

## **FOCUS ON FAMILIES: NEW ZEALAND FAMILIES OF YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW**

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### **Abstract**

This article, based on the Families Commission publication *The Kiwi Nest: 60 years of Change in New Zealand Families* (2008), will discuss how family forms and roles within families have changed over the past 60 years, and will consider the future implications for those interested in families. The article first looks at New Zealand families today and includes projections looking forward. The different experiences of family over the last 60 years will then be presented through the lens of three generations of New Zealand families. The story that emerges is one of increasing diversity and change. The article concludes by discussing the implications for future public policy.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Some may argue that the role of the family in society is diminishing. Evidence could be presented that shows some activities undertaken by the family in previous decades – such as the care of pre-school children and the elderly, the production of food (especially vegetables), house and window cleaning, and making bread and clothing – are now often purchased from outside the family more than they may have been 50 years ago. For some, this may signal the demise of the family.

What is more difficult to argue, however, is that the *functions* of the family are any less important to society, even if some of the activities historically associated with families are now often “outsourced” or “commercialised”.

Four core functions of families can be identified. They are:

- the nurturing, rearing, socialisation and protection of children
- maintaining and improving the wellbeing of family members by providing them with emotional and material support
- the psychological “anchorage” of adults and children by way of affection, companionship and a sense of belonging and identity
- passing on culture, knowledge, values, attitudes, obligations and property from one generation to the next (Families Commission 2005).<sup>2</sup>

How these functions are performed has changed over time and is likely to continue to change. Families today are different in many respects from families of yesteryear. An accurate

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on *The Kiwi Nest: 60 Years of Change in New Zealand Families* (Families Commission 2008), written by Angela Yeoman with the support of Len Cook and Karen Wong. The author has repackaged and condensed their impressive work.

<sup>2</sup> While there may be broad agreement about these core functions, there are many views about whether other functions are also core, who in the family should carry them out, what the role of those outside the family is, and what constitutes success in family functioning. Europeans, Māori, Pacific peoples and other cultural and ethnic groups all have different views on these matters (Families Commission 2005).

appreciation of these differences and the current forms families take is a prerequisite to designing effective policies and programmes to support them in the future.

This article, based on *The Kiwi Nest: 60 years of Change in New Zealand Families* (Families Commission 2008), will discuss how family<sup>3</sup> forms and the roles within families have changed over the past 60 years and consider the future implications for those interested in families. The article first considers New Zealand families today and includes projections looking forward. The different experiences of family over the last 60 years will then be presented through the lens of three generations of New Zealand families. The story that emerges is one of increasing diversity and change. The article concludes by discussing the implications for future public policy.

## NEW ZEALAND FAMILIES TODAY AND LOOKING FORWARD

At the heart of New Zealand families today are couples. In 2006 57% of all adults aged 16 years and over were partnered and living together. The majority of those partnered (76%) were legally married (Statistics New Zealand 2007g). Of all households in 2006, 38% were couples with at least one dependent child and 19% were couples without children. Couples without children are expected to increase faster than couples with children over the next couple of decades (Statistics New Zealand 2007e).

De facto relationships and re-partnering are common. In 2006, 34% of all marriages were remarriages (Statistics New Zealand 2007c, 2008:1, 62). In the same year about 20% of all men and women who were in partnerships were living in a de facto relationship. Of partnered people aged 15–44 years, about 40% were living in de facto relationships, compared with 10% of those aged 45 years and over (Statistics New Zealand 2007c, 2008:63). This suggests de facto relationships will remain important, if not increase in frequency.

Living alone is a growing family form. Of all households in 2006, 23% consisted of people living alone, and this proportion is projected to increase to 26% by 2021. In part this reflects the projected ageing of the population (Statistics New Zealand 2007a).

Mothers are older at the time of the birth of their first child. In June 2007, the median age of women giving birth to their first child was 28 years, while the median age of all women giving birth was 30.1 years. This compares with a median of 25 years, for giving birth, in 1976 (Families Commission 2008:25).

The number of children being born is decreasing (in actual numbers and as a proportion of the population) as more people stay single, more people partner but do not have children, and more women delay having children until they are financially settled – often into their mid-30s or later. The fertility rate in June 2007 was just on the “replacement level” of 2.1, which allows for replacing the woman and her partner and babies who die soon after birth. The fertility rate subsequently increased slightly to reach 2.2 by December 2007. By 2016, however, fertility is projected to drop to 1.85 (Johnston 2008, Statistics New Zealand, 2005b, 2007b). It is projected that by 2061 children aged up to 14 years will make up only 16% of the population, compared with 21% in 2006. There were 890,000 children in this age group in 2006 (Statistics New Zealand 2007d).

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<sup>3</sup> The Families Commission uses the term “family” to refer to family groupings (nuclear and extended) in all ethnicities, including whānau. Whānau in the mid-20th century have been described as oriented to ancestors, with members living in different households but acting together to care for whānau affairs (Metge 1995:40).

However, the fertility rise towards the end of 2007, mentioned above, is associated with a mini baby-boom, going against the general downward trend in the number of births and fertility rates: 64,040 births were registered in 2007, the most since the early 1960s. The fertility rate at the end of 2007 (2.2) was the highest since 1990. By age, the highest fertility rate in 2007 was among women aged 30–34 years, while in the late 1960s it was among those aged 20–24 years. The reasons for this mini baby boom are not known, and a fall in fertility rates by 2016 is still predicted (Johnston 2008).

Māori and Pacific populations have a younger age structure than other ethnic communities in New Zealand. At 30 June 2007, for example, the median age of the Māori population was 23 years, compared with a median of 34.1 years for New Zealand's total population. In 2001 the median age for New Zealand's Pacific population was 21 years, compared with a median of 34.8 years for the population as a whole at that time (Statistics New Zealand 2003:9, 2008:14). Compared with other ethnic groups, Māori women have a higher fertility rate (2.8 at June 2007), lower median age of giving birth (25.9 at June 2007), and lower median age of marriage (25 years in 2005) (Pool et al. 2007:192–193, Statistics New Zealand 2007b, 2007a).

Families are becoming more ethnically diverse. About one in five children born in New Zealand in 2006 had more than one ethnicity. By comparison, about one in 10 mothers had multiple ethnicities (Statistics New Zealand 2008:34).

Family form varies by ethnicity. Māori and Pacific children are more likely than other ethnic groups to live as part of a single-parent family, while Asian children are the least likely to do so. In 2001, for example, the proportion of women likely to be single parents differed markedly depending on ethnic group and age. (Statistics New Zealand 2005:36–37). Some ethnic groups are more likely than others to live in multi-generational households and families. This is a particular characteristic of Asian families, as well as many Māori and Pacific families. In 2006 just over 27% of families with dependent children in New Zealand lived in households where there was more than one family. In 1981 this proportion was 17.2% (Pool et al. 2007:193–194, 260, Statistics New Zealand 2007e).

## 60 YEARS OF CHANGE

Our perception of “family” may change over time and our experiences are affected by our age and culture. The story of how different generations have experienced family life, is a story of change and growing diversity in the family form and the roles within families.

To begin the story this article explores the experience of families through the lens of three generations of families. This section provides statistics on the family forms for three broadly defined generations of adults:

- people aged 65 years and over (born in 1943 or before)
- people aged between about 38 and 64 years (born between 1944 and 1970)
- people aged between 15 and 37 (born between 1971 and 1993).

The generation that lived through World War II is considered first, and a picture emerges of a generation that married, married young and had large numbers of children. Few people born at this time deviated from the trends described here.

## Experiences of Family for Those Born in 1943 or Before

For people aged 65 years and over (born in 1943 or before), family life might typically correspond with these statistical family forms.

Most people born in the early 1940s got married, and mostly before they turned 25. In 1961 the marriage rate was very high at 38.2 marriages (per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 and over). The median age of marriage for women in 1960 was 22 years (Dalley and McLean 2005, Dharmalingam et al. 2007: Table 5.6, Statistics New Zealand 2007a). Few people in this cohort who were un-partnered would have fallen in the category “never partnered”. In 1971 only about 5% of all women aged 30–39 years, for example, had never married (Statistics New Zealand 2004a:17, 2005).

The nuclear family (a mother, a father and children) in which the parents were married was the norm during the 1950s and 1960s. The divorce rate, however, increased from 3.2 divorces per 1000 existing marriages in 1961 to 5.1 in 1971 (Statistics New Zealand 2007a). Although few parents divorced when their children were young, some divorced once their parenting had finished. Of women who had married before 1970, for example, 20% divorced within 15 years of marriage, and 25% with 25 years of marriage. Some of the most common characteristics of these divorces were marriage at an early age, and being pregnant at the point of marriage or becoming pregnant shortly after (Pool et al. 2007:188). Very few people currently aged 65 years or over would have experienced a de facto relationship. Of those born in the years 1936 to 1949, for example, only 11% had lived in a de facto relationship by the age of 30 years. By contrast, 81% had married by that age (Dharmalingam et al. 2007).

There were very few single parents with dependent children. The raising of children by a sole parent was more likely to be the result of the early death of a spouse than of divorce or ex-nuptial birth. By 1971, for example, only 5% of all households were single-parent families (Pool et al. 2007:104, 188, Statistics New Zealand 2005).

Mothers were young and married and had a number of children. Most people born in 1943 or before had children during the post-war period (1945–1970). Even by the mid-to-late 1970s the median age of mothers at childbirth was still quite young at around 25 years. In 1961, the peak year for births, New Zealand’s fertility rate was 4.3 (Statistics New Zealand 2007b, 2007a). Māori made up only 8% of the population at this time and the experiences of this cohort were slightly different. Māori were less likely than New Zealand Europeans to use the European legal system to cement relationships, using instead the models of partnerships governed by iwi, hapū and whānau customs and traditions. They were more likely to have children outside of marriage, and more likely to have children at a younger age. In 1966 the fertility rate for Māori women was 5.5, significantly higher than the total fertility rate for all women in New Zealand of 3.4 (Pool et al. 2007:192, 204, Statistics New Zealand 2007a).

A significant proportion of women born before 1943 would have conceived a child before they married. People now aged 65 years or over formed their families and brought up their children during a period when family form was remarkably homogeneous. As New Zealand Europeans formed the predominant ethnic group in New Zealand in the post-war decades, their experiences of family formation dominated the slightly different experiences of Māori. The extent to which almost all adults married, married young and had many children was very different from the pattern in the pre-war years. Social expectations and values prevailing from the 1940s to 1970 reinforced specific notions of family. The labour market, taxation,

social assistance, laws and public policies supported families of a specific family type during this period. The extent to which this support, and the associated experience of family, could be sustained became uncertain, however, as a range of economic and social factors began to change.

Of women born in 1936, for example, over 37% had conceived a child outside of marriage by the age of 27. Of women born in 1945 (just slightly outside our age group), over 54% had conceived a child outside of marriage by the same age (Else 1991:2, 3). Many, if not most, young pregnant women got married before they gave birth (Pool et al. 2007:189). Of the women who gave birth outside of marriage in the post-war decades, most found adoptive parents for their babies: in 1971, for example, the peak year for adoptions, 3,976 babies were “adopted out” by young unmarried mothers. Between 1955 and 1974, 56,581 adoption orders were registered (Else 1991). In 1974 the number of children aged up to 14 years peaked at 940,000 (Statistics New Zealand 2007d).

### The Experiences of the Baby Boom Era (between about 1944 and 1970)

The next age group to be considered is people now aged between 38 and 64 years. This is the baby-boomer generation that we hear so much about. The experiences of people born in this period were so different from those of the previous generation that they commanded a distinctive name. This age group encountered enormous change, increasing diversity in family forms and experiences, and a rapidly decreasing average family size.

Marriage rates were lower. A smaller proportion of the baby-boom generation married than that of their parents. In 2001, for example, 36% of women aged 30–34 years and 22% of women aged 35–39 years had never married, compared with about 5% across this age range in 1971 (Statistics New Zealand 2005:27). Marriage rates dropped from an all-time high of 45.5 marriages (per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 and over) in 1971 to 16.5 in 1996. Of marriages during this time, more than a third (16% in 1971, increasing to 33% in 1986 and 37% in 1996) were remarriages (Statistics New Zealand 2007a).

Marriage and family formation for people born between 1944 and 1970 differed, depending on whether they were early or late baby boomers. Early baby boomers married earlier and more often than the later baby boomers, in a pattern more similar to that of their parents. Of women born in the 1950s, for example, 47% had married by the age of 25 years. By contrast, of women born in the 1960s, only 20% had married by that age (Dharmalingam et al. 2007). Also, the later that people were born during the period 1944–1970, the more likely it was that they lived in a de facto relationship (Dharmalingam et al. 2007).

Divorces increased from 5.1 per 1000 existing marriages in 1971 to 12.7 in 1996, peaking at 17.1 in 1982 (Statistics New Zealand 2007a). Many, if not most, of these were the parents of the baby boomers divorcing, generally once their parenting was over. Most had married early, often precipitated by a pre-nuptial pregnancy (Pool et al. 2007:188). Even so, Pool et al. report that one out of every 10 marriages for the birth cohort 1966–1975 was dissolved within two years (2007:236). Many divorced baby boomers re-partnered or remarried. From 1971 to 1996 the proportion of marriages that were remarriages increased from 16% to 37% (Statistics New Zealand 2007a).

Step families increased. Baby boomers are more likely than their parents to have been involved in parenting that is shared between households and parenting of children from other

relationships, as rates of divorce and remarriage increased during the 1980s and 1990s. Less is known about the re-formation and blending of baby-boom families where marriage was not involved.

The later in the baby-boom era people were born, the more likely they are to have been single parents. Most of the growth in single-parent families occurred during the late 1970s and the early 1980s (Pool et al. 2007:268, Statistics New Zealand 1999). The number of single-parent families increased from 5.1% of all households in 1981 to 9.5% in 1996 (Statistics New Zealand 2007e). By 1986 7% of households were single-parent family households and 16% of dependent children lived in single-parent families (Statistics New Zealand 1999, 2007e). The main contributors to this increase were:

- an increase in divorcees with dependent children (50% of all divorces in 1996 involved dependent children, for example)
- an increase in young unmarried mothers who decided not to place their babies for adoption.

More of the baby-boomer generation has remained un-partnered than the earlier generation, particularly those in the later part of this generation. The proportion of adults aged 15 and over who remained un-partnered by the age of 25 years is estimated at 15% for those born between 1950 and 1959 and 20% for those born between 1960 and 1969 (Dharmalingam et al. 2007).

People born between 1944 and 1970 are more likely than their parents to have had their children later and to have had fewer children. The median age of mothers giving birth increased from 25 years in 1976 (when the early baby boomers, born late 1940s/early 1950s, might have been having children), to 29 years in 1998 (representing the later baby boomers, born in the late 1960s). Fertility rates reduced significantly between the early baby-boomer years of childbearing to the later years: 3.18 in 1971, dropping to 1.96 in 1996 (Statistics New Zealand 2007a).

There were increasing ethnic differences in family form. At the end of the baby boom, Māori families were more likely than New Zealand European families to live in an extended household (with two or more families, and/or older parents and adult children living together) (Pool et al. 2007:193). Māori continued to have more children and at a younger age than New Zealand women as a whole. In 1976, for example, the median age of childbirth for Māori women was 22 years, increasing to 26 years by 1998. In 1971 the Māori fertility rate was 5.1, but it fell to 2.7 by 1996 (Statistics New Zealand 2007a). For Pacific women born during the baby-boom period, the median age of giving birth was lower than that for New Zealand women generally, but not as low as that for Māori women: 28 years in 1998, for example (Statistics New Zealand 2007a). For Asian women born in the baby-boom era, the median age of childbearing has been higher than that for New Zealand women generally: 31 years in 1998, for example (Statistics New Zealand 2007a).

For the baby-boom generation, the pace of change during the post-war years was startling, particularly regarding the expectations and norms about family formation, the use of contraception and having children. Furthermore, choices changed regarding higher education, participating in the labour force and being employed, all of which affected decisions about family life. Family diversity became increasingly apparent.

### Experiences of People Aged Between 15 and 37 (Born Between 1971 and 1993)

For this group, diversity in family forms has become commonplace. One of the most obvious trends in this section is a delaying of childbearing. Delaying childbearing obviously reduces the window of opportunity for childbirth, and potentially means smaller families and fewer children overall. This age group is also exhibiting trends towards fewer marriages, more remaining un-partnered and fewer divorces involving children.

Fewer people have married when compared with their parents. In 2006 the marriage rate was 13.5 (marriages per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 and over), continuing the trend of a steady decline in marriage rates since the 1971 high of 45.5. People in this age group are more likely than their parents or grandparents to marry later. In 2006 the median age of first marriage for women was 28.2 years. By comparison, the median age of first marriage for women in 1996, for example, was 26.1 years (Statistics New Zealand 2007a, 2007c).

De facto relationships are more prevalent and have replaced marriage among younger people. Of those born between 1970 and 1975, for example, 38% had lived in a de facto relationship by the age of 20 years, while only 2% had married (Dharmalingam et al. 2007: Table 5.6). Of all women who married in 1971, 32% were teenagers, compared with 2% in 2006. Nine out of 10 teenage women who were partnered in 2006 were living in de facto relationships (Statistics New Zealand 2007c).

Divorce is as likely as for their parents. Since 1984 divorce rates have remained fairly stable at around 12%. Of those marrying in 2006, 34% were remarrying: many were members of the baby-boomer generation remarrying, and some of them were people in the 15–37 age group (Statistics New Zealand 2007c). About half of divorced people who remarry do so to other divorced people (Statistics New Zealand 2007a). In 2006, 44% of divorces involved families with children, down from 50% in 1996. Fewer children were involved in divorces in 2006 (8,075) than 1996 (9,445) (Statistics New Zealand 2007c).

Many people in this age group have lived in a blended or step-family. In 2001, for example, close to one-fifth of all women with children had been parents in step-families or blended families (Ministry of Social Development 2004:32). Furthermore, one in five separated women re-partner in the first year of separation (Pool et al. 2007:238).

Currently, people aged 15–37 years are more likely than their parents or grandparents to have been born into and/or lived in a single-parent family: by 2006 10% of all households were headed by single parents, compared with 9.5% in 1996, 7% in 1986 and 5% in both 1981 and 1971 (Statistics New Zealand 2005, 2007e). In 2006 21% of households with dependent children were single-parent households, down from 22% in 2001, but up from 13% in 1986 and 8% in 1981 (Statistics New Zealand 2007e). Most single-parent families are headed by women. Only one in eight children in a single-parent family lived with their fathers in 1996 (Statistics New Zealand 1999).

This generation is more likely than older generations to be un-partnered or to partner later. In 2006 28% of people aged 25–34 years, for example, had never married or entered a civil union, and 34% were un-partnered (Statistics New Zealand 2006). Since the 1980s the number of women residents in New Zealand has been increasing relative to men, particularly in the broad 20–49 years age group. More women are either living on their own or are single parents (Callister et al. 2006).

New forms of relationships have emerged as this generation entered adulthood. Of women aged 20–24 years in 1995, for example, 20% were in living apart together (LAT) unions compared with 27% in de facto relationships and 37% in no union of any sort. This reflects the fact that adult children today are increasingly likely to continue to live with their parents for some time (Pool et al. 2007:231–232, based on Statistics New Zealand’s New Zealand Women: Family, Employment, and Education survey).

People aged 15–37 years are more likely than their parents and grandparents to have children later, and fewer children are being born today compared with earlier generations. In 2007 the median age of women giving birth to their first child was 28 years, and for all births was just over 30 years (Statistics New Zealand 2007b).

This generation has experienced increasing ethnic diversity in the population. Unfortunately data about ethnic differences are not readily available for this specific age group. What we do know is that New Zealand is more ethnically diverse than ever before. Between 1991 and 1996 the number of people reporting as Asian rose by 74%, while the number reporting as Māori and Pacific rose by 20 and 21%, respectively. The comparable figure for European New Zealanders was only 3.5% (Khawaja et al. 2007). More recently the number of people identifying as Asian rose by almost 50% (between 2001 and 2006), and people identifying as Pacific by nearly 15% (Statistics New Zealand 2007f). In 2006 just under 20% of children were reported as belonging to two or more ethnic groups, compared with only 3.5% of people aged 65 years and over (Statistics New Zealand 2007f).

Māori children in the 1990s (and, to a lesser extent, Pacific children) were more likely than children from other ethnic groups to live with one parent. About 41% of Māori children lived in single-parent families in 1996, compared with 29% of Pacific children, 17% of European children and 12% of Asian children (Statistics New Zealand 1999). Māori women continue to be more likely than women from other ethnic groups to have children, to have larger families and to have children at a slightly younger age. (Statistics New Zealand 2007b).

## DIFFERENT GENERATIONS, DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES

Changes in global, economic, labour market, social and other factors contribute to the story about increasing diversity and change in families. This section explores some of these major changes and their impact on the form and role of families.

In the first three decades after World War II, public policy and the law did not need to acknowledge diversity in the family, nor did those involved in financial and other business transactions with families. There was little diversity in family forms to take into account. Policies and laws designed to improve living conditions were relatively easy to target to families because most families were similar in type. Whānau were considered in the same way as Pākehā families. The policies reinforced a homogeneous approach to families, premised primarily on the “nuclear” family (Pool et al. 2007).

Metge (1995) gives an account of the history of whānau that differs from the history of Pākehā families. Before significant contact with Europeans, whānau were three-generation groups, and both social and economic units. They changed, however, with increased exposure to European law and to changing economic influences. It was not until the Child, Youth and Families Act was passed in 1989 that whānau were legally recognised. Until the mid-20th

century, customary Māori approaches to forming a union did not embrace the registration of marriage and births initially imposed by the British settlers in 1852.

As the receipt of benefits, retirement income and other state assistance began to require proof of age and marriage, Māori began to register. Early data based on registration processes, therefore, show Māori to have had lower marriage rates and more babies born outside of marriage (Pool et al. 2007:176–177, Royal Commission on Social Policy 1988: Vol I, p. 61) than others, perhaps misleadingly as they disregarded the stability and cultural sanction of these customary unions.

The post-war period saw the start of intensive migration to the cities by Māori. Before World War II 75% of Māori lived in rural areas. However, work attracted Māori to the cities, a trend which grew into wholesale migration by the 1950s and 1960s (Dalley and McLean 2005:325). This movement of Māori from their places of origin brought, for many, cultural and family disruption on a large scale.

Until the early 1970s there was usually full employment and generally a growing economy in New Zealand. The labour market was regulated in a way that enabled and even encouraged women to stay at home to bear and raise children, and for fathers to earn enough through full-time employment to keep a family. This was achieved in various ways, including legislation of the 40-hour week under the provisions of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1894, which reduced both the extent to which people were expected to work longer hours and the potential for other types of employment, such as part-time work (Pool et al. 2007:290–291). Families could also expect a “man’s wage” to be adequate to keep a family, as it was generally accepted that women stayed at home and raised children (Pool et al. 2007:201–202, 290, Royal Commission on Social Policy 1988: Vol I, pp. 28, 33).

As well as being affected by the economy and the labour market, families were also influenced by moral beliefs, social norms and laws such as those relating to contraception and divorce. For example, it was an offence, under a 1954 amendment to the Police Offences Act, for people under the age of 16 years to obtain or be given contraception. Until 1972 the Family Planning Association had a policy of not assisting unmarried women. Difficulty obtaining adequate contraception would have contributed to the significant number of women who became pregnant outside marriage at a young age and the number who married when already pregnant (Else 1991:2–4, Pool et al. 2007:225).

Public policies also supported the post-war notion of the family by financially rewarding families for having children and by targeting assistance to married couples. A Universal Family Benefit (UFB) was paid to mothers for each child they gave birth to, irrespective of the income of the family.<sup>4</sup>

In the late 1960s and early 1970s some environmental factors started to change, and in step with these changes greater diversity in families began to emerge. The arrival of the contraceptive pill meant that women could decide if and when to have children. By the 1970s New Zealand began to need new skills in the labour market, more people in the work force

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<sup>4</sup> A 2001 study indicates that if there had been no UFB in those post-war years, fertility in New Zealand might have been reduced by as much as 28% (Pool et al. 2007:202, referencing Poot and Siegers 2001).

and new ways of working to compete in the global economy and respond to technological advancements, which encouraged and allowed women to work.

More young people in general – and more young women in particular – began to access education. The longer education demanded by the changing labour market may also have contributed to the trend we have observed of delayed childbearing: in 1971 women made up 30% of enrolments in tertiary education, increasing to 49% by 1985 (Maani 1997:9, Statistics New Zealand 2005a:49, 58). In the 2000s it is just as usual for women as for men to engage in higher study. In fact, since the mid-1990s women have been more likely than men to participate in tertiary education (Ministry of Social Development 2007: 39).

As the labour market grew and changed between the 1970s and the 1990s, it needed more adults to work and more adults with new skills. Women helped to meet that demand and invested time in their careers. This also contributed to delayed childbearing (Pool et al. 2007:303). Many women, however, were already mothers, and were keen to work, while many more were keen both to have a career and to start a family. Childcare centres were established. The Equal Pay Act was introduced in 1972, and a raft of government policies were introduced and refined between the 1980s and the 2000s. These included job protection, through the Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987, and paid parental leave, under the Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Paid Parental Leave) Act 2002.

Step-families in New Zealand have become common. By the 1980s and 1990s “reconstituted and blended families had become far more common and seem to have, at least in their manifest dimensions, been one of the more important changes to the nuclear family occurring during this period” (Pool et al. 2007:239). One in five children is likely to have lived in a stepfamily household before they reached the age of 17 (Pool et al. 2007:368). As a result of “reconstitution and blending”, the size and range of many family networks has increased (Pool et al. 2007: 385). Laws relating to divorce and marital property, and public policies such as those that provide financial assistance for single parents and those that expect absent parents to make a financial contribution to the parenting of their children, have been enacted.

New Zealand has become more ethnically diverse, and the term “family” has been influenced by the migration into New Zealand of families from around the world bringing with them different cultures, social norms, religions and family types. Immigrants to New Zealand have affected various demographic statistics, including the number of children in a family, the median age of giving birth, and the number of families that include extended family and adult children. People from Asian and Pacific countries, in particular, have significantly affected New Zealand’s culture and its understanding of the term “family” (Burke 1986, Pool et al. 2007:191–194, 260).

Of the youngest group of adults today, born between about 1971 and 1993, many have lived in, or observed around them, a variety of family forms. Diversity in what is called family became more apparent over the past few decades, and policies, laws and social norms were adapting to support such diversity. Over the same period, labour market policies were introduced to support their mothers and fathers, and now themselves, in the dual roles of worker and parent.

## THE CHALLENGES FOR POLICY

The trend of increasing diversity and change raises questions about how New Zealand can support its families in bearing and raising children, and how public policy in particular can target support to families in all their diversity. The diversity of family forms today has made it challenging for policies and organisations to target assistance where it is needed and to support families as they raise their children.

Marriage was once a common and obvious trigger point for targeting, but this is not so useful today (Pool et al. 2007:201). The birth of a child is now perhaps one of the most useful trigger points. Because of the complex living arrangements of many children today, however, benefits and assistance probably need to follow the child rather than the parent. This then raises questions about the status and role of the parents and step-parents and their rights and obligations. It also raises the level of complexity of any policy delivery to these children and their families.

Some policies may also have unexpected consequences on families. For example, the policy of providing student loans for tertiary education hinged on the assumption that private gains outweighed public gains from education and that individuals and families should therefore be responsible for a significant proportion of the costs. The impact of student debt on family formation and family functioning is currently unquantified (Families Commission 2008:69).

Policies that have an impact on families are part of the environment in which families live and make decisions. These policies can be either direct (e.g. paid parental leave) or more distant (eg policies on health delivery). It is important for families that policies be designed from a family-centred perspective and that less immediately relevant policies be scrutinised for their potential impact on family functioning.

Good policy also depends on reliable and sufficient data; the paucity of family-related statistics that cover the full range of family forms and structures common today hinders the development of effective policy. In particular, the lack of data on intergenerational family forms such as whānau and fono makes it difficult to design policies to target the needs of Māori families and families of other ethnic groups in which extended family structures are common.

Family forms and individual roles in families look very different in 2008 to what they did 60 years ago. The range of choices available to individuals within families has expanded so that, for example, women are able to enter and stay in the workforce where their grandmothers were not; young people can contemplate many more career choices than those a generation or two earlier; and fathers are increasingly choosing to be fully involved with their children where their grandfathers would not have had that opportunity. This increase in choice is influenced in large part by changes in social attitudes. No longer is it shameful for a child to be born out of wedlock or for that child's mother to raise him or her alone. The increased range of choices, however, means that there are far fewer scripts available for families to guide them in performing their roles.

Through all these changes the core functions of families remain constant. Families bear, raise and nurture children. They provide emotional and material support needed for children to become fully functioning and participating members of society, and protect vulnerable family

members, including children and elders. Families pass on culture, knowledge, values, attitudes and property.

In order to do these things, they need “family time” to devote to strengthening family relationships and parent their children. This suggests that we need policies that enable families to make wise choices that have a positive impact on family functioning, and that the role of the state, at the very least, is to support families to make informed decisions about the wide range of choices available.

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