

Life Patterns Ten years following Generation Y



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LIFE PATTERNS

The Life Patterns research program is designed to follow patterns in young people's lives over time in order to gain a longitudinal and holistic understanding of the ways in which two generations of young Australians are responding to our rapidly changing world. The program is based at the Youth Research Centre at the University of Melbourne.

The generosity and ongoing support of the Life Patterns participants has meant that this study has built up a unique picture of the reality of the lives of two generations. Over the past three decades, changes such as the need for more education, greater insecurity and precariousness in employment, and the decreasing relevance of traditional patterns of living have created conditions in which young people think of their lives as a personal project.

This publication focusses only on the generation that left secondary school in 2006, Cohort 2 of the Life Patterns project, providing a summary of the last ten years.

The Life Patterns research program:

- follows two generations of Australians – Cohort 1, who left secondary school in 1991 (corresponding to the popular notion of 'Generation X') and Cohort 2 that left secondary school in 2006 (corresponding to the popular notion of 'Generation Y'). Multiple comparisons can be made between the two cohorts across different points in their lives.
- explores the pathways through different areas of life taken by Australian young people including their experiences in education, the labour market, their family and personal relationships, attitudes to life, concerns, and health and wellbeing.
- provides a unique picture, very different from the stereotypes of smooth transitions from education to work, or of the narcissistic or complacent generation often described in the media or by politicians. We have argued for the importance of paying attention to the diversity of experiences that characterise young people's lives.

- allows for insights to be drawn that feed into policy advice and also into public debate and our work is often used by the media to dispute simplistic claims about young people.
- is designed to follow patterns in young people's lives over time in order to gain more than a static glimpse. We are interested in developing a more dynamic picture of young people's lives rather than a single snapshot in time.
- surveys Cohort 2 yearly and interviews a subset of 30-50 participants every second year.
- is an ongoing project supported by the University of Melbourne and the Australian Research Council, and the research participants.

WHO ARE THE LIFE PATTERNS PARTICIPANTS? THEN AND NOW.

Cohort 2 of the Life Patterns research program opened with a suite of three surveys conducted in 2005 and 2006 (when participants were in Years 11 and 12). Data was collected in 77 schools in Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales and Tasmania. A sample of 3977 participants were recruited from 47 government schools, 20 catholic and 10 independent schools.

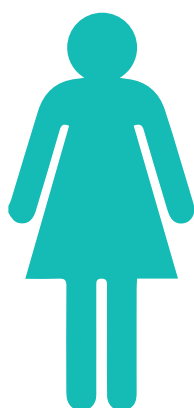
Ten years later (in 2015), there were 591 participants responding to the annual survey. More women than men have remained in the study. In 2006, 55% of the cohort were women and by 2015 women made up 69% of the sample. When we began the study 35% of this cohort lived in a capital city and 32% lived in a regional city. After 10 years there has been a gradual drift to metropolitan areas and the majority of participants now live in a capital city (68%).

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS



| | 2006 | 2015 |
|----------------------|------|------|
| CAPITAL CITY | 35 | 68 |
| IN A REGIONAL CITY | 32 | 24 |
| IN A COUNTRY TOWN | 22 | 10 |
| RURAL, NOT IN A TOWN | 11 | 3 |

2006



55%



45%

2015



69%



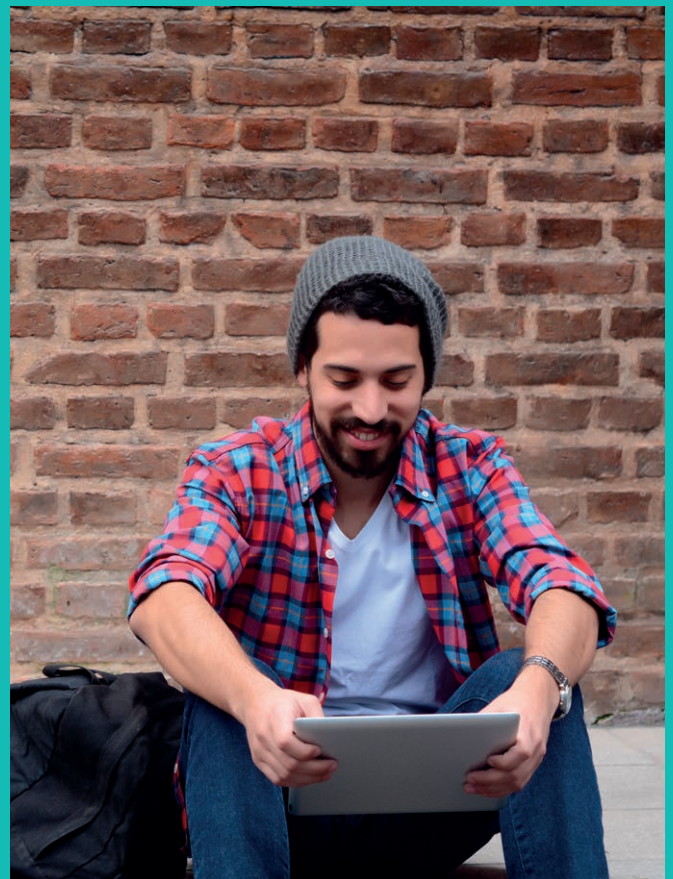
31%

NEW ADULTHOOD?

Using data from this project, we have argued that there is a 'new adulthood'.¹

This cohort (which is often described as 'Generation Y') experiences different conditions and circumstances to those of their parents. Changes include the gradual entrenchment of precarious work (that is, short-term contracts and part-time work), and mixing work and study for extended periods. The attitudes of this generation show that in response, young adults strive to be flexible and mobile in the face of insecurity, and to build meaning in life through personal relationships (rather than relying on a career or occupation to provide meaning). These new conditions, opportunities and priorities have created a 'new adulthood'. In response to these changes, members of this generation have largely accepted that it is up to the individual young person (and their family) to invest in education and take responsibility for navigating increasingly precarious and insecure labour markets. Unlike previous generations, this generation tends to expect an unstable path through the job market, a longer road towards achieving job security and is wary of planning their work or family lives too far into the future.

While many young people are able to balance these demands, there is a substantial minority for whom it is difficult to work out what kind of education or training will be best and how to secure their preferred job. Difficult transitions to work have become an increasing reality for everyone, not just for those historically labelled as disadvantaged.



GOALS IN LIFE

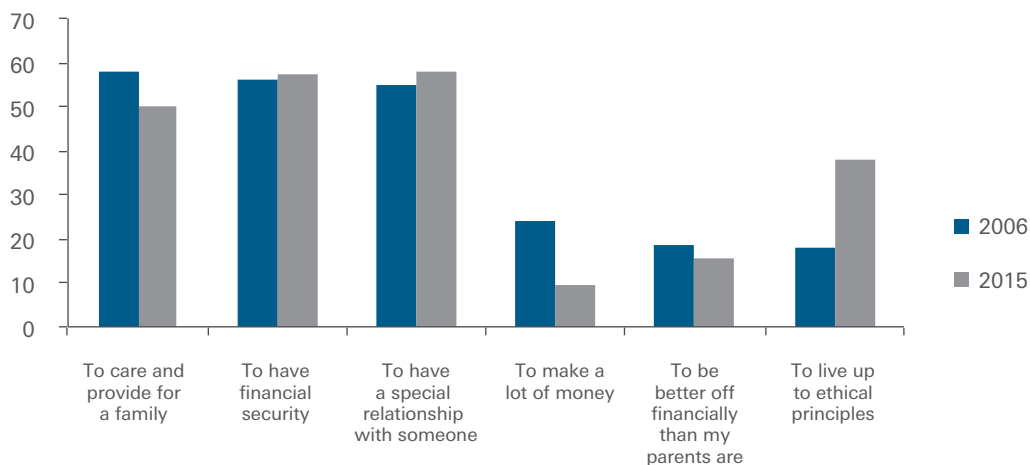
In the period between 2006 and 2015 little changed in the top priorities in life.

In the period between 2006 and 2015 little changed in the top priorities in life. 'To have a special relationship with someone', 'to have financial security' and 'to care and provide for a family' have continued to be the highest priorities. These priority goals closely resemble those of the previous cohort, Generation X, where family relationships and job security were continuously the highest issues of importance in participants' lives over two decades.

However some goals have increased in importance since 2006 – for instance, 'to live up to ethical principles'. As these goals have increased in importance, other goals, such as 'to make a lot of money' and 'to achieve a position of influence' have lessened in their importance. The continuity and change of these priorities in life goes against the grain of some popular media images and narratives of young people disengaged from core intrinsic values such as sustaining meaningful relationships and living ethically.



FIGURE 1. "HOW DO YOU RATE THE FOLLOWING AS GOALS TO AIM FOR THROUGHOUT YOUR LIFE?" (BY 'VERY HIGH', IN 2006 & 2015 (AGED 17/18 - 26/27), COHORT 2, %)



EDUCATION

Getting a tertiary education was an important priority for many in this generation.

In 2015 a majority of participants (82%) have completed a post-secondary school qualification. This is up from 77% in 2014. A majority of participants have completed at least a university bachelor degree (52%) while a minority have obtained a TAFE degree (14%). The percentage of young Australians aged 25 to 34 years old with at least tertiary education was 44% in 2010 (OECD, 2012). The percentage of young Australians aged 25–29 year with a bachelor degree or higher was approximately 35% in 2012. Most importantly, while many participants have achieved at least one tertiary educational credential, 13% have already gained two post-school educational credentials and another 26% are currently studying towards their second tertiary degree. In relation to the connection between education and work, 20% of participants in 2015 feel that they need a further degree to get work in their chosen area.



EDUCATION AND SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

For Cohort 2 in Life Patterns (i.e. those who in 2015 were aged 26/27), undertaking further education (post-secondary school) was a majority experience. However, within that group young people from low socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to complete a TAFE degree than young people from high socio-economic status (20% vs. 5%). The latter group was more likely to obtain a university bachelor degree (36% vs. 23%) and to be currently studying a higher education postgraduate degree (18% vs. 9%) than their low-socio-economic counterparts. In gender terms, males are more likely than females to have completed a TAFE degree (19% vs. 12%), while females are more likely to have completed both a university bachelor degree and a postgraduate degree than males (14% vs. 6%). In terms of place, many young people from rural areas have had to migrate to metropolitan centres to complete their tertiary study. As we stated above, in 2006 the program started with quite a locational balance, but ten years later the majority live and work in urban areas.



EMPLOYMENT

Young people value full-time, secure work but these jobs are harder to find

The world of work is changing and this generation is encountering a very different labour market to that of their parents. The data provided by this study has allowed us to make numerous arguments about how young people are navigating this new world including the impact of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008 and an increasingly precarious labour market.³ Furthermore, youth unemployment rates (for 15-24 year olds) in Australia have been increasing steadily since the GFC, reaching a new high of 14% in January 2015, the highest since July 2002.⁴

Employment has become increasingly uncertain and many researchers now refer to the labour market as 'precarious'.⁵ 'Precarious' employment is a combination of low pay, employment insecurity and working time insecurity.⁶ Over a decade young people have strongly valued full-time, secure work; however, this is harder to obtain. While employment remains reasonably stable overall, the GFC of 2008 has had a significant impact on full-time employment rates, particularly for young people.⁷ This is unsurprising as economic and financial crisis tend to affect those most vulnerable (e.g. youth, unemployed workers, single parents) in society.⁸

Over the years we have found that working conditions for young people have become more complex and nuanced than the traditional dichotomy of employed–unemployed.⁹ For instance, issues of work instability and insecurity are not just related to patterns of type of employment (permanent vs. non-permanent), but they are also reflected in the proportion of people working irregular hours and shift works. Similar to previous years, at least seven out of ten participants in the Life Patterns study who are employed are working some form of irregular hours in 2015.

"I feel an issue that young people entering the workforce must contend with is the increasing casualisation of many sectors. It makes it quite hard to have job security and certainty."

Man, metropolitan area, year: 2014, technical support worker.

"It can be difficult to juggle the demands of two part-time jobs - often seems to equate to more hours than just one full-time job. I also work from home in the evenings and on weekends, for my job as a contractor for a private practice, and this can sometimes be stressful and exhausting! It is also unsettling being on a 12 month contract for my job in the public sector - it has been renewed once, for another 12 months, and my employers are very happy with me, but there just aren't enough positions for the number of people they have employed, so I'm unsure what will happen at the end of the year."

Woman, metropolitan area, year: 2015, speech pathologist.

Traditional notions of a career are usually associated with the expectation of finding a job that is secure, full-time, permanent and related to the person's field of study. Evidence from the first Life Patterns cohort shows that as young people are investing in their education well into their twenties, reaching their goal of achieving a secure, meaningful job can take up to a decade after leaving secondary school to achieve.¹⁰ In the ten years that Cohort 2 participants have been out of school, the evidence points to a dynamic but complex and precarious labour market where high levels of job mobility is the standard. For example, since 2010, 68% of participants have had 2 to 5 jobs and 12% have had over 5 jobs. Currently only 23% of participants expect to be in their current job for longer than 5 years. In 2015 the reason cited for looking for another job was overwhelming 'for a better opportunity' (65%). This has been a constant over the last five years.

"It's good to have goals because it keeps you from going off track, but nothing in the future is truly certain. I've learned not to stress too much about the next 5-10 years because the environment (economy/technology/job-roles etc.) is constantly changing. As for my career goals at this stage of my life, my focus isn't about reaching a specific role or position, but rather, to learn and to evolve myself as much as possible. For me, it's about having a strong set of employable skills and remaining flexible enough to adapt to the changing environment. This way, when the right moment or the right role arises, I'll be ready to capture it."

Man, metropolitan area, year: 2015, paralegal.



SINCE 2010, 68% OF PARTICIPANTS HAVE HAD 2 TO 5 JOBS AND 12% HAVE HAD OVER 5 JOBS. FURTHERMORE, ONLY 23% OF PARTICIPANTS EXPECT TO BE IN THEIR CURRENT JOB FOR LONGER THAN 5 YEARS

Similar to Cohort 1 of Life Patterns, job security is an ongoing goal for this generation. Fortunately, the number of participants who agree that their job security is good is increasing as time goes on; however, in 2015 one in four participants does not feel that they have job security.

A possible explanation for the increasing job security is a higher number of participants completing one or more tertiary education degrees and more people committed to only work rather than combining that activity with studies. For example, in 2013, at least a third of participants were still studying. In 2015, only a quarter were involved in some form of formal education, with the vast majority of the rest committed solely to work. While it would be a mistake to say that achieving a tertiary education credential provides immediate job security, research shows that educational credentials have become more important for navigating the labour market.¹¹

When looking for reasons in career and employment choices over the years, “job security” continues to be the most important factor rated ahead of issues such as “it pays well”, “has flexible hours” or is “full-time”. Currently, 95% of participants consider “job security” at least a high importance when deciding a career job.

Over the last six years, particularly in the period where many participants shifted from combining work and study to solely working, we have found a decline in irregular shifts.

JOB SECURITY IS GOOD (by ‘high’ and ‘very high’)



64%
2013

68%
2014

74%
2015

HOW MUCH IMPORTANCE WOULD YOU GIVE TO “JOB SECURITY” IN DECIDING ON A CAREER JOB? (By ‘high’ and ‘very high’, 2009 (aged 20/21) to 2015 (aged 26/27), Cohort 2, %)

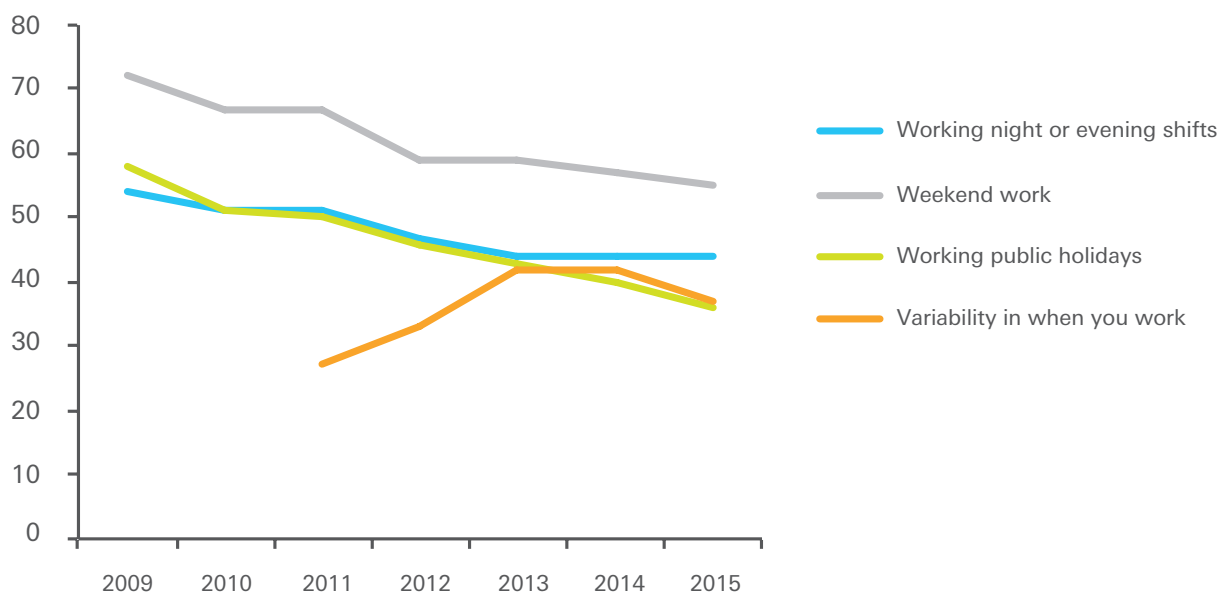
86% | HIGH - VERY HIGH JOB SECURITY FOR 2009

95% | HIGH - VERY HIGH JOB SECURITY FOR 2011

92% | HIGH - VERY HIGH JOB SECURITY FOR 2013

95% | HIGH - VERY HIGH JOB SECURITY FOR 2015

FIGURE 2. WORKING CONDITIONS - IRREGULAR SHIFTS: "YOUR WORK INVOLVES..." (BY 'AGREE', 2009 (AGED 20/21) TO 2015 (AGED 26/27), COHORT 2, %)



Nonetheless, in 2015, approximately half of participants are working nights or evening shifts and/or doing weekend work. Weekend work is the main type of irregular work, signalling the possibility of long weeks of work for young people with little time to rest and play, as the following quotes from participants illustrate.

"I love my profession but find the level of work involved very demanding. Long hours, weekend work and no lunch breaks at times, often leave me exhausted with little time to lead a life outside my job."

Woman, rural area, year: 2015, pharmacist.

"Mostly work 6 days a week. The overtime and on call means I sometimes don't have much of a life outside work."

Woman, metropolitan area, year: 2015, radiographer.

"Working unpaid overtime especially on weekends is quite stressful. I recently was seconded into shift work which greatly affected my wellbeing and socialising."

Woman, metropolitan area, year: 2015, engineer.



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TERTIARY EDUCATION AND WORK

Finding a job related to their field of study has proven difficult for many participants.

In an environment where the nature of jobs are changing, it can be difficult to predict which jobs will be plentiful when a person graduates. The transition from education into a job is also made more difficult by the recent slowdown in the creation of full-time jobs and by a broader competitive pool of educated young people. Currently approximately three-quarters of participants stated they are working in their field of study.

While this is an important achievement, one quarter of participants are still searching for that elusive job, while for the remaining participants working in their field of study does not guarantee job security or non-precarious working conditions.

"Job market is very competitive. When I was looking for work I sometimes felt that I had acquired an education at the expense of relevant work experience - ultimately disadvantaging me in the job market."

Woman, metropolitan area, year: 2015, working in the field of international relations.

"Lack of jobs in communications field, but continues to churn out graduates from Uni. Too many uni places, not enough jobs - there are so many applicants for every job I go for! But I feel lucky to have a job that has prospects, even if it's not in my desired field. Allows me to plan for the future somewhat, save and still enjoy life."

Woman, metropolitan area, year: 2015, journalist.

In the last few years, there has been an increase from 57% in 2012 of those stating their job was in their field of study to 69% in 2015. While many are slowly moving into jobs in their field of study, one third agree that there are very few jobs in their field of study and 17% of participants in 2015 felt that they need another degree to get work in their chosen field.

In order to find employment some have returned to study in new areas:

"My undergraduate degree is in marketing and at the time of completion I found it difficult to find a job in this field. Since then I have held jobs in unrelated fields. This year I have returned to postgraduate study in a different field of interest, hoping I can enter this field upon completion."

Woman, metropolitan area, year: 2015, flight attendant (now studying nutrition).

"I initially went back to university because jobs in science are scarce. Engineering is proving to be very good. I graduate at the end of the year and already have promising leads into full time engineering work after graduation. Financially it has been a pretty big sacrifice, but I have been able to get by from living at the family home paying cheap board, receiving youth allowance and scholarship money. Intermittent casual work has also helped."

Man, metropolitan area, year: 2015, student.

Updating skills by re-training in their late twenties is increasingly becoming a norm for Generation Y, establishing a dramatic difference from their parents' experiences.

I AM IN A FIELD OF MY STUDY

57%

IN 2012 WERE WORKING
IN THEIR FIELD OF STUDY

69%

IN 2015 WERE WORKING
IN THEIR FIELD OF STUDY

HOUSING AND COST OF LIVING

The cost of living and owning a home have become a major concern for Life Patterns participants.

The cost of housing is escalating, there is a shortage of affordable accommodation, and the cost of healthcare and education continue to rise.¹² Affordable housing is crucial to a young person's wellbeing. Over the past ten years more and more participants have revealed their worries about accommodation, including concern about the cost of living and of renting. House prices that young people face today as they enter the property market are much higher than they were 30 years ago and have risen much faster than incomes over that period¹³. The following quotes, illustrate these increasingly worrying issues:

"I find it frustrating that most people in our generation will never own their own home if they wish to live in places like Melbourne. Personally, with my job it limits me to the places I can work. Certainly not rurally (where I am originally from). It has always been a dream of mine to own my own home and it is somewhat depressing to think that I never will unless I move away from Melbourne."

Woman, metropolitan area, year: 2013.

"I feel that the cost of living has delayed some things for me. My partner and I are currently living with my parents while we build a house. However, the cost of renting and buying in our home town is so high that we've had to wait for our first home to be financially possible. This has delayed marriage and children for us. It makes me nervous seeing time go by and knowing we have to wait longer about having children too late and the issues this may cause."

Woman, metropolitan area, year: 2015.

While participants have been progressively leaving the family home, as described by the quote above, in 2015 27% still live at home with their parents. Some participants are mobilising parental support to relieve housing pressures. Preliminary findings of our interviews in 2015 revealed that some participants were living with their parents with the goal to save for a deposit for a property. Intergenerational support is becoming a key aspect of the reproduction of distributional inequalities with those not able to mobilise personal resources having it harder, or being left behind in the housing market.



WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Across all the surveys and interviews managing to balance different life commitments has emerged as a key, and ongoing, concern.

Over the past quarter of a century, changes such as the need for more education, greater uncertainty of employment and the decreasing relevance of traditional patterns of living have created a context in which young people think of their lives as a personal project. Making decisions about how to navigate post-secondary education, juggle their part-time and casual employment needs, and build the connections needed for secure full-time time work, while trying to find time for friends and family, requires significant life-management skills. In 2008, at the ages of 19 and 20, 95% of participants said it was 'very important' or 'important' to keep a balance in life and this has continued to be one of the main goals in life. However, as mentioned above, managing to keep this balance creates stress and anxiety for many of our participants.



FURTHER EDUCATION, PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS

In recent publications (2012, 2013) Dr. Dan Woodman has drawn on interview material with 50 cohort 2 Life Patterns participants to examine the effects that mixing study with variable hours in a precarious labour market has on young people's friendships. Although it may be suggested that the rise of 'flexible' employment arrangements might play a central role in allowing people to combine their work, study and a social life, many young people have little control over their schedules. The impact of mixing work and study meant that participants found it difficult to find regular periods of shared time to maintain close friendships and to build new acquaintances into deeper friendships. These effects however, were not experienced universally by all participants. Students from wealthier backgrounds were able to take time off work during busy study periods, allowing them more control over their timetables.





BALANCING CAREER AND FAMILY

In 2015, only 4% of Cohort 2 were in a parenting role in a parenting role. In her PhD study of 18 female Life Patterns' participants (2015), Dr. Jessica Crofts found that, while many young women are heavily investing in and planning their careers, they expect that the pressures of balancing work and family will mean that they will leave the work force for a period or return to work part-time. These concerns are increasingly being voiced by the general cohort in 2015:

"I don't currently do a lot of socialising but now that my baby is getting older and I will be going back to work soon I intend to get more me time to help myself mentally..... I can't decide if I would like to return to work part-time or find another job as childcare is expensive. I have worked out that even though I will be working 3 days I will only be paid for 1.5 days after paying for transport and childcare".

Woman, metropolitan area, year: 2015, accountant.

"As a lot of my friends start having children I have realized the difficulty of maintaining a career while starting a family. I am putting off having children until I have a permanent

full-time job, so that I will have something to return to, but it seems it is going to be more difficult than I thought to have a good job, which is enjoyable and challenging, and to be a good parent".

Woman, metropolitan area, year: 2015, library technician & archivist.

"I worry that I will struggle to own my own home. I also worry about the decisions I will have to make as a woman regarding my career versus children (and whether or not this will affect my decision to have either)".

Woman, metropolitan area, year: 2015, flight attendant & student.

The struggles faced by Cohort 1 of the Life Patterns research program are discussed in detail in Cuervo, Crofts and Wyn (2012). They reveal the challenges that women in particular face in juggling work and parenting in a context of workplaces that are relatively unresponsive to the parenting needs of women and men.



GENERATIONS



There are many ways in which Generations X and Y are more similar than they are different.

Popular culture and media is full of references to Generation X and Generation Y, with discussions of widely held beliefs about the differences between these two groups. The data shows that in terms of their attitudes, priorities and ambitions, there are many ways in which these two generations are more similar than they are different. For example, both groups place the same emphasis on security, good pay and both affirm the importance of strong family relationships and friendships. The main difference is that Generation Y anticipates a more unstable path through the job market and are cautious of planning their work or family lives too far into the future.

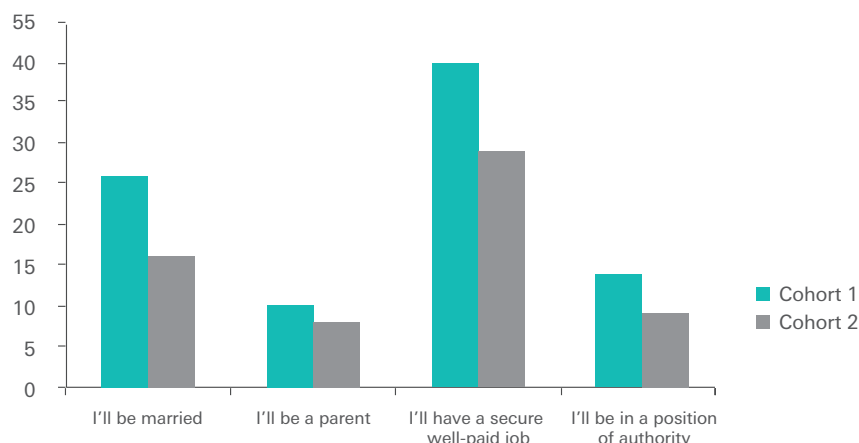
The graph below compares both generations predictions for the future when both groups were aged 23 (1996 and 2011).

Two differences stand out in Figure 3. The first is that Cohort 2 participants are less likely than Cohort 1 participants to expect that they would be married in the next five years. As both cohorts hold relatively similar attitudes towards the idea of marriage in general, this seems to reflect a cultural shift in which young people are putting off marriage in favour of concentrating on other aspects of their lives for the time being.

Secondly, while Cohort 2 participants place the same emphasis on secure and well-paid jobs, they are less optimistic than Cohort 1 were at the same point about being in such positions in five years' time. Cohort 2 places a similar emphasis on the importance of these two aspects of life (marriage and having a secure and well-paid job), but again anticipate that they will take longer to reach these milestones than Cohort 1 participants.

Another set of intergenerational comparisons conducted at the age of 25 (in 1998 with Cohort 1 and 2013 with Cohort 2) shows similarities and differences between the groups. On the one hand, both cohorts reveal a high satisfaction with their personal relationships and life and their educational achievements. On the other hand, 33% of Cohort 2 were highly satisfied with the educational opportunities for their generation compared to 4% for Cohort 1, while 19% of Cohort 2 shows high satisfaction with career opportunities compared to 9% of Cohort 1. This data reveals a difference in perceived opportunities in the different fields of education and work, and the greater optimism by the younger generation.

FIGURE 3. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS LIKELY FOR YOU IN 5 YEARS FROM NOW? (BY 'VERY LIKELY', IN 1996 & 2011 (AGED 23 YEARS OLD), COHORT 1 AND COHORT 2, %)



HEALTH & WELLBEING

Issues of anxiety and stress are often mentioned in the surveys and interviews.

An ongoing theme of the Life Patterns data is managing a balance between educational and employment commitments alongside personal health, wellbeing and relationships. Issues of anxiety and stress in relation to achieving this balance are often mentioned in the surveys and interviews. Since 2010 there has been a decrease in participants' mental and physical health, in particular for women.

As to be expected, young people's mental health concerns depend on the institutional spaces they are interacting with. For instance, in 2010 comments related to the difficulties participants had in balancing study, work and finances:

"Uni work and money issues stress me out. Centrelink Youth Allowance does not pay enough to cover rent, bills, car needs, medical or dental, but uni hours and work requirements don't allow time to work."

Woman, regional area, year: 2010.

"Between doing 20 contact hours at uni plus that at work as well as a good 20-30 hours outside uni study a week, my body is exhausted and mentally it feels like uni is overtaking my life and may not be worth all this. I can't work less hours as I am saving."

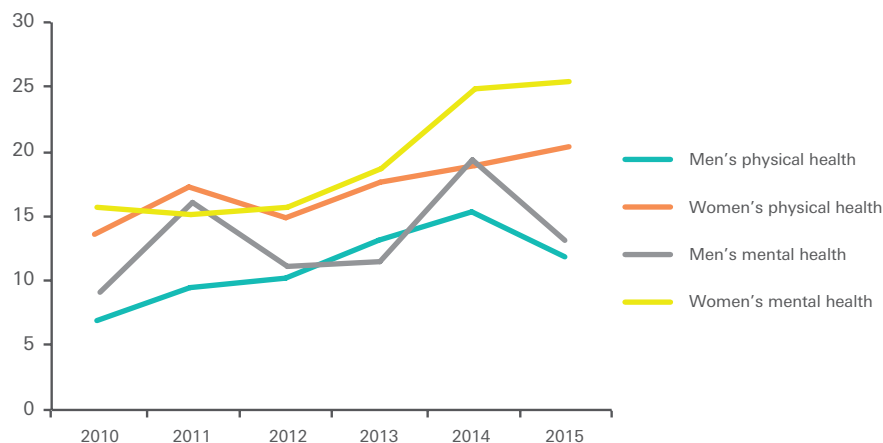
Woman, metropolitan area, year: 2010.

As more began to leave university and move into the full-time workforce, participants reported increased stress and anxiety around securing work with good working conditions.

"My working conditions cause me a fair amount of stress and anxiety. My irregular hours (as a casual) means that I am always worried about whether I will have enough hours in the next fortnight to pay my bills and for food. Certain times of the year are quieter than others, which is always stressful. I feel like I need to always be as available as possible - not taking sick days or leave, working the weekend and late shifts, often at short notice, to maintain a sense of job security and try and improve my chances of getting work in the future."

Woman, metropolitan area, year: 2014, PhD student & library services officer.

FIGURE 4. MEN AND WOMEN'S PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH. (BY 'VERY UNHEALTHY' AND 'UNHEALTHY', IN 2010-2015 (AGED 21/22 - 26/27), COHORT 2, %)



“My working conditions dictate my other life commitments – for example study, social life, exercise. They can be very exhausting and stressful but I cannot do my job and training without accepting these conditions. Sometimes I do work I do not get paid for (unpaid overtime), and often do not provide true time sheets as this is expected of me and my colleagues.”
Woman, metropolitan area, year: 2014, medical practitioner.

The stress of balancing work with other responsibilities and commitments is also expressed in frustration about the difficulty of spending enough time with family and friends. We have argued in numerous places that the challenge of balancing life’s various priorities can have significant impacts on health and wellbeing.¹⁴



MENTAL HEALTH AND UNIVERSITY

Data in the longitudinal Life Patterns research program provides an opportunity to bring a national lens to the issue of mental health for higher education students.¹⁵ In 2013, visiting academic Dr. Evelina Landstedt from Umeå University Sweden used the Life Patterns findings to argue that a greater proportion of tertiary education students self-identified mental health concerns compared to their non-student peers. Financial hardship and combining work and study are associated with the trend towards declining mental health for young people aged 19 to 25. Almost 40 percent of students experience financial hardship. This finding suggests that being at university and working might actually be contributing to the creation of mental health issues. These issues were reflected in comments on the challenges of juggling work and study, and managing financial hardship while studying. We argue that there is a need for universities to work to address issues of mental health and financial hardship.

RELATIONSHIPS

Participants continue to find ongoing fulfilment in their personal lives.

Despite challenges in balancing all aspects of participants' lives, participants continue to find ongoing fulfilment in their personal lives. This has also been a constant source of satisfaction and support for Cohort 1. Over the course of the past 10 years family relationships, particularly the material and emotional support that they can provide, have been crucial to most.

In 2015, 42% of participants live with a partner, an increase from 37% the previous year and 18% are married, increasing from 11% in the previous year. Furthermore, a small number are now in a parenting role (4%) and 40% predict that they will be in a parenting role in the next five years.

"It's sometimes tricky to balance projects with parenting, but I have a great support network and reliable friends."

Woman, regional area, year: 2015.

"I now have a baby to look after which has been an extremely positive experience."

Man, regional area, year: 2014.

"I am in an ongoing relationship of almost five years which is a very positive aspect of my life and I feel very supported by family and friends."

Woman, regional area, year: 2014.

"I feel that my friends have a big impact on my life, as does my partner. I am currently happy with where I am and what I have achieved."

Woman, metropolitan area, year: 2015.

Importantly, family provides a key support during times of mental and physical ill-health:

"It has been a long and isolated struggle for me and my mum. Funding for services are being cut, therefore we are struggling to make ends meet. For ten years my mum dedicated herself to looking after me. I have come a long way with her help. This is continuing, but I think now she will be looking for work to support me. We will work together to get things done. We don't do much, but whatever we can we try and do things that makes us happy. My grandfather helps and my cousins provide friendship. Mum and I are positive that things will improve with my illness and that one day I will be well enough to work and be independent. Small baby steps to a big and better future ahead".

Man, metropolitan area, year: 2014.

"I'm 25 years old now. I've been in my relationship for 6.5 years and still live at home. I have friends who have met their partners, moved out, gotten married and are having kids in a shorter time frame than that! At this stage of my life I feel like I am working towards a life goal, not a career goal. We want to buy a house within 6-8 months' time, and then get engaged, get married, travel to Europe and start having kids. I originally called it my 5-Year-Plan (although by now there are 4 years left) and my partner - who is 3 years older than me - agrees with this time line. He was my rock when my OCD was at its worst and still supports me now. I am really loving my life now. I have an established network of friends who I have known since primary and high school and my family is hugely supportive and I love all my nieces and nephews."

Woman, regional area, year: 2014.

Against the pressures of daily life, family and close relationships continue to be the key support for many.

IN THE MEDIA

Research coming out of Life Patterns often features in the media.
Here are some of the articles that have appeared recently:

PAIN NOW, REWARDS LATER? YOUNG LIVES CANNOT BE RELIED

*Johanna Wyn and Hernán Cuervo,
The Conversation, June 18, 2014*

This article, using Life Patterns data from Cohort 1 and Cohort 2, argues Federal Government policies that aim to reduce young people's access to income support, to education and training and to employment are detrimental and unfair to young people and broader society. Life Patterns' researchers Johanna Wyn and Hernán Cuervo argue that there is a significant and growing minority of young people who are 'doing it tough' in terms of education and employment, and require (and deserve) government support during these periods. Extended periods of poverty, unemployment, lack of access to meaningful and purposeful education or training and insecure work for 18 to 25 year olds robs young people of the building blocks to make productive lives. Wyn and Cuervo argue that Australia has a lot to gain by supporting young people during these significant years of their life, both economically and socially.

RISING JOBLESS RATE MEANS YOUNG WORKERS LOSE IN PENALTY RATES DEAL

*Dan Woodman, The Conversation,
March 27, 2015*

This article uses research from the Life Patterns program to argue against the cutting of penalty rates for Australian workers. Life Patterns' researcher Dan Woodman uses data from Cohort 2 to demonstrate that many Life Patterns' participants appreciate weekend work because the additional pay means a little less time at work, as well as a little less trouble paying the bills. Evidence from this study shows that working weekends means you may miss out on events such as concerts, sporting events, birthday parties and family gatherings, and that relationships may also suffer. This data counteracts the common argument that young people "like" to work Saturday and Sunday.

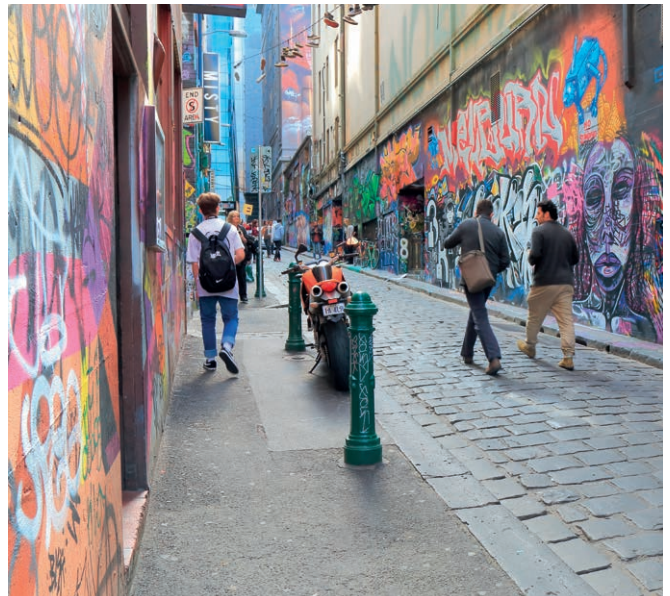
In 2015, 58% of Life Patterns participants had worked a job in which they were paid penalty rates in the previous five years. Woodman uses qualitative data to highlight the effects this has on young peoples' social lives and relationships. One participant reported that, "*You're working when your friends, family or partner are at home.*" Another said that it made "*planning future occasions with friends and family hard*".

NARCISSISTS ANONYMOUS OR THE 'IGENERATION'

Sandy Smith, *Sydney Morning Herald*,
July 31, 2012

This article discusses the common conception that your generation is more 'narcissistic' than previous generations. A supporter of this viewpoint is Jean Twenge, Professor of Psychology at San Diego State University and co-author of *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*. Twenge believes young people are becoming increasingly narcissistic, blaming permissive parenting, the internet, celebrity culture and the 'self-esteem movement'.

However, Professor Johanna Wyn, chief investigator of the Life Patterns program, rejects the narcissistic label given to young people in Australia today. She uses the Life Patterns data to argue that young people today "have to be really good decision makers, they have to be self-aware and they have to be good navigators of complex times and I think you could be reading some of those traits as somehow being narcissistic because they have to be fairly aware of where they stand, who they are, how they connect, but I see it as a functional and probably inevitable way of operating." Furthermore, young Australians "really value family highly and friends and there's a really high rate of volunteering and I think it really doesn't paint a picture of that kind of narcissism or self-interested individual... I think there's a lot of evidence to paint a different picture."



RESEARCH

Recent publications:

- Woodman, D. & Wyn, J. 2015. Class, gender and generation matter: using the concept of social generation to study inequality and social change. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18 (10), 1402-1410.
- Woodman, D. & Wyn, J. 2015. *Youth and Generation: Rethinking change and inequality in the lives of young people*. SAGE Publications: United Kingdom.
- Wyn, J., Cuervo, H. & Landstedt, E. 2015. *The limits of wellbeing*. In K. Wright & J. McLeod (Eds.), *Re-thinking Youth Wellbeing: Critical Perspectives*. Singapore: Springer.
- Cuervo, H. & Wyn, J. 2014. Reflections on the use of spatial and relational metaphors in youth studies. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(7), 901-914.
- Cuervo, H., Crofts, J. & Wyn, J. 2013. *Generational insights into new labour market landscapes for youth*. Research Report 42, Youth Research Centre, The University of Melbourne.
- Cuervo, H., Crofts, J. & Wyn, J. 2012. *Gen X and the gender revolution: Pioneers or traditionalists?* Research Report 36, Youth Research Centre. Melbourne: University of Melbourne.
- Cuervo, H. & Wyn, J. 2012. *Young People Making it Work: Continuity and change in rural places*, Melbourne University Press: Melbourne.
- Cuervo, H. & Wyn, J. 2011. *Rethinking youth transitions in Australia: A historical and multidimensional approach*. Research Report 33, Youth Research Centre, The University of Melbourne.
- Wyn, J., Cuervo, H., Smith, G. & Woodman, D. 2010. *Young people negotiating risk and opportunity: post-school transitions 2005-2009*. Research Report 32, Youth Research Centre, The University of Melbourne.

Find out more:

-  **Participant reports - http://education.unimelb.edu.au/yrp/projects/life_patterns**
-  **Research Reports - http://education.unimelb.edu.au/yrp/projects/life_patterns**
-  **<https://twitter.com/YRCunimelb>**

End notes:

- ¹ See Woodman, D. & Wyn, J. 2015. *Youth and Generation: Rethinking change and inequality in the lives of young people*. SAGE Publications: United Kingdom.
- ² Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). 2012. *Education at-a-glance 2012: OECD indicators*.
- ³ Cuervo, H., Crofts, J. & Wyn, J. 2013. *Generational insights into new labour market landscapes for youth*. Research Report 42, Youth Research Centre, The University of Melbourne.
- ⁴ Brotherhood of Saint Laurence (March 2015). *The teenage dream unravels: trends in youth unemployment*.
- ⁵ Furlong, A. & Kelly, P. 2005. The brazilianisation of youth transitions in Australia and the UK?, *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 40 (2).
- ⁶ White, R. & Wyn, J. 2013. *Youth and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.161.
- ⁷ NCVET 2014, *Youth transitions in Australia: a moving picture*, NCVET, Adelaide, p.7.
- ⁸ Cuervo, H., Crofts, J. & Wyn, J. 2013. *Generational insights into new labour market landscapes for youth*; Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). 2004. *Employment outlook*. Paris: OECD.
- ⁹ See Furlong 2007 for a similar analysis in the United Kingdom context.
- ¹⁰ Andres, L. & Wyn, J. 2010. *The making of a generation: the children of the 1970s in adulthood*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- ¹¹ Wyn, J. 2009. *Touching the Future: Building skills for life and work*. Camberwell: ACER Press; Woodman, D. & Wyn, J. 2015. *Youth and Generation: Rethinking change and inequality in the lives of young people*. SAGE Publications: United Kingdom.
- ¹² Australian Council of Social Service, 2015. *Inequality in Australia*. Strawberry Hills, NSW: ACOSS.
- ¹³ Foundation for Young Australians. *Renewing Australia's Future: will young Australians be better off than their parents?* P.18.
- ¹⁴ See Wyn, J., Cuervo, H. & Landstedt, E. 2015. *The limits of wellbeing*. In K. Wright & J. McLeod (Eds.), *Re-thinking Youth Wellbeing: Critical Perspectives*. Singapore: Springer.
- ¹⁵ See Wyn, J., Cuervo, H. & Landstedt, E. 2015. *The limits of wellbeing*. In K. Wright & J. McLeod (Eds.), *Re-thinking Youth Wellbeing: Critical Perspectives*. Singapore: Springer.

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