

WHERE TO NOW FOR THE ATP STUDY?

The Australian Temperament Project (ATP) aims to follow children's psycho-social development from infancy to adulthood, and to investigate the impact of personal characteristics, together with family, peer and school influences, on adjustment and wellbeing. This longitudinal study commenced in 1983 at a child age of four to eight months, and has collected 13 waves of data by mail surveys over the first 20 years of life. Parents, teachers and the young people themselves have provided information about the children's progress over many aspects of life.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies has housed the project since 2000, and is managing the study in collaboration with researchers from the University of Melbourne and the Royal Children's Hospital.

Future directions for the study include the collection of a further wave of data collection, and the start of a new sub-study.

The 14th wave

The 14th wave of the ATP is planned to take place in early 2006 when participants are in their mid-twenties. This is an age where many young people explore a "variety of possible life directions in love, work, and world views" (Arnett, J.J. (2000) "Emerging adulthood", *American Psychologist*, vol. 55, pp. 469-480).

The developmental challenges of this period include:

- commencing working life and developing careers;
- negotiating and establishing mutually satisfying and supportive relationships with parents and peers;
- forming close, intimate relationships, and in the longer term, becoming capable and competent parents;
- avoiding health compromising and risk-taking behaviours such as substance use/abuse, antisocial or criminal behaviour, depression/suicide, unsafe driving behaviour, gambling; and
- participating in the broader community and society – engaging in community life and civic activities.

Our knowledge of how young Australian adults are faring across these aspects of life is limited at present.

The broad aim of the 14th wave is to gather information that can help to answer questions such as: How can we best assist and support young people to establish a satisfying and productive adult life? What roles can families, peers, partners, communities and governments play?

Furthermore, the links between young people's earlier characteristics and experiences and their adjustment and wellbeing in adulthood remain poorly understood. Given the rich data available in the Australian Temperament Project over the whole period from infancy onwards, the Project's 14th data collection will be well placed to investigate these important issues.

Generation 2

The ATP participants are now at an age where some are having children of their own. Hence, an exciting new Australian Temperament Project sub-study, the *Generation 2 Study*, is planned to commence later this year. This study aims to investigate issues such as: What factors assist young people to negotiate the transition to parenthood? How do new parents' experiences and behaviours impact on their children's wellbeing and development?

With the wealth of information already available over the young adults' lifetime, we will be able to explore questions such as:

- How do an individual's personal attributes, skills, and past experiences contribute to his/her parenting capacities and styles?
- What personal, familial, and environmental factors assist young people to become effective and responsive parents?
- What support and assistance do grandparents provide, and what is its impact on the lives and wellbeing of grandparents and new parents?
- What are the similarities between parents and their children (for example, their temperament style)? How well do parent and child characteristics fit together or mesh, and how does this impact on parent-child relationships and child wellbeing?
- The ATP's *Generation 2 Study* will provide valuable information about the individual, family and wider environmental factors which influence young parents and their children, both within generations and across generations, and will provide insights into the experiences and challenges encountered by young Australian parents in today's world.

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