

Families in the news

Families moved into the centre of the media's gaze in the last couple of months. The approaching end of the millennium, and the release of ABS reports – *Marriage and Divorces, Australia 1998* in August, and *Births, Australia 1998* in November 1999, provided a major impetus for this renewed interest.

■ WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

With the coming of the new millennium, 'The Future' looms large in the press. In recent months staff at the Australian Institute of Family Studies have been interviewed for a variety of articles on what the future holds for the family (*Trends of the family*, Sunday Herald Sun 15/8/99); what our households might look like (*Peek at family of the future*, Daily Telegraph 29/10/99); and whether we will be able to support our ageing population, while maintaining our present standard of living.

On the millennium theme, the Institute's Research Manager, Peter Saunders, contributed a feature article on the future of marriage to *The Weekend Australian's* (13/11/99), *Chronicles of Future* series, *We're all married now*, and a Principal Research Fellow, Ian Winter, drew on the Institute's new research into social capital to comment on the likely pattern of community involvement in the 21st Century.

The Sunday Age (26/11/99) chipped in with its look at families in the 21st Century, and it was clear that the issue of fertility and population size was foremost in the minds of most of those whose views were represented.

■ WEDDING BELLS

The unexpected increase in the rate of marriage reported in the Australian Bureau of Statistics *Marriage and Divorces, Australia 1998*, had some in the media rushing to announce that marriage was making a comeback after years of decline. The corresponding drop in the divorce rate was barely

mentioned, and certainly not discussed in any great detail. The Institute's Research Manager Peter Saunders, and Research Fellow Christine Kilmartin, were kept busy with media interviews about the meaning of the new data.

■ PRE-NUPTIAL AGREEMENTS

The Winter 1999 edition of *Family Matters* reported the findings of Institute research into attitudes toward pre-nuptial agreements. This research, reported at the time of its publication, was also cited in a number of articles about the desirability of pre-nuptial agreements. Over the last few months there has been considerable media attention on the issue – due mostly to the introduction of pre-nuptial agreements in family law, and a couple of high profile weddings.

■ WHERE HAVE ALL THE BABIES GONE?

The continuing decline in Australia's fertility rate led to a wave of feature articles, editorials and many hours of radio airtime, on the implications of a falling birthrate. Institute Research Fellow, Christine Kilmartin, who has been examining the statistics on who is and isn't having babies, was much in demand by the media for her insights into the possible causes of the decline in birth rate and the implications this might have in the future. *Life in the 21st Century: Fertility* (The Sunday Age 28/11/99) and *The Big Baby Bust* (The Weekend Australian 20/11/99) were two of the feature articles on this theme.

– Catherine Rosenbrock
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