disadvantage
- > provide a base for measuring changes in social outcomes over time and across population groups, using both self-assessed and objective measures
- > provide data on social wellbeing that is not available from other sources.

## 7.6 ADMINISTRATIVE DATASETS

Administrative datasets offer some potential to understanding of new complex family structures. There are a number of potential advantages with administrative data including: there may be less of a response burden if the information can be captured easily as part of the general administration process; data from administrative datasets may be able to be matched against other data, which helps to build up a bigger picture; and there is likely to be a much lower non-response rate than with other types of data collection, although there are always likely to be missing values in any dataset.

Key areas where administrative data can be useful are for child support payments and information from the family court processes. In relation to child support, Blank and Ellwood (2002) note that a key part of the US welfare reform was to strengthen child support enforcement. This process involves several steps: establishing paternity; getting an award in place and determining the amount of the award; locating the separated parents (if, for example, the whereabouts of the liable parent is unknown); and collecting the award. Blank and Ellwood report that there were major problems in locating far fathers because administrative datasets provided limited information, and having a high proportion of interstate cases exacerbated this. They note that a vast new system was put in place to track these parents. This included a national new hire reporting system, where employers are required to collect and immediately report to the state the names and social security numbers of all new hires. There was also expanded data-matching and new penalties introduced for those with unpaid child support. However, the administrative-based measures omit payments that are made in a variety of non-official ways (Coley 2001), and they provide no information on emotional support.

Unfortunately, data on award of custody has not been collected since 1990.<sup>35</sup> Even if such data were available, they would not tell us what happened subsequently, whether the orders were followed or if the arrangements were later changed unofficially. We also have little information on cases that are not resolved through the courts or which have made their own child support arrangements. Nevertheless, there may be some relevant data in existing datasets, so it could be worth the Families Commission undertaking a survey across government agencies to determine what data on separated families can be obtained from these administrative datasets.

## 7.7 INSTITUTIONAL POPULATIONS

A large share of men living in institutional settings, whether in prison or the military, are fathers, yet in all industrialised countries, including New Zealand, large-scale national surveys of the otherwise total population generally exclude the institutionalised population (Cherlin and Griffith 1998).<sup>36</sup> For example the Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) in New Zealand excludes those in institutions. Any survey that 'clips onto' the HLFS will therefore also miss this population. For this reason the Australian Family Characteristics survey does not include those living in institutions. Some special surveys, though, focus exclusively on the institutionalised population. In the United States, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) initiates numerous surveys of inmates in prisons, halfway houses or probation agencies. These include the Survey of Adults on Probation (SAP), the Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities (SISCF), the Survey of Inmates in Federal Correctional Facilities (SIFCF) and the Survey of Inmates in Local Jails (SILJ). Although most of the content in these surveys is focused on criminal justice issues, questions have been asked about father involvement with children before incarceration, and current contact with children.

## 7.8 QUALITATIVE STUDIES

Research using quantitative data addresses some kinds of questions. For others, qualitative or mixed method research can best inform policy-makers, especially when the questions being investigated include lived experience, complex interactions and subjective beliefs and attitudes.

While this paper focuses on quantitative data sources, it is already recognised amongst 'fatherhood researchers' that qualitative data are important. In a United States paper designed to help researchers, practitioners and policy-makers conceptualise, examine and measure change in fathering behaviours in relation to child and family wellbeing, the National Center on Fathers and Families (2001: 51) notes:

There is considerable consensus among practitioners and researchers that both quality and quantity of father involvement needs to be assessed. To this end, the indicators must reflect quantitative studies and data sources as well as employ both qualitative and action research methodologies that permit the voices of community, family members, fathers, and children to be heard and the contexts of child rearing to be more fully understood and described.

Similarly, in Australia, good use has been made of qualitative data sources. For example, in 2003 Australian researchers conducted a series of focus group interviews with 56 separated/divorced parents (27 mothers, 29 fathers) who had at least one child under the age of 18 years, as part of a wider study on family separation (Smyth 2004). This was a good example of a mixed methods research project. In order to place the small-scale, qualitative focus group data in the wider national picture, the researchers explored the extent to which different patterns of parenting may be linked to certain demographic elements in the general population of separated/divorced parents. This involved drawing on data extracted from wave 1 of the HILDA survey.

Finally, as discussed earlier in the paper, it was qualitative research carried out in New Zealand that helped demonstrate that children often retain strong bonds to 'blood' links, even in cases where the parents hardly communicate at all (Fleming and Atkinson 1999).

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35 Hon D.A.M. Graham (Minister of Justice), answer to question for written answer no. 204, lodged 20 February 1996, New Zealand Parliamentary Debates: Question Supplement, vol. 23, 20 February-4 April 1996, page 5103.

36 The census, however, covers all of the population.

## 8.0 SOME ISSUES TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN DESIGNING NEW DATA COLLECTIONS

As discussed earlier in the paper, having contact does not necessarily mean being an involved parent. The US National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) suggests a need to focus on three aspects of father involvement (NCOFF 2001). These are: *responsibility*, *availability* and *engagement*. Responsibility refers to the role a father takes in ascertaining that the child is cared for and arranging for the availability of resources. Availability is a related concept concerning the father's potential for interaction, by virtue of being present or being accessible to the child (whether or not direct interaction is occurring). Engagement refers to the father's direct interaction or contact with his child through caregiving and shared activities. NCOFF researchers suggest that there is general consensus among social and behavioural scientists, that measuring these three aspects of father-child relations provides the best opportunity for an assessment of the potential impact of fathers' behaviours on child development. Other researchers, notably Amato (2004), refer to 'authoritative' parenting as being important.<sup>37</sup>

After reviewing a number of US longitudinal studies, Argys et al (2003) made a number of recommendations on the design of questions about contact between children and their non-resident parents. Firstly, information should be collected about the various types of contact. They recommend that overnight contact should be distinguished from day visits, and that data should also be gathered on contact by phone or letter. Subsequently, the use of the internet has increased, as has texting. Custodial parents may have limited knowledge about the extent of such contact.

Secondly, Argys et al note that the timing of contact may also be important. Longer periods of irregular contact may or may not be a good substitute for the same amount of contact spread more evenly throughout the year. The Australian Institute of Family Studies also notes that it is important to distinguish between daytime only contact and overnight stays in research, because the latter provides greater opportunities for family activities to occur, which encourages emotional bonds to develop between children and their non-resident parents.<sup>38</sup>

Thirdly, the researchers note that father-child contact, and the type of father-child contact, vary through the child's lifecycle. They suggest that longer visitation and phone calls may replace more regular daytime contact as a child reaches adolescence. Legally specified living arrangements will also potentially change over time, therefore it may be important to determine the patterns of contact at different ages. Longitudinal or retrospective reports of agreements and contact should therefore be collected.

Argys et al note that agencies that most frequently interact with parents and children from non-intact families are typically focused on establishing and enforcing a child support award. However, legal agreements between such parents often go far beyond this measure of financial contributions by non-resident parents. Legal agreements specify custody, and often include an agreement regarding physical custody and visitation. Argys et al note that current data collection that provides measures of compliance with child support awards, is inadequate to measure compliance with visitation. Researchers generally have no ability to determine whether or not parents are complying with visitation orders, much less to understand why. Other questions that need to be answered include: Are non-resident parents willingly reducing their visitation? Are residential parents interfering with visitation? Is this in response to non-payment of child support, or is non-payment linked to obstructed access?

Like many other researchers, Argys et al note that data indicating the prevalence and frequency of contact between a non-resident parent and their child vary substantially depending upon the source of the information. For example, mothers consistently report that fathers are less likely to see their children than do the fathers. Again focusing on mothers as custodial parents, conditional on having some father-child contact, mothers also report fewer days of contact as compared to the same reports by fathers.

Representation of information from both parents may be important to gain a more accurate picture of interactions between non-resident fathers and their children. Interviewing fathers would allow us to understand better the circumstances of fathers who choose not to be involved with their children.

Finally, Argys et al suggest that questions about the activities in which non-resident parents and their children are engaged, and assessment of the quality of their relationship, should be incorporated into surveys designed to examine child wellbeing.

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37 There can be definitional problems in identifying the tasks which should be considered as parenting. Hassall and Maxwell included among the activities of a 'primary caregiver' tasks which required no direct parent-child contact, such as shopping, cooking, sewing, ironing and cleaning, but they omitted other tasks such as earning to house, clothe, feed and otherwise provide for a child's needs (Hassall and Maxwell 1992: 75).

38 [www.aifs.gov.au/institute/info/charts/contact/index.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/info/charts/contact/index.html). There may also be differences between weekend and weekday contact in terms of activities, involvement with school and community, supervision of homework, etc.

## 9.0 NEW ANALYTICAL TECHNIQUES

Complex cross-household data challenge standard analytical techniques. As suggested by Cherlin and Griffith (1998) and family process researchers in the US, network and complex systems approaches may offer valuable insights. These approaches, coupled with the construct of the mother-child-father triad, offer the potential for a more comprehensive view of family life, which includes parents actively engaged in beneficial parenting roles without assuming that their children live full-time with them. In New Zealand, Hillcoat-Nallétamby (2002) has undertaken some exploratory work with data she has collected. However, further experimentation is needed. Again, New Zealand researchers are likely to be able to learn from experiments being carried out in other countries.

## 10.0 THE LANGUAGE DIMENSION

The briefing document to the then newly formed Families Commission (2004: 9) notes that:

There is **great diversity in the form** of families in New Zealand today – couples with children, sole parents, parents who don't live with their children but are still involved, same sex couples (some with children), and many family members who have ties of support across households and generations.

The statement “parents who don't live with their children but are still involved” is an attempt to describe a largely invisible family type, yet the sentence is clumsy. Family types are evolving rapidly, as in recent decades, yet the language to describe them accurately may not keep pace. However, the rapid growth in the diversity and complexity of family types and parenting arrangements make it especially important to describe families in accurate terms. The shorthand that has developed for use in research and policy debates, and especially that loosely employed by the popular media, works against acknowledging such complexity. It is much easier, for example, to describe children as simply being raised by ‘sole mothers’ or in ‘single-parent families’ than to talk about the real complexity in parenting arrangements and children's lives. Moreover, the same terms are sometimes used with quite different meanings. For example, under the Child Support Act 1991, ‘shared parenting’ means that a child whose parents live apart is spending at least 40 percent of nights in each household. On 28 January 2006, *The New Zealand Herald* reported on a ruling by Judge Ian McHardy, “...and then, if things go well, a shared parenting arrangement with the father having the children one day a week and every second weekend” (Barton 2006).<sup>39</sup>

New terms have already emerged for families that re-form within households, with the terms ‘step family’ and ‘blended family’ in common usage.<sup>40</sup> In relation to families that cross household boundaries, the development of new and accurate terms to describe these families has been more difficult. While terms such as ‘father who no longer lives with the mother of his children’ are appearing in our written literature, they are cumbersome. Terms such as ‘absent father’, while potentially an incorrect description of connection with his children, are easier to use. Similarly, ‘fatherless family’ is a phrase that has been used by some groups when promoting the idea of shifting back to living in traditional families (eg Blankenhorn 1995). With a more sympathetic view towards differing family arrangements, Duncan and Edwards (1997: 30) use the term ‘lone mothers’ for ‘all mothers bringing up children without a resident partner’. When researchers, policy-makers and the general public refer to a group of separated fathers as ‘deadbeat dads’<sup>41</sup> (Reichert 1999, Sorensen 1997), because they are not paying child support, they are likely to focus only on enforcement of child support awards, rather than expanding the vision to include ways to bolster earning power, or recognise potential contributions from social involvement with their separated children. In the US, among blacks the term ‘baby father’ has become a popular way to call an unwed father who does not live with his child's mother (Mincy, Garfinkel and Nepomnyaschy 2005).

However, even when more care is used in the language of social science and policy-making there are still some difficulties. Terms commonly used in the research literature are ‘non-custodial’ parent or ‘non-resident’ parent. The literature is mixed in its use of the terms ‘non-resident’ and ‘non-custodial’, typically giving no clear justification for the use of one term over the other. ‘Non-custodial’ is not an ideal term. It is a legal term and reflects a legally sanctioned unequal division of custody which some argue discriminates against fathers (Braver and Griffin 2000).<sup>42</sup> There are also parents who truly share custody and the care of their children for whom ‘non-custodial’ is an inaccurate term. Parallel problems apply to terms such as ‘primary caregiver’. The term ‘non-resident’ has problems as well, in that it implies the ‘family’ is where the child lives most of the time and the other parent is not a ‘resident’ of that family. When that child is with the non-resident parent the parent is the resident parent. Furthermore, the ‘non’ prefix is negative and suggests deviance. While some parents who have been separated from their children may well engage in activities potentially destructive to their children or former partners, a sizable portion can, and do, engage in constructive parenting and co-operative

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39 Shared parenting is a highly sensitive political area in New Zealand and overseas, and so it is surprising that data are not available and the terminology is so loosely applied.

40 According to an Australian Bureau of Statistics glossary a ‘step family’ is “a couple family containing one or more children, none of whom is the natural or adopted child of both members of the couple, and at least one of whom is the step child of either member of the couple. A step family may also include other children who are not the natural children of either parent.” A ‘blended family’ is “a couple family containing two or more children, of whom at least one is the natural or adopted child of both members of the couple, and at least one is the step child of either member of the couple. Blended families may also include other children who are not the natural children of either parent.”

41 Otherwise termed ‘beat dead dads’ by some fathers’ groups. Sometimes the term ‘deadbroke’ is also used in relation to low-income non-custodial fathers (Talvi 2002).

42 In a survey, which included a question about possible favouritism within the Arizona legal system in relation to divorce, Braver & Griffin noted that 25 percent of mothers thought the system was slanted towards mothers (two-thirds took a neutral position). Significantly more men, 74 percent, thought it favoured mothers.

sharing of parenting responsibilities. These various terms have sufficient problems to prompt us to look for something different.

Hill and Callister (2003) have explored the phrases 'inside' and 'outside' parent. However, again there are problems with this terminology. It portrays an image of there being one real family unit with any parent not living full-time inside that unit being an 'outsider'. It also excludes those situations of equal shared parenting. A further possibility is 'near' and 'far' parents, the 'near parent' being the one the child spends most time with. However, this language is not appropriate in situations of truly shared post-separation parenting.

'Separated' parent is an expression with the appeal that it is more neutral in terms of its implications regarding primary or secondary parent status and more readily lends itself to complementary terms for parent and child. 'Separated' child is a fitting name for the child no matter which of the parent's homes he or she is residing in at the time. However, when 'separated' is applied to 'parents' the term poses the problem that the parents may never have been married or cohabited, or, if they had been married, that they are not yet divorced.

There have been attempts in the past to develop new language to describe parenting across households. For example, in the early 1980s Ahrons and Perlmutter (1982) suggested the expression 'binuclear family' but this never caught on. Co-parenting has also been used infrequently. More recently the phrases 'two-household' child, 'two-home' child and 'shared' child have been suggested (eg, see Birks 2000, 2001a&b, for early use of some of these latter terms). The first two terms tend to capture, from children's perspective, the notion that they alternate between the residences of their different parents. 'Shared' child captures this notion from the perspective of the parents but carries the connotation of child as a possession of the parents. What tends to differentiate the 'two-household' and 'two-home', at least in the authors' minds, is that 'two-home' conveys more clearly a situation of joint physical custody. Not all children with separated parents would be classified as a 'two-household' or a 'two-home' child; only those with active separated parents would be. Other researchers have developed a more complex continuum of father types that relate both to household structure and involvement with children. For example Deschamps (2004) uses 'divorced dads' to describe non-residential men who provide economic support and fun, but avoid the more mundane, responsible aspects of parenting. She calls 'traditional' those fathers who take parenting one step further and are more likely to engage in co-operative parenting.<sup>43</sup> 'Out of house dads' in the Deschamps study had a high level of all aspects of measured parenting, despite not residing with their children.

Terms long in use are listed in Appendix 5 along with some proposed new ones that take more of a cross-household perspective. The list at a minimum reveals a need for new terms, as some newly coined ones improve accuracy and some fill a void.

New Zealand policy-makers have already recognised the power of language in relation to the Family Court. Changes to language were an important part of debates around the Care of Children Bill during its consideration in 2004. In a Ministry of Justice glossary, 'day-to-day' care is defined as "having a child live with you on a daily basis, and being responsible for everyday things, like making sure they are safe, that they get to school, and that they are warm and properly fed".<sup>44</sup> Day-to-day care used to be called 'custody'. 'Contact' is 'when a child spends time with a parent or other person who does not have day-to-day care of the child'. Contact used to be called 'access'.<sup>45</sup> A 'parenting agreement' is 'where separated parents or guardians set out their own arrangements for looking after the children'. Parenting agreements usually deal with arrangements for day-to-day care, arrangements for contact with the children, or other issues to do with the children's care, development and upbringing (such as school or religion). Finally, a 'parenting order' made by the Family Court says who is responsible for day-to-day care of a child, and when and how someone else important in the child's life can have contact with them. Parenting orders can be enforced just like any other order of the court. Parenting order is the new name for custody or access order.

Finally, Appendix 5 sets out some further examples of current and new terms to describe parenting across households and, through a search of the internet, indicates how commonly these terms are being used. It indicates, as yet, little use of new terminology.

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43 There is also a term, 'parallel parenting' for situations where both parents are actively engaged, but co-operation between them is minimal. See, for example, Stahl (1999).

44 [www.justice.govt.nz/family/glossary/](http://www.justice.govt.nz/family/glossary/)

45 The terminology is not exactly interchangeable. Under the Child Support Act any parent with whom a child spent less than 40 percent of nights is termed non-custodial and therefore could not be considered to have custody. Also, under the Care of Children Act, contact "includes all forms of direct and indirect interaction with the child" (Care of Children Act 2004, section 8). Indirect contact would cover such things as phone, email or letter, whereas terms of access generally placed no boundaries on these. It may be the case that, in future, more parents will each have periods of day-to-day care, rather than one having custody and the other having access.

## 11.0 DEVELOPING A NEW ZEALAND RESEARCH STRATEGY ON PARENTING ACROSS HOUSEHOLDS

Even if we could develop satisfactory databases in the future, this does not solve all the data problems in this area. Firstly, data to date misrepresent the situation for families with financial and personal links across households. We will not be able to look backwards to compare these family structures over time with any ease, unless we rely on people's recollections of their past behaviour. Secondly, research to date, and possibly for some time into the future, is shaped by current data sources with all their inherent weaknesses. Findings from such studies have to be viewed with caution. Thirdly, policies and practice, including 'best practice', have been developed on a foundation of existing research. It would be prudent to have a thorough reappraisal of this research, policy and practice to identify possible resulting distortions.

In addition, it would not be easy to gather improved data. There are some options that could be considered, a combination of which could be helpful.

- > A question on cross-household parenting could be added to the census. It would have to be a fairly crude measure, given the range and complexity of arrangements, possibly doing no more than identifying target households for further study. The earliest that any new data from this source could be obtained is 2011, so results from a follow-up survey might not be available for nearly 10 years.
- > A new time use survey would be better suited to consideration of care across households, and could include grandparent care etc. It would be a major lost opportunity if this were not covered.
- > The specialist family survey, currently under development by Statistics New Zealand, could be a feasible short-term solution to the dearth of data, and it could be repeated regularly. Families and family arrangements are, by their nature, dynamic, and it is important to monitor changes over time. This could be done by repeat surveys, or by including backward-looking questions.
- > The General Social Survey, also currently under development, may also provide some basic data on links across households.
- > The new child longitudinal survey currently under development should consider including a module exploring some links to separated parents. At the time of writing this report we had not seen the final design of the study. However, given that it is proposed that the child will be the unit of analysis, this option would seem quite feasible.
- > Ideally, given that data are being gathered to assist in policy evaluation, a targeted 'Fragile Families Survey' would be undertaken, covering the families of most interest to policy-makers, although these are also commonly the most difficult people to reach. Care would still be needed to address dynamic issues.
- > Administrative data are inevitably limited. For example, even if we know Family Court decisions on the care of children, they apply to only a proportion of children whose parents live apart, and we would not know how long the arrangements were complied with, if at all. Nevertheless, it should be possible to greatly improve on the availability of current data, little of which is processed into an analysable form.
- > No single data source is likely to provide the range of information needed to describe accurately the wide range of family arrangements that exist. For the foreseeable future we are likely to have to rely on a number of sources, while being aware of the limitations of each of them. Overall, we cannot afford to give too many resources to this topic, so we will have to rely heavily on overseas research, bearing in mind possible differences due to cultural, legislative and economic factors. In New Zealand there are important ethnic dimensions to childrearing arrangements, and this seems to be the biggest argument for having our own data.

In addition, quantitative data could usefully be complemented by qualitative studies.

## 12.0 CONCLUSION

This paper shows that there is no simple classification of families. To fully understand families, it is necessary to consider them from the perspectives of individual participants, considering their relationships to others. We may well observe overlapping but distinct sets of relationships. The paper also demonstrates that research on families cannot be considered as a passive exercise, in that the approaches taken and the concepts used affect how families are seen. Similarly, the data that are gathered constrain our research, although the resulting influence on research questions and answers is not always acknowledged. It is important that we both recognise the limitations of our work, and aim to improve the data so as to reflect more accurately the richness and diversity of family life.

While popular discourse often focuses on what parents 'do' rather than family structures, what they 'do' is still constrained by data collections that acknowledge parents only when they live full-time in the same household as their child.

In policy debates children's families are still commonly portrayed as comprised either of intact two-parent families (biological or stepparent) or 'single-parent families'. Yet there is considerable diversity in parenting arrangements, and one major group is often overlooked. These are the children of separated biological parents who, to varying degrees, have two active parents and two households. Despite the prevalence of this separated family type in all industrialised countries, much is yet to be learned about it, especially from the perspective of the children in these families.

Given the small size of New Zealand and our limited resources, we will inevitably continue to rely heavily on overseas studies. However, this paper has also suggested some ways in which New Zealand data collections could be improved.

As well as there being gaps in data collections, the language of research and policy debates is lagging behind the changes in family types. Many of the words currently used, such as 'non-custodial' parent and 'non-resident' parent have connotations of exclusion rather than inclusion. In some situations this will reflect reality, but in others the terms are misleading.

We urge careful attention to language. While most researchers try to differentiate between single-parent households and single-parent families, the term 'single-parent family' can still be found in many research publications even when it is quite clear that the children involved have two active parents. The term 'single-parent family' is also commonly used in policy debates and in everyday language.

It has long been understood that language is important in shaping our understanding of the world. Strauss (1959: 15) for example, stresses the importance of language on the information and transformation of identity, noting, "[a]ny name is a container; poured into it are the conscious or unwitting evaluations of the namer". Furthermore, altering names is "a rite of passage" with a passage to a "new self image" (Strauss, 1959: 16, 17). We suggest that the use of new, more accurate terms, such as 'separated' child, 'two-home' child and 'two-household' child, are worth exploring as 'a rite of passage', moving research and policy-making to a better fit with the complex realities of 21st century families.

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# APPENDIX 1

Some of the shortcomings of the information collected on families and relationships across households were discussed in the consultation process for the 2006 content round and are discussed in the final report on content (Statistics New Zealand 2003: 20). For example:

An important issue raised during this consultation was the representation of two-household children (ie children who have two active parents living in separate households and spend time living with each parent).

The report goes on to note:

Another aspect of families and households that users raised was the relationship between household members. It needs to be sufficiently detailed to allow step-parents and step-siblings to be identified and to distinguish these situations from those in which family members are all biologically related. Currently in New Zealand there is very little information available on biological households and blended households.

Then in a section with the heading 'Possible Solutions and Further Work Required' the paper states:

Although there is clearly a need for more detailed information on families and households, users' views on whether this information could be obtained from the census were mixed. Some made suggestions for changes or additions to census questions, but others felt that the complexities of contemporary families and households would be more accurately captured through a separate sample survey, or that this information should only be obtained from the census if the census was the sole option for collecting it. Also raised was the issue that better use of existing information should be undertaken before making any changes to the census.

An alternative perspective given during consultation was that the issues relating to family measurement could be overcome if the users of the data recognised its limitations, and that the difficulty lies in what is done with census data (eg using information about the proportion of one-parent families as a measure of social deprivation or 'risk') rather than in the data itself, and that this should not be regarded as a significant issue for the census. In any case, it is important that users understand the data, and Statistics New Zealand will explore ways of informing users about the limitations of the family and household data.

Further work is required to investigate possible amendments and determine how users' needs can best be met. During consultation there was support for further research into issues relating to families and households. Statistics New Zealand has already made some progress on this work. A review of information needs in the families and households area is currently under way. A specialist family survey may be the best option for collecting complex family information.

## APPENDIX 2

Details of the types of family and household data collected, and associated definitions, from the five-yearly New Zealand Census, can be found in the Statistics New Zealand publication '2006 Census of Population and Dwellings: Final report on content' (2003). Some of the key definitions are:

### FAMILY TYPE

Family Type is a derived variable that classifies family nuclei according to the presence or absence of couples, parents and children.

### FAMILY NUCLEUS

A couple, with or without child(ren), or one parent and their child(ren). The children do not have partners or children of their own living in the same household.

### HOUSEHOLD

Either one person usually living alone, or two or more people usually living together and sharing facilities (eg eating facilities, cooking facilities, bathroom and toilet facilities, a living area), in a private dwelling.

### HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Household composition is the variable that classifies households according to the relationships between people in households.

A household is either one person who usually resides alone or two or more people who usually reside together and share facilities (such as eating facilities, cooking facilities, bathroom and toilet facilities, a living area).

For more information see:

[www2.stats.govt.nz/domino/external/omni/omni.nsf/wwwglsry?openview&count=500](http://www2.stats.govt.nz/domino/external/omni/omni.nsf/wwwglsry?openview&count=500)

#### **Census household composition classification (from 2001 Census National Summary):**

Couple only

Couple only and other person(s)

Couple with child(ren)

Couple with child(ren) and other person(s)

One parent with child(ren)

One parent with child(ren) and other person(s)

One-family household, not further defined

Total one-family households

Two 2-parent families(1)

One 2-parent family and a 1-parent family(1)

Two 1-parent families

Other 2-family household

Two-family household, not further defined

Total two-family households

Three- or more family household (with or without other people)

Household of related people

Household of related and unrelated people

Household of unrelated people

Other multiperson household, not further defined

Total other multiperson household

One-person household

Household composition unidentifiable(2)

Total

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**Census family by child dependency status classification:**

Couple without children

Couple with children

Couple with dependent child(ren) only

Couple with adult child(ren) only

Couple with adult and dependent children only

Couple with dependent child(ren) and at least one child with unknown dependency status

Couple with adult child(ren) and at least one child with unknown dependency status

Couple with adult and dependent children and at least one child with unknown dependency status

Couple with child(ren), all dependency status unknown

Total couples with children

One parent with children

One parent with dependent child(ren) only

One parent with adult child(ren) only

One parent with adult and dependent children only

One parent with dependent child(ren) and at least one child with unknown dependency status

One parent with adult child(ren) and at least one child with unknown dependency status

One parent with adult and dependent children and at least one child with unknown dependency status

One parent with child(ren), all dependency status unknown

Total one parent with children

Total Families

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## APPENDIX 3

### SOME EXAMPLES OF OVERSEAS DATA COLLECTIONS

We focus on three countries, Australia, Canada and the United States. The examples presented are illustrative rather than being a full review of all relevant surveys. We begin by examining some cross-sectional studies. We then consider a selection of national panel studies. This is supplemented by comments on a smaller specialists panel study undertaken in the US on 'fragile' families. We then present some information on time use surveys.

#### CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDIES

While the US Current Population Survey currently cannot be used to determine emotional connections between children and separated parents, CPS April Child Support Supplements (1994, 1996 and 1998) have gathered information on custody arrangements, contact with far parents, and support payments from non-custodial parents to the custodial parent (Child Trends 2002, Lyon 1999). This information is gathered via the custodial parent, and more specifically includes child support arrangements, amounts received and changes in amount; responsibility for health insurance coverage; physical and legal custody; visitation privileges; residential location of non-resident parent; amount of contact the child had last year with the non-resident parent; provision of goods, including gifts, for children; child support payments made as well as received; and agreements made by the separated parents. In addition, in a 1980 supplement on marital and fertility histories separated fathers were asked whether they had children from a previous marriage and if so, how many of these children lived elsewhere (Cherlin, Griffith and McCarthy 1983). Other examples of US cross-sectional studies exploring aspects of separated father involvement include the 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES), noted by Cherlin and Griffith (1998). NHES 1996 included a parent involvement component that asked the parents/guardians of 16,910 kindergarteners through to 12th graders questions, including 5,440 children who had a far father, about mothers' and fathers' involvement in their children's schools. The resident parent, usually the mother, provided the responses.

On a regular cycle the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) undertakes a Family Characteristics Survey as a supplement to its household labour force survey (Monthly Population Survey). In recent surveys this has included questions on child support and visiting arrangements. Child support and visiting arrangements are collected from families most likely to be affected by these arrangements, namely families with children aged 0-17 who were living with one natural parent but had another natural parent living elsewhere. The ABS plans to conduct a survey on Family Transitions and History (including Family Characteristics) from July 2006 to June 2007. However, one problem with such a survey is that it does not cover those people living in non-private dwellings. These include parents who may be in the military, in prison or living in boarding houses.

#### NATIONAL PANEL STUDIES

A panel design to a survey can facilitate identification of separated parents, changes in family type that occur during the course of the study period, and can provide the potential for linking separated parent data. Household listings are updated each wave, and sample members followed to new households when they move out of existing ones. The Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) is an example of a national study that pioneered this approach, and has a long study period. A number of other American surveys have followed in these footsteps. The PSID, ongoing for over 30 years and following offspring of sample members as they establish their own households, has collected information annually on child support payments received. The study has asked also about financial support of anyone outside the household; however, the recipient of the financial support, in most years, is not identified, and could be an elderly parent or sibling, etc rather than a separated child. The study has followed all adult sample members from the start; hence, members of couples living in the same household in 1968 have been tracked to separate households when they have split up. In the early years of the study, this facilitated matching of separated parents, father with mother, in their distinct households

(Hill 1992). However, over time, initially coupled individuals have become increasingly unrepresentative of separated parents. With the advent of a change in following rules (to track sample children, not just sample adults) and recontact beginning in 1994 of households containing a sample child but not a sample adult, the study has since facilitated representative analysis of matched sets of separated parents (Smock and Manning 1997). The PSID has also facilitated analysis of the role family structure changes play in children's lives, by tracing children from birth into adulthood, allowing examination of differential influences of divorce or separation at different stages in children's lives (Hill, Yeung and Duncan 2001).

The PSID, on occasion, has also had special supplements gathering extensive information relating to child development and interaction with parents. Two separate waves of the Child Development Supplement, CDS-I (1997) and CDS-II (2002/03) have gathered extensive data relating to effects of family, school and neighbourhood on child development. CDS-I interviewed about 2,400 families with children ages 0-12, and approximately 2,000 were re-interviewed by CDS-II. While CDS-I attempted interviews with far parents, CDS-II did not, because response rates were low. Both waves of CDS, though, include child time diaries (self-reported by the child if aged nine or older) and at least a few questions regarding far parents. These data have been yielding interesting insights into household-based views of the role of parents in their children's lives (eg Yeung et al 2001) with some insight into the role of far parents as well (Hofferth and Anderson 2003).

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is an example of a large-scale official longitudinal survey with a rather short panel period. SIPP contains a topical module on support for non-household members that asks a number of questions about child support and gathers basic information on time spent with absent children. An initial question asks "During the past 12 months, did you make payments for the support of your child or children under 21 years of age who live outside the household?" (with a separate question asking how many of the children receiving child support are under age 18, the age limit used by many surveys asking about non-custodial children). Details about payments are sought, including amount, whether it is a voluntary or court ordered payment and whether health insurance is included in the payments. A question is also asked about custodial arrangements. The time spent with separated children requires estimates to be made in days, weeks or months in the past year.

Canada also provides an example of an official longitudinal study of children that was commenced in the mid-1990s and goes some way into establishing complex cross-household relationships. The Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) includes questions about historical custody arrangements, the existence of other siblings outside the household, whether the biological parents were together when the child was born and whether the father's name is on the birth certificate (Statistics Canada 1995). This type of survey, which is very long and complex, provides opportunities for interviewers to delve deeply into topics, which would not be possible in a short self-completed survey. This initial questionnaire collected information on whom the child lived with on a year-by-year basis, but no specific information was collected on contact and time spent with non-custodial parents. Interestingly, early reports from the survey suggest that one very basic type of connection between father and child – the father's name being on the birth certificate – has been on the rise (Marcil-Gratton 1998).

There are examples of long-panel-length surveys in the US being used to determine the levels of contact separated parents have with their children by asking the far parent directly. The United States National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) (1979) has asked men questions about the living arrangements of their children and the level of contact they have with children who do not live with them (Lerman and Sorensen 2000). It has also regularly asked questions about children living outside the home. These include how often the fathers visit each child and the duration of these visits (ibid: 141). Similarly, the later NLSY97 has questions about contact with far parents and the receipt of child support payments. It also has indicators of whether paternity has been established for the target youth in the survey (Argys and Peters 2001).

A nationally representative large-scale survey with separated parents in mind is the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). It specifically asks the question: "Do you have any biological or adopted children aged 18 or younger who do not live in the household at least half the time?" While noting the strength of the NSFH survey for identifying far fathers, Garfinkel et al (1998: 55) estimate that nearly 40 percent of such fathers are missing from the survey. They suggest that one-third of these men are in jail or are so loosely attached to households that they are not interviewed, but they

still attempt estimates of the characteristics of the 'missing' fathers by such means as assuming a high level of homogeneity in assortative mating, using the characteristics of custodial mothers to reveal the characteristics of non-custodial fathers.

This assumption of a high level of homogeneity in assortative mating was subsequently supported by Garfinkel, Gleib and McLanahan (2002). However, this later study also suggests caution when assuming that fathers have similar characteristics to mothers. Fathers, for example, may be in prison whereas mothers are not, or the other way around. Despite omission of select segments of separated fathers, much of the published literature on the amount of contact far parents in America have with their children comes from the NSFH survey (eg Seltzer 1991; Seltzer and Bianchi 1988; Stewart 1999). The published US literature, though, focuses almost exclusively on divorce and separation of married couples as the event creating separated parents. In the Stewart study both mothers and fathers who reported not living with their biological children were asked what month and year they had last lived with each absent child and asked each child's sex and age. A focal absent child was then randomly selected and further questions were asked about contact with that child. This process generated a sample of 156 far mothers and 531 far fathers. Despite the relatively large overall sample size of the NSFH, these comparatively small numbers illustrate the difficulty of obtaining a good sample of such parents through a purely random sample.

The data collected by the NSFH provide useful, but relatively crude, measures of contact with far parents. For example, Stewart found that just over a fifth of target children had not seen their fathers in the reference year, while at the other end of the spectrum a third saw them at least once a week (for some at this higher end, no doubt, these visits could have been motivated by the absent father wanting to visit the mother with whom he still has a 'romantic attachment', not just a desire to spend time with the child, as the Fragile Families research suggests). Additional measures of contact were the number of times children received phone calls or letters, and the number of weeks a child lived or visited with their far parent each year. Omitted here is contact via the internet, which is potentially one way of children having contact with their non-resident parents without close control by the custodial parent. The use of cell phones, including the use of text messaging, also opens up new ways for contact that can bypass control by the custodial parent.

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), a nationally representative study of more than 20,000 adolescents in grades 7 through 12 in the US in 1995 with a follow-up interview one year later, also provides crude measures of the quantity and quality of paternal involvement for far parents in a context that takes care in distinguishing biological from stepparents. Measures of parental involvement include a quantity assessment (in terms of the number of activities, from a list of five, that the parent and adolescent were engaged in during the last four weeks) and a quality assessment (level of closeness adolescent feels to parent).

Argys et al (2003), in a paper on measuring contact between children and their non-residential fathers, discuss a number of the US longitudinal studies. This includes setting out the questions asked in a number of these surveys. These questions are reproduced in Appendix 4. Argys et al conclude that current US data do not provide a full or consistent picture of either the quantity or quality of interactions between children and their non-residential parents. They note that the various datasets provide quite different estimates of the proportion of children who see their non-resident father. Yet, acknowledging the benefit of multiple measures, they note that each provides some insight into particular aspects of father-child contact.

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (or HILDA) Survey is a household-based panel survey, which aims to track all members of an initial sample of households over an indefinite life (HILDA 2005).<sup>46</sup> Further, the sample is automatically extended over time by adding to the sample any new children or members of the selected households, as well as new household members resulting from changes in the composition of the original households.

As of mid-2005, there had been five waves of HILDA. A significant section of the personal questionnaire of each wave has been devoted to issues related to family formation. A number of questions have been asked regarding financial support given to children and the level of contact (and how parents feel about this level of contact) with children who live elsewhere. While similar questions have been asked at all waves, the actual wording in some instances has changed over time as improvements have been made.

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46 All of the survey instruments are available on the HILDA website: [www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/sinstruments.html](http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/sinstruments.html)

Finally, while this paper does not focus on British studies, it is worth noting that researchers are using data from the British Household Panel Survey to consider how the emotional and financial resources are shared across households (eg Ermisch 2005; Walker and Zhu 2005).

## SMALLER-SCALE PANEL STUDIES

Other more targeted longitudinal studies are interested in contact between parents who may not be living together. The US Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study baseline interviews were conducted between June 1999 and October 2000. It is not a random survey of families, but follows a new cohort of unwed parents and their children over four years. New mothers were interviewed in the hospital within 48 hours of their child's birth, and fathers were interviewed either in the hospital or elsewhere as soon as possible after the birth. In this study there is a particular interest in fathers, and issues being investigated include expectations about fathers' rights and responsibilities, mother-father relationships and how many fathers want to be involved in raising their children.

## TIME USE SURVEYS

In order to obtain more comprehensive estimates of relative time spent with custodial and non-custodial parents, and, as importantly, some idea of what activities were carried out during this time, time use survey techniques are needed. Time use study methodologies are still evolving. Increasingly, there is an interest in determining time use patterns of both partners in intact couples, along with the time use of children in households.

The 1997 Child Development Supplement to the PSID (now called PSID CDS-I) has been used to examine accessibility and engagement with children by fathers and mothers in intact families (Hofferth and Anderson 2003; Yeung et al 2001). Data were collected through the use of a 24-hour diary time diary administered to 1,761 children aged 0-12 in 1997. Each family was asked to complete a diary for a pre-assigned random weekday and weekend day. In terms of who completed the diary it was noted "[t]he primary caregiver of the target child, in most cases the mother, was the preferred respondent in cooperation with the target child, when possible" (p 139). This resulted in 60 percent of diaries being completed by the mothers alone, 6 percent completed by the child alone, and 12 percent by the mother and target child, 15 percent by someone else in the household (a grandmother or other relative), with 7 percent having information missing on who completed the diary. All the children who self-completed the diaries were nine years or older. The authors recognise the potential for bias when fathers were not involved in completing the questionnaire. While breaking new ground in the study of time spent by fathers and mothers with children, Yeung et al (2001: 53) note there is a need to go beyond researching only intact two-parent families and "[a]n important area of study for future research will be to compare paternal involvement in intact families with that in stepparent and single-parent families" [more accurately, single-parent households].

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) commenced running a time use survey in January 2003, and the first annual estimates were published in 2004. This survey directly addresses issues both of the existence of non-resident children and the amount of time parents spend with them. Given the large sample size (in 2003 about 21,000 individuals were interviewed) it is likely that a significant number of separated parents will be included.

In the initial set of questions respondents are asked a shortened version of the NSFH question. "Do you have any children under 18 who do not live with you?" The interviewer can also read, if necessary, "The way people spend time is often related to whether they have children even if the children don't live with them." Age and sex of each such child is identified, and these children are added to the household's roster of persons individually and uniquely identified. These non-resident children are readily identifiable, having been given a relationship code of 'non-household child'.<sup>47</sup> During the administration of the diary, the BLS asked respondents who was with them. Each person on the roster has a unique code, so time with each individual child, resident or not, is recorded for any activity reported in the diary. Diary time with the parent actively and directly engaged with a child counts as childcare time. This provides a picture of childcare as a primary activity. To gain a more complete picture of who is caring for children, and to identify the activities that adults combine with childcare,

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47 The type of question asked in the survey includes, "There was at least one non-household child under 18 reported and the child's name was not entered in the WHO column of the diary. Now I'd like to ask you about your children who don't live with you. During any part of the day yesterday, was/were [FNAME] [LNAME] in your care?" ([www.bls.gov/tus/tuquestionnaire.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/tus/tuquestionnaire.pdf))

the BLS measures secondary childcare – times when the parent is indirectly involved with a child but still mindful of, and responsible for, the child. For secondary care BLS has chosen to focus on children under the age of 13, and to employ summary questions built off the time diary, asking them about all children mentioned in the time diary and about non-resident children, even if not mentioned in the diary. Here, though, the emphasis is on identifying activities done in conjunction with childcare rather than time spent with specific children. Hence, the BLS study's approach would identify, separately for non-resident children, active but not passive care.

The BLS survey offers the promise of obtaining useful data on the time non-residential parents spend caring for their children.<sup>48</sup> If Statistics New Zealand was to run a time use survey again it needs to examine closely the results emerging from the BLS survey. The BLS survey should yield reliable estimates at the aggregate level, and the time-diary approach offers the opportunity for identifying important types of parent-child interaction, which researchers might not anticipate when developing the fixed questions for more conventional survey approaches. Furthermore, the BLS approach has the advantage of obtaining this information from the non-residential parent.

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48 One element that appears to present special challenges and has the potential to dramatically affect estimates of time spent in secondary childcare is the time when parents and/or children are sleeping. In light of evidence showing inconsistency across respondents in their reporting of childcare time in such situations, BLS imposed a rule that childcare would be defined to occur when, and only when, the respondent and at least one child were awake (Schwartz 2002).

# APPENDIX 4

## SURVEY QUESTIONS ON NON-RESIDENT PARENT/CHILD CONTACT

Note: The information on the US surveys is drawn from Argys et al (2003)

Fragile Families and  
Child Wellbeing (FF)

Since (CHILD) was born, has (FATHER) seen (him/her)?

During the past 30 days, how many days has (FATHER)  
seen (CHILD)?

Since (CHILD's) birth, has (CHILD) ever stayed overnight  
with (FATHER)?

How many nights altogether has (CHILD) spent with (FATHER)?

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National Longitudinal Survey  
of Youth 1979 (NLSY79)

In the past 12 months (or since separated from mother/father)  
how often has BIO CHILD 01 seen his/her mother/father?

ALMOST EVERY DAY, 2-5 TIMES A WEEK, ABOUT ONCE A  
WEEK, 1-3 TIMES A MONTH, 7-11 TIMES IN PAST 12 MONTHS,  
2-6 TIMES IN PAST 12 MONTHS, ONCE IN PAST 12 MONTHS,  
NEVER

How long do these visits usually last?

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National Longitudinal Survey of  
Youth 1997 (NLSY97)

Thinking about the last 12 months or since you began living  
apart:

How many times have you received a card, letter or phone call  
from your biological father?

NEVER, ONCE OR TWICE, LESS THAN ONCE A MONTH, ABOUT  
TWICE A MONTH, ABOUT ONCE A WEEK, SEVERAL TIMES A  
WEEK, EVERY DAY

How many times have YOU contacted or tried to contact your  
biological father either by mail or phone?

SAME RESPONSES AS ABOVE

How many times have you visited your biological father either at  
his house, your house, or somewhere else WITHOUT spending  
the night?

SAME RESPONSES AS ABOVE

Thinking only about the last 12 months or since you began living  
apart, have you ever stayed overnight at your biological father's  
house?

SAME RESPONSES AS ABOVE

How many nights have you stayed over at your biological father's  
house during the past 12 months, or since you began living  
apart? Think about visits at holidays, during vacations and other  
times like weekends.

ONCE OR TWICE, 3-10 NIGHTS, 11-25 NIGHTS, 26-50 NIGHTS,  
51-100 NIGHTS, MORE THAN 100 NIGHTS.

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National Survey of America's Families (NSAF)

Does (CHILD) have (a biological/an adoptive/a biological or adoptive) father who lives somewhere else?

During the last 12 months how often has (CHILD) seen (his/her) father?

[IF CHILD LIVED WITH FATHER IN LAST 12 MONTHS, RECORD THE TIMES THE FATHER HAS SEEN THE CHILD SINCE CHILD AND FATHER NO LONGER LIVED TOGETHER.]

NOT AT ALL, MORE THAN ONCE A WEEK, ABOUT ONCE A WEEK, ONE TO THREE TIMES A MONTH, ONE TO 11 TIMES A YEAR, OTHER (SPECIFY)

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Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)

Did all of the children visit the other parent about the same number of days in the past 12 months?

What is the total amount of time <the child/all children/the oldest child> spent visiting the other parent in the past 12 months?

\_\_\_\_\_ DAYS \_\_\_\_\_ WEEKS \_\_\_\_\_ MONTHS

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Wisconsin Child Support Demonstration Evaluation – Mother Survey (WCSDE)

During the time you and <focal child>'s father lived apart in 1998, did <focal child> spend time with his/her father, even one time? YES NO

During the time you and <focal child>'s father lived apart in 1998 did <focal child> spend time with his/her father? ABOUT EVERY WEEK, ABOUT EVERY OTHER WEEK, ABOUT EVERY MONTH, LESS THAN THAT

Next I'd like to know about how many days <focal child> spent time with his/her father on each of these visits. Count each day when they were with each other at all, even for a short time..... During the time you and <focal child>'s father lived apart in 1998, on about how many days every <week/other week/month> did <focal child> spend with his/her father?

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Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA)

A number of questions are asked about contact and financial support, but there have been some changes in questions over the various waves of this survey. As an illustrative example, in wave 2 questions under a main section 'Family Formation' started with:

*G1: Now some questions about family. How many children do you have? Please include natural and adopted children; not step or foster children.*

*Then the questions are asked:*

*How many of these children live here at least 50% of the time?  
How many live in another private dwelling more than 50% of the time?*

*How many usually live in a non-private dwelling but spend the remainder of time mainly with you?*

*How many other children (not included above) live elsewhere?*

The questionnaire then explores how far away the children lived (<5km, 5-9, 10-19, 20-49, 50-99, 100-499, 500 plus, overseas). After a set of questions about financial support, there are questions for parents with children aged 17 or less who lived elsewhere:

G9: I am now going to ask you about the contact you have with your (youngest) child who usually lives elsewhere. About how many nights each week, fortnight or month does this child usually stay overnight with you?

G10: And how many days would [..name..] spend with you each week, fortnight or month without staying overnight?

G11: Looking at SHOWCARD G11 – how do you feel about the amount of contact you have with [..name..]?

Nowhere near enough

Not quite enough

About right

A little too much

Way too much

Questions are also asked of the custodial parent about the amount of contact the child has with the non-custodial parent. In waves 3, 4 and 5 a different contact question was asked. This was:

I am now going to ask you about the contact you have with your (youngest) child who usually lives elsewhere. Looking at SHOWCARD G9, how often do you usually see [...name..]?

Daily

At least once a week

At least once a fortnight

At least once a month

Once every three months

Once every six months

Once a year

Less than once a year

Never

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## APPENDIX 5

**Table 5.1:** Terms applicable when biological parents are not a couple and live separately

<b>Intended meaning</b>	<b>Terms currently in common usage</b>	<b>Suggested terms</b>
<i>Parents may or may not be a couple and may or may not live separately:</i>		
Conceptual unit focused on network of ties between child, mother and father, all of whom are irrevocably linked by biological ties but not necessarily by living together, by parents being a couple, or by parents actively parenting	NO TERM	Mother-child-father triad
<i>Parents are not a couple and live separately:</i>		
Functional unit with child living with one biological parent and the biological parent who lives elsewhere may or may not be actively parenting	Sole-parent family Single-parent family Lone-parent family Fatherless family	Replace 'family' with 'household' <sup>49</sup>
Functional unit with child alternately living with each of his/her two actively parenting biological parents	NO TERM	Two-parent, two-household family Two-home family Two-household family Separated family Binuclear family
Parent seen as living with the child	Resident parent Single parent Lone parent	'Visible' parent Near parent
Parent seen as living elsewhere	Non-resident parent Absent parent	'Invisible' parent Elsewhere parent Far parent Separated parent
Child living elsewhere	Non-resident child Absent child	In-common child 'Invisible' child Elsewhere child Far child Separated child
Child who alternately lives with each of his/her two actively parenting biological parents	NO TERM	Two-parent, two-household child Two-household child Two-home child Separated child

<sup>49</sup> In some instances, 'single-parent household' is not the most suitable term, as with a household containing two single parents each with their own children present.

**Table 5.2:** Use of selected terms to describe families or parents

<b>Search words</b>	<b>Google search 10 December 2003*</b>	<b>Google search 29 June 2005 Whole web</b>	<b>Google search 29 June 2005 New Zealand</b>
Two parent family	19,700	51,800	563
Two parent household	4,860	13,500	32
Sole parent family	44,900	646	176
Sole parent household	11,500	188	25
Non custodial parent	45,900	144,000	496
Non resident parent	5,630	14,500	98
Shared parent	916	901	11
Deadbeat dad	19,600	69,700	34
Nuclear family	99,100	493,000	829
Binuclear family	344	592	1
Two home child	8	15	6
Two home children	34	44	19
Two house child	0	0	0
Two house children	0	1	0
Shared parent family	0	0	0
Absent parent	20,300	60,600	93
Deadbeat mom (US)	Not searched	5,500	Not searched
Deadbeat mum (New Zealand)	Not searched	Not searched	4
Solo parent	Not searched	6,560	879
Sole parent	Not searched	47,500	6,020
Separated family	Not searched	12,300	41
Separated parenting	Not searched	735,000	3,620
Co-parent family	Not searched	24	0

\* Responses are reported in Google in terms of 'about' the number of hits.

Search was carried out using the search words in inverted commas to limit to exact phrases, eg "sole parent".



**Blue Skies Research**

1/06 *Les Familles et Whānau sans Frontières: New Zealand and Transnational Family Obligation*, Neil Lunt with Mervyl McPherson and Julee Browning, March 2006.

2/06 *Two Parents, Two Households: New Zealand Data Collections, Language and Complex Parenting*  
Paul Callister, Institute of Policy Studies, Victoria University &  
Stuart Birks, Centre for Public Policy Evaluation, Massey University

These reports are available on the Commission's website [www.nzfamilies.org.nz](http://www.nzfamilies.org.nz) or contact the Commission to request copies.

Families Commission  
PO Box 2839  
Wellington  
Telephone 04 917 7040  
Email [enquiries@nzfamilies.org.nz](mailto:enquiries@nzfamilies.org.nz)

**Wellington office**

Public Trust Building, Level 5  
117-125 Lambton Quay  
PO Box 2839, Wellington  
Phone 04 917 7040  
Fax 04 917 7059

**Email**

[enquiries@nzfamilies.org.nz](mailto:enquiries@nzfamilies.org.nz)

**Website**

[www.nzfamilies.org.nz](http://www.nzfamilies.org.nz)

**Auckland office**

Level 5, AMI House  
63 Albert Street, Auckland  
Phone 09 970 1700